

📖 Topic Page: [Nullification \(States' rights\)](#)

Definition: **nullification** from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*

 [pronunciation](#)

(1798) **1** : the act of nullifying :the state of being nullified **2** : the action of a state impeding or attempting to prevent the operation and enforcement within its territory of a law of the U.S. **3** : jury nullification

nul·li·fi·ca·tion·ist \-sh(ə-)nist\ n

Summary Article: **nullification**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

in U.S. history, a doctrine expounded by the advocates of extreme states' rights. It held that states have the right to declare null and void any federal law that they deem unconstitutional. The doctrine was based on the theory that the Union is a voluntary compact of states and that the federal government has no right to exercise powers not specifically assigned to it by the U.S. Constitution. The Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions declared (1799) nullification to be the rightful remedy by the states for all unauthorized acts done under the pretext of the Constitution. A closely reasoned reinforcement to the doctrine of nullification was set forth—in response to the tariff of 1828, which favored Northern interests at the expense of the South—by John C. Calhoun in his *South Carolina Exposition* (1828). The strong pro-Union stand of President Jackson brought forth further remonstrances from Southern leaders. After enactment of the tariff act of 1832 South Carolina called a state convention, which passed (1832) the ordinance of nullification. This ordinance declared the tariff laws null and void, and a series of enactments in South Carolina put the state in a position to resist by force any attempt of the federal government to carry the tariff act into operation. President Jackson in reply dramatically issued a strong proclamation against the nullifiers, and a force bill was introduced into the U.S. Senate to give the President authority to use the armed forces if necessary to execute the laws. Jackson, however, felt that the South had a real grievance and, behind his show of force, encouraged friends of compromise, led by Henry Clay, to prepare a bill that the South would accept. This compromise tariff was rushed through Congress, and after its passage (1833) the South Carolina state convention reassembled and formally rescinded the ordinance nullifying the tariff acts. To preserve its prerogative it adopted a new ordinance nullifying the force bill. But the issue was not pressed further until the election of Abraham Lincoln, when the doctrine of secession was brought to the foreground.

See Boucher, C. S. , *The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina* (1916, repr. 1968);

Wiltse, C. M. , *John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 1829-1839* (1949);

Freehling, W. W. , ed., *The Nullification Era* (1967);

Peterson, M. D. , *Olive Branch and Sword: The Compromise of 1833* (1982).

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