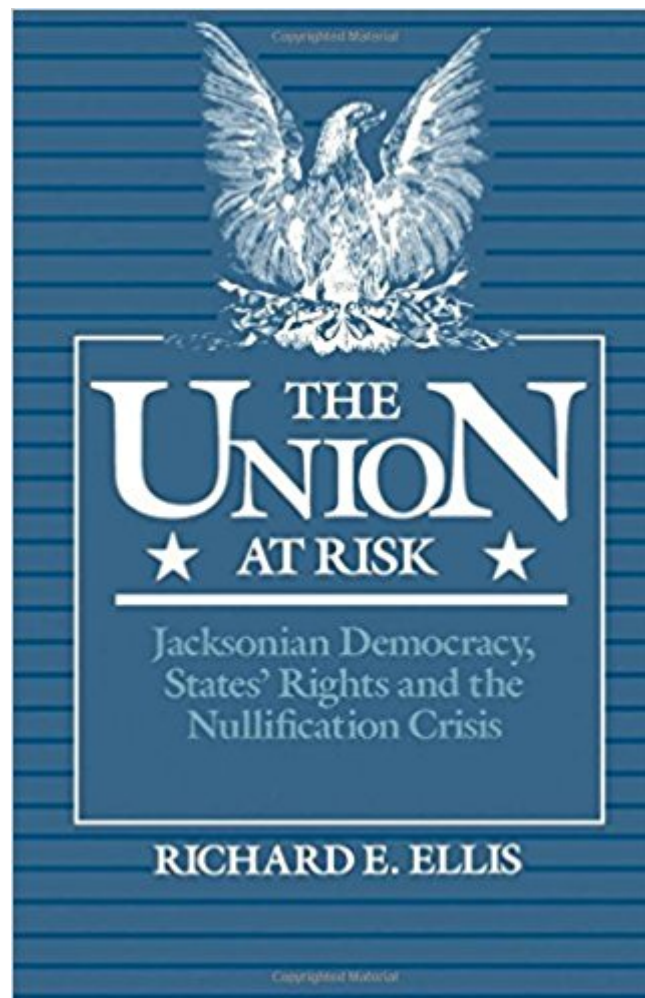




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# The Union At Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States' Rights, And Nullification Crisis



## Synopsis

The Nullification Crisis of 1832-33 is undeniably the most important major event of Andrew Jackson's two presidential terms. Attempting to declare null and void the high tariffs enacted by Congress in the late 1820s, the state of South Carolina declared that it had the right to ignore those national laws that did not suit it. Responding swiftly and decisively, Jackson issued a Proclamation reaffirming the primacy of the national government and backed this up with a Force Act, allowing him to enforce the law with troops. Although the conflict was eventually allayed by a compromise fashioned by Henry Clay, the Nullification Crisis raises paramount issues in American political history. *The Union at Risk* studies the doctrine of states' rights and illustrates how it directly affected national policy at a crucial point in 19th-century politics. Ellis also relates the Nullification Crisis to other major areas of Jackson's administration--his conflict with the National Bank, his Indian policy, and his relationship with the Supreme Court--providing keen insight into the most serious sectional conflict before the Civil War.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"An outstanding addition to the literature on Jacksonian democracy and should become a standard source on the nullification crisis....Ellis has given a fresh interpretation to a familiar topic and has offered a convincing reassessment of the broader significance of the nullification crisis in Jacksonian democracy."--*History: Reviews of New Books*"A superb study, adding new information and insights into our understanding of the Nullification Controversy of 1832-1833. It is richly textured with valuable details on both the national and state levels and quite outstandingly demonstrates a

sophistication of understanding about the political maneuvering that occurred."--Civil War History"Makes a significant contribution to political and constitutional history."--The Historian"Extensively researched and thought-provoking....[Ellis's] discussion has rich detail and much novelty....Its strength lies in its reconstruction of a dramatic historical moment with an informative emphasis upon its constitutional importance."--Georgia Historical Quarterly"A fine study by a masterly political historian."--Merrill D. Peterson, University of Virginia"Ellis has done a superb job in exploring and uncovering new dimensions of an old and often treated topic...The Union at Risk makes a major contribution to historical literature."--James Roger Sharp, Syracuse University"By tracking the Nullification Crisis to a new depth in the politics of the states Ellis shows how the states' rights bulwark of Jefferson's yeoman republic became the bulwark of slavery."--Charles Sellers, University of California, Berkeley"A major addition to the scholarship of the Jackson period."--CHOICE

Richard E. Ellis is at State University of New York, Buffalo.

"The Union At Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States Rights And The Nullification Crisis" by Richard E. Ellis, is a well written and timely presentation (although published in 1987) of a 200 year old issue which appears to be gaining a new following in 2010 due to current issues surrounding health care and other matters. In fact, a newly published book entitled "Nullification: How To Resist Federal Tyranny In The 21st Century" by Thomas E. Woods, Jr., has been waiting on my shelf pending my completion of Ellis' work."The Union At Risk..." is a well organized, comprehensive and easily understood appraisal of the events surrounding South Carolina's action in passing state ordinances nullifying the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832 within the borders of the state, and their threat to exercise their perceived right to secede if their grievances were not addressed. President Andrew Jackson's response in threatening to use force to collect revenue due under the tariffs and to arrest and try as traitors those responsible for promoting nullification is shown to be both a success and a failure. While there were many who agreed with him that nullification and/or secession were illegal or at least unwise, his extreme threats tore apart his party, caused supporters to become opponents, and did great harm to the very union he was determined to save. At the same time, Jackson was among the minority of officials willing to risk war to save the union. One is left with the very strong conclusion that had he NOT reacted so violently, the union might have dissolved at the hands of those who refused to consider a compromise in tariff rates, and those who were willing to allow a state to secede. Ellis' excellent interpretation and historical analysis assists the reader in putting all

the pieces of the story together. Taking the position that Jackson was both right in his belief that the union had to be saved and wrong in his approach, the reader learns that the issues involved are complex and not easily resolved, and not even fully resolved 178 years later. The issues of states rights, the right of secession, and apparently, even the doctrine of nullification are still hot issues. In his final chapter, Ellis summarizes events and trends, bringing the reader up to the middle of the 19th century and the civil war. Drawing on sociological changes in the United States, he helps the reader understand that the nullification crisis effectively created a situation which virtually assured a national conflict over states rights, with slavery and fear of strong governmental interference with that institution as the focusing factor. Considering current events and future possibilities, this reader considers Ellis' work to be essential reading before anyone is prepared to seriously consider risking or promoting nullification in the 21st century. Five stars for intelligence of writing, analysis and helpfulness.

I knew nothing about the nullification crisis until I read this book. A struggle between the perennially recalcitrant South Carolina and the Federal government over the tariff of 1828, this book gives a thorough review of events leading up to the crisis and its resolution. It reviews not only events in Congress and within Jackson's presidency, but also players and events in individual Southern and Northern states. Although I don't believe the U.S. was ready for civil war in 1831-32, some have accurately termed this event as South Carolina's rehearsal for the Civil War. Unhappy with high tariffs that protected northern manufacturing and made goods expensive for the agrarian South, South Carolina unilaterally nullified the tariff of 1828, stating as a sovereign state it had authority to nullify a federal law and hinted at succession. South Carolina had weak support from the other southern states and little sympathy from many northern states, but Jackson made the mistake of threatening the use of force against S.C. and in doing so damaged the federal effort to quash the S.C. nullification. I think many states feared federal use of force would lead to war, but the Southern paradigm had not yet brought itself to support war. That would take another 30 years. Congress lowered the federal tariff enough to allow all parties to save face, but S.C. proved itself to be a difficult player as it had been during the constitutional convention, would be 30 years later, and in many ways is still so today. I think this book covers a much neglected topic that has far reaching implications.

How did the United States, in less than 100 years, go from a new country founded on the principle that "all men are created equal" to a nation at war with itself over a contrary view? Richard Ellis, in

"The Union at Risk", provides a very insightful look at the principles and parties most responsible for the cataclysm of civil war. I was a bit concerned that I might be delving into an academically abstruse tome; but, thanks to its bargain pricing, I took a chance--it worked! The book read like a suspense novel, and I found myself not wanting to put it down. Well written, reasonably concise, and to all appearances, quite objective in tone; this is definitely a book worth reading. I do have to add--and is not paying me to say this--that my wife and I both absolutely love our Kindles, and the availability of books like this at such reasonable prices seals the deal for us. Since I bought my first Kindle over two years ago, my range of reading has continued to expand--I have always been pretty eclectic in my reading, equally preferring classic literature and non-fiction (history and philosophy). The advantage with the Kindle is immediate accessibility. Anyway--thanks, !! Now, back to "The Union at Risk". If, like me, you have an interest in the American Civil War, do not hesitate to read this book. Ellis effectively describes the context in which slavery was allowed to fester as that "peculiar institution", and the range of views about that institution. For me, it enhanced my understanding why that terrible war had to be fought. His title really says it all--our Union, our existence as a nation "indivisible", was on the line. That we survived is remarkable; Ellis' book makes that point quite clear.

This is a terrific analysis of the nullification crisis. The author notes that resolution of the difficult issue was not the resounding success for President Jackson as conventional wisdom might say. There are strong chapters on the Southern view of nullification. Although the other slave states were opposed to South Carolina, they were not devoted to the use of force against the Palmetto State. The civil war could have started thirty years before Fort Sumter. Read this to find out why.

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