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Republican Ideology in a Slave Society: The Political Economy of John C. Calhoun

By LACY K. FORD

DURING THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN OF 1840 THE WHIGS MUSTERED support for William Henry Harrison, their Indian-fighting nominee, while opportunistic Democrats welcomed nullifiers back from political apostasy to support Martin Van Buren. In June of that year a Democratic-Republican club in New York City invited the author of nullification, John C. Calhoun, to speak at its annual Fourth of July celebration. Following his usual practice, Senator Calhoun declined, pleading the press of legislative business in Washington. In his public reply to the invitation Calhoun revealed his belief that the stakes in the fall elections were high indeed. "Be assured," Calhoun advised his New York friends, "we are in the midst of no ordinary crisis." Drawing on his own interpretation of the young republic's history, the South Carolinian explained the nature of the crisis at some length:

. . . which shall prevail, the school of Jefferson or Hamilton? Shall we after the great progress made, and with the sad lesson of experience before us, turn back to the Hamilton policy, reunite the government with the banks, create anew a national bank, build up another funding system, re-enact a protective tariff, restore the misnamed American System, with all its corrupting and dangerous consequences; or shall we, admonished by the past, adopt the opposite system of policy, restrict the government rigidly to the few great objects assigned to it . . . and take a fresh departure, in the direction laid down in the State Rights Republican Chart of [17]98, as projected by Mr. Jefferson and his compeers. On the decision of this all-important question will depend, as I believe, the future destiny of the country. If the side of our opponents should in the end prevail, our free and glorious institutions will not long survive.¹

¹ John C. Calhoun to Charles P. Daly and Others, June 4, 1840, in Robert L. Meriwether, W. Edwin Hemphill, and Clyde N. Wilson, eds., *The Papers of John C. Calhoun* (17 vols. to date; Columbia, S. C., 1959-), XV, 266-70 (quotations on pp. 266, 269).

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Three weeks later Calhoun repeated this denunciation of Whiggery in a letter to supporters in Kentucky, declaring that if Harrison and Henry Clay were allowed to “rear up anew the miscalled American system, with all its wasteful and unconstitutional expenditures; discord, revolution, and the loss of liberty will certainly follow.”²

To be sure, partisan political rhetoric of the Jacksonian Era frequently soared to the apocalyptic heights reached by Calhoun in his condemnation of the Whig program. Thus the South Carolinian’s dramatic language might be dismissed as simple partisan stridency. But Calhoun sounded almost as urgent, if slightly more colloquial, in his private correspondence. The defeat of the Whigs and “expelling the whole system of federal consolidation measures,” Calhoun told his son Andrew, “would be one of the most remarkable revolutions ever effected without force and would give the Government a new lease for its existence.”³ With his longtime South Carolina ally, Armistead Burt, Calhoun spoke even more bluntly, branding the Whig program as “neither more nor less than old federalism, tainted with anti mason & abolition, and turned demagogue [*sic*] of the lowest order.”⁴ But why was John C. Calhoun so exercised about the election of 1840? Just a few years earlier he had frequently made common cause with leaders of the emerging Whig opposition in a calculated effort to curb what he perceived as “executive usurpation” on the part of Andrew Jackson. Nor did Calhoun ordinarily display much appetite for the tough infighting of partisan electoral politics. Indeed, even during the heat of the 1840 campaign Calhoun told political allies in Greenville, South Carolina, that if “the present contest was one about men, as our opponents [Whigs] would have us believe, I would take neither interest nor part in it,” because it was considered “degrading to sixteen millions of freemen to be agitated on the question, whether this or that individual should be raised to the highest office,” when the “liberty and welfare of the country, and the principles and policy by which they are to be promoted and preserved, are the only considerations worthy of patriots and freemen.”⁵ But for Calhoun the election of 1840 involved more than a mere contest of men and personalities. Instead, Calhoun believed the election offered the country a clear choice between two competing notions of political economy, a Whig-gish one that urged an active role for government in fostering market

² John C. Calhoun to J[ohn] M. McCalla *et al.*, June 27, 1840, *ibid.*, 287–90 (quotation on p. 289).

³ John C. Calhoun to Andrew Pickens Calhoun, June 8, 1840, *ibid.*, 273.

⁴ John C. Calhoun to A[rmistead] Burt, August 20, 1840, *ibid.*, 334–35 (quotation on p. 335).

⁵ Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun, Nullifier, 1829–1839* (Indianapolis, 1949), 223–67; John C. Calhoun to Tandy Walker, E[lias] D. Earle, and A[ndrew] B. Crook, August 24, 1840, in Meriwether *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XV, 337–39 (quotation on p. 338).

expansion and economic development and a somewhat less well defined Democratic one that argued that the only proper role for government was as protector of the independent citizen from combinations of power and privilege, whether economic or political.⁶

In a recent historiographical survey Sean Wilentz noted that, after nearly two decades of emphasis on the ethnocultural motives behind Jacksonian political conflict, historians are now recovering the profound ideological dimension that animated political combat during this furiously political age. Jacksonian party competition can be best understood, Wilentz suggested, as a prolonged attempt to resolve the “contradictions between the political legacy of the Revolution and the social consequences of the [subsequent] market revolution”⁷ Moreover, in his excellent study of the Early National Period, Drew R. McCoy observed that “whatever the partisan persuasion of most American statesmen, they generally thought in terms of constructing a national political economy that was compatible with a republican system of government.”⁸ Jacksonian political leaders, like Jeffersonians before them, struggled to reconcile their revolutionary heritage of classical republicanism, with all its strictures against commerce and luxury, with the material realities of a rapidly expanding market economy. No public figure grappled with this problem with more energy and determination than Calhoun, and few addressed it with as much originality; but no systematic study of Calhoun’s views on questions of political economy, or of his efforts to sustain these views in the political forums of the nation, has yet appeared. Calhoun’s ideas regarding the proper republican political economy were articulated most fully, most vigorously, and most often during the partisan debates between Whigs and Democrats in the late 1830s and early 1840s. The debates centered on such fundamental economic issues as banks, tariffs, and public lands. By focusing on Calhoun’s thought during these debates, this essay will explore the brilliant Carolinian’s ideas on political economy at their full maturity, seasoned by the bitter and inconclusive strife of the nullification crisis and free of the youthful enthusiasms of his early career.

⁶ On Whig ideology see Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago and London, 1979), especially pp. 96–149; Thomas Brown, *Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the American Whig Party* (New York, 1985), especially Chaps. 2 and 7; Charles G. Sellers, Jr., “Who Were the Southern Whigs?” *American Historical Review*, LIX (January 1954), 335–46. On Democrats see J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, 1978), especially pp. 55–58; and Lacy K. Ford, “Social Origins of a New South Carolina: The Upcountry in the Nineteenth Century” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1983), 213–50.

⁷ Sean Wilentz, “On Class and Politics in Jacksonian America,” *Reviews in American History*, X (December 1982), 45–63 (quotation on p. 59).

⁸ Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, 1980), 10.

Much of the currently fashionable understanding of Calhoun dates back to the provocative interpretations of Louis Hartz and Richard Hofstadter, both of which appeared just as the stifling conformity of Henry Luce's "American Century" swept across the nation in the aftermath of World War II.⁹ In *The Liberal Tradition in America* Hartz depicted Calhoun as a wayward Lockean liberal trying to fashion a systematic defense of slavery in a society lacking the materials needed for genuine Burkean conservatism. Hartz portrayed Calhoun as an architect of the so-called "Reactionary Enlightenment" during which the Old South reluctantly abandoned its liberal Jeffersonian birthright to wrap itself in a fragile protective shroud of legalism and constitutional literalism. Jefferson's fond hopes for the American experiment in self-government devolved into Calhoun's dark fears for a slave society exposed to the terrors of abolition. According to Hartz, the intellectual structure of the "Reactionary Enlightenment" collapsed under its own weight because neither Calhoun nor most other southerners could wholeheartedly repudiate their own liberal revolutionary heritage.¹⁰

By contrast, Hofstadter, in his famous "Marx of the Master Class" essay, rendered Calhoun as a precocious Marx, an emerging dialectician of class conflict whose sympathies were engaged by the pathos of the propertied rather than by the proletariat. For Hofstadter, Calhoun appeared not so much a nostalgic reactionary trying to recapture some lost hierarchical social order as a very modern conservative trying to forestall the rise of the proletariat through an alliance between the landed gentry and the new bourgeoisie, an antidemocratic strategy that anticipated the now overworked notion of a "Prussian Road" to modern society.¹¹ Calhoun failed, Hofstadter concluded, not because he was an intellectual relic or a survivor from a lost world but because he was a prophet, a visionary whose "brilliant but highly abstract" mind grasped "with uncanny insight several major trends of the future" but failed to produce an appropriate analysis of the social and economic circumstances of the Age of Jackson. When Calhoun viewed the rising democratic and materialistic tides of his time, Hofstadter argued, he watched through the eyes of a prescient Alexis de Tocqueville rather than those of a pragmatic Andrew Jackson. Calhoun's vision and relentless logic led him to conclusions about class conflict and the crisis of egalitarianism that

⁹ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York, 1955), 143–209; Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made It* (New York, 1948), Chap. 4.

¹⁰ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition in America*, Chap. 6.

¹¹ Hofstadter, *American Political Tradition*, Chap. 4. Hofstadter refined an earlier version of this argument made by Richard N. Current in his "John C. Calhoun, Philosopher of Reaction," *Antioch Review*, III (June 1943), 223–34. The idea of a "Prussian Road" to modernity is suggested in Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston, 1966), Chaps. 3, 8, 9.

few Americans could accept during the heady early years of Jacksonian democracy. Jacksonian America was, after all, still an essentially preindustrial society where many still believed that revolts by the lower classes were distinctly European phenomena. If Calhoun was Marx standing on his head, he was also Marx without an industrial revolution to criticize.¹²

Hartz portrayed Calhoun as an obsolete Tory while Hofstadter saw him as a rejected prophet, but both authors agreed that Calhoun was a political anachronism of one kind or another. Moreover, both Hartz and Hofstadter agreed that the Jacksonian political mainstream and Calhoun's own political heritage were pretty thoroughly Lockean and liberal. Both also saw Calhoun's failure to generate a meaningful conservative alternative as a tribute to the power of that liberal consensus.¹³ Even the conservative Russell Kirk, a much more sympathetic commentator, found Calhoun a failed Tory, a faint echo of Burke, who deserved attention primarily because he introduced an unreceptive American audience to prescriptive rights and offered a conservatism based on something "deeper than mere defense of shares and dividends."¹⁴ The influential Marxist historian Eugene D. Genovese concurred with Hartz's judgment that Calhoun's conservatism looked feeble and halfhearted compared to that of George Fitzhugh, the American South's most unstinting champion of social hierarchy, though Genovese recognized Calhoun as the most formidable political strategist produced by the slaveholding elite.¹⁵

All of these conventional interpretations have done considerable violence to Calhoun and his thought either by wrenching both the man and his ideas out of their proper historical and ideological context or by grossly misunderstanding that context. Assuming a liberal rather than a republican heritage for nineteenth-century America, Hartz, Hofstadter, and others saw Calhoun as a curious anomaly in the evolution of Lockean liberalism in the United States. Recently, new studies have taken important steps toward returning Calhoun to his proper context by evaluating his thought as part of the evolving

¹² Hofstadter, *American Political Tradition*, 88–91 (quotation on p. 90).

¹³ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition in America*, 167–77; Hofstadter, *American Political Tradition*, 90–92. Recent interpretations of Calhoun that are heavily influenced by the work of Hartz and Hofstadter include Irving H. Bartlett, *The American Mind in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Arlington Heights, Ill., 1982 ed.), 91–97; and James D. Clarke, "Calhoun and the Concept of 'Reactionary Enlightenment': An Examination of the Disquisition on Government" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Keele, 1982). For a recent study emphasizing the strength of liberalism during the Jacksonian Era see John Patrick Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest and the Foundations of Liberalism* (New York, 1984), Chap. 4.

¹⁴ Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (South Bend, Ind., 1978), 130–60 (quotation on p. 160).

¹⁵ Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York, 1969), 132–36.

republican tradition in America.¹⁶ In a suggestive essay, Pauline Maier placed Calhoun squarely within the republican tradition of the revolutionary generation but also argued that the South Carolinian was a nostalgic anachronism during the Age of Jackson. Calhoun, Maier maintained, was essentially an eighteenth-century, pre-Madison republican who could never quite sacrifice the ideal of disinterested statesmanship on the altar of countervailing, self-interested factionalism.¹⁷ J. William Harris has suggested that in many respects Calhoun was “a pre-eighteenth century republican” who remained devoted to the classical ideal of a perfectly balanced government long after most American republicans had accepted a far less formal system of internal checks and balances as an adequate harness for governmental power. Calhoun’s obsession with constitutional mechanisms, Harris argued, revealed a classical or Renaissance republican belief that virtue was a product of proper institutional arrangements. Calhoun, Harris concluded, “was out of place as a thinker because of his almost pure classicism,” yet the South Carolinian achieved “a kind of greatness” much “like that of a dinosaur in the age of mammals, awesome and perfect in its way . . . but bound for extinction.”¹⁸ Absent from these examinations of Calhoun as republican is the interpretation of the Fort Hill planter as proto-Marxist prophet, but present is Calhoun as a nostalgic throw-back to an earlier, more well-ordered age.

The idea of Calhoun as a political dinosaur, as a survival of eighteenth-century or even classical republicanism, is not entirely unappealing. South Carolina’s famous “Compromise of 1808,” an amendment to the state constitution that increased the representation of the upcountry in the state legislature, was based on an almost classical concept of “balance” between upcountry and lowcountry, a balance that Calhoun, whose father Patrick had been the foremost

¹⁶ See Robert A. Garson, “Proslavery as Political Theory: The Examples of John C. Calhoun and George Fitzhugh,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXXXIV (Spring 1985), 197–212. On republicanism see J. G. A. Pocock’s magisterial *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N. J., 1975). Two excellent summaries of the explosion of scholarship on the subject are Robert E. Shalhope, “Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of the Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXIX (January 1972), 49–80; and Robert E. Shalhope, “Republicanism and Early American Historiography,” *ibid.*, XXXIX (April 1982), 334–56. The standard works on the influence of republican ideology in late eighteenth-century America are Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), especially Chap. 5; and Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969), Chaps. 2, 13, 15.

¹⁷ Pauline Maier, “The Road Not Taken: Nullification, John C. Calhoun, and the Revolutionary Tradition in South Carolina,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, LXXXII (January 1981), 1–19.

¹⁸ J. William Harris, “Last of the Classical Republicans: An Interpretation of John C. Calhoun,” *Civil War History*, XXX (September 1984) 255–67 (first quotation on p. 256; second and third quotations on p. 267).

champion of upcountry rights, staunchly defended.¹⁹ In Washington, Calhoun consistently portrayed himself as a defender of the “original purity” of the Constitution and called for a return to pristine first principles.²⁰ Calhoun also commented frequently, in a fashion reminiscent of Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, on the declining level of public discourse and the deterioration of political ethics. Old Federalists, Calhoun opined in 1836, had been “honest, high-minded patriotic” gentlemen who were simply “mistaken as to the principles and tendency of the government.”²¹ He never granted such respect to the new breed of rivals who engaged him during the 1830s and 1840s.

Moreover, as a constitutional theorist, Calhoun clearly found the rationalization of James Madison’s *Federalist* Number 10 unsatisfactory. Lacking the classes or estates necessary to construct a balanced government after the British model, the United States, Madison had contended, might depend on its vastness and diversity, qualities ordinarily thought detrimental to republics, for protection against the consolidationist tendencies of power. America’s multiplicity of interests and the relative geographic isolation of these interests would generate, in Madison’s view, many competing factions incapable of combination, each exerting a centrifugal pull against centralized power. Madison accepted each faction’s selfish pursuit of its own interest not only as inevitable but also as necessary for the proper maintenance of checks and balances.²² As Calhoun saw it, Madison, confronted with the reality of self-interest and faction, ingeniously contrived to make necessity a virtue. Calhoun, like other good republicans since antiquity, preferred to design a political and economic structure that might somehow make virtue a necessity.²³

In rejecting Madison, Calhoun certainly branded himself an un-Madisonian republican, but it seems more appropriate to call Calhoun the greatest of the post-Madisonian republicans rather than the last of the pre-Madisonian, or classical, republicans. In the political realm, transportation improvements and, more important, the

¹⁹ Margaret L. Coit, *John C. Calhoun: American Portrait* (Boston, 1950), Chaps. 1–4; Ford, “Social Origins of a New South Carolina,” 432–43; Rachel Klein, “The Rise of the Planters in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1767–1808” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1979).

²⁰ John C. Calhoun to Richard Vaux and Others, January 1, 1840, in Meriwether *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XV, 27–28.

²¹ “Speech in Reply to Criticisms of the Bill to Prohibit the Circulation of Incendiary Publications Through the Mail,” April 12, 1836, *ibid.*, XIII, 147–66 (quotation on p. 162).

²² On Madison see Douglas G. Adair, *Fame and the Founding Fathers*, ed. Trevor Colburn (New York, 1974), especially Chap. 3; Garry Wills, *Explaining America* (Garden City, N. Y., 1981); Ralph Ketcham, *Presidents Above Party: The First American Presidency, 1789–1829* (Chapel Hill, 1984), especially pp. 113–23; Lance Banning, “Republican Ideology and the Triumph of the Constitution, 1789 to 1793,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXXI (April 1974), 167–88; and McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, Chap. 5.

²³ For Calhoun’s view see his “A Disquisition on Government,” in John M. Anderson, ed., *Calhoun: Basic Documents* (State College, Pa., 1952), 29–97.

remarkable unifying power of well-drilled, Jacksonian political parties gradually overcame the decentralizing tendencies of faction and distance. Just a half century after *The Federalist* was published, Calhoun had in plain view what Madison believed impossible in America—a coherent numerical majority, a majority capable of becoming as tyrannical as any king or aristocracy. Calhoun reconsidered the basic political conundrums of republican thought, not out of nostalgic preference for ancient wisdom but because experience had revealed the problematical nature of Madison's formulation. Indeed, Calhoun's most original ideas, state interposition and the concurrent majority, were rejected or ignored largely because they were novel and esoteric rather than because they were antiquated or outmoded.²⁴

Like the Founding Fathers, Calhoun considered the American political and economic order an ongoing experiment in republican government. For most of his life he was cautiously optimistic about its prospects for success. In his sense of the experimental nature of American republicanism, in his underlying optimism about its future, and even in his belief that republican liberty could be preserved only by freemen on constant vigil, Calhoun proved a legitimate heir of Thomas Jefferson, even though the sober South Carolinian did not share the Sage of Monticello's sanguinity about human nature or his anxiety over the baneful influence of slavery on the republic.²⁵ Conservative in the sense that he considered the existing society "first in the order of things, and in the dignity of its object" and the purpose of government "secondary and subordinate, to preserve and perfect society," Calhoun fashioned a defense of the society-in-being, the racially based slave society of the Old South.²⁶ Calhoun, like many southerners since the founding of the republic, saw nothing incompatible in his joint commitment to republicanism and slaveholding, arguing instead that the two were natural comple-

²⁴ For expressions of the Founding Fathers' fears of tyrannical majorities see Clinton N. Rossiter, ed., *The Federalist Papers* (New York and Scarborough, Ont., 1961), 77, 84, 323–24; and Thomas Jefferson to Marquis de Lafayette, February 14, 1815, in Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (20 vols.; Washington, D. C., 1905–1907), XIV, 245–46. On Calhoun's views see Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York, forthcoming in 1988), Chap. 8.

²⁵ See Clyde N. Wilson on this point in his introduction to *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XIV, xxxii–xxxiii. Richard K. Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson: A Revisionist View* (Lawrence, Kan., 1984), emphasized the optimistic and visionary aspects of Jefferson's thought. M. E. Bradford, *A Better Guide Than Reason* (LaSalle, Ill., 1979), emphasized Jefferson's caution as a practicing politician. Clyde N. Wilson, "The Jeffersonian Conservative Tradition," *Modern Age*, XIV (Winter 1969–70), 36–48, argued that "as a thinker Jefferson was freeranging" but that "one is hard put to find genuinely radical acts of Jefferson the statesman" (p. 40).

²⁶ Calhoun, "A Disquisition on Government," in Anderson, ed., *Calhoun*, 32. For an excellent introduction to the development of the proslavery argument see Drew G. Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge and London, 1981), 1–20.

ments of each other even as the institution of slavery came under sharp moral assault from the abolition movement.²⁷

Along with other leading politicians of the Jacksonian Era, Calhoun recognized that economic foundations as well as political mechanisms safeguarded republican ideals. As a man who took both politics and ideas seriously, Calhoun spent much of his political life trying to construct a system of political economy that would provide the proper material and ethical foundation for republican ideals and still accommodate the needs and appetites of a vigorously commercial market economy. Calhoun's political ideas were often original responses to new problems threatening the cherished republican political order. His economic ideas, though far more conventional, were equally "modern" by Jacksonian standards. By reason of training, inclination, and sectional self-interest, Calhoun accepted, with certain qualifications, the most aggressively and persuasively argued economic premises of his day—the antimercantilist economic liberalism of Adam Smith, especially as interpreted by the ardent free traders of the Manchester School.²⁸ In developing his view of the proper political economy for the nation, Calhoun drew on both republican precepts and the tenets of economic liberalism, resolving apparent contradictions with his own logic and empiricism when necessary. With the emergence of the Whigs as a full-fledged political party during the 1830s, Calhoun believed that party differences lay primarily in the area of political economy; and as a politician anxious to shape debate and influence policy, he entered the ideological fray with his usual vigor and determination.

Calhoun opposed the Whig program for economic development on both "Country" republican and Smithian liberal grounds, sometimes combining these potentially contradictory sets of ideas with stunning

²⁷ On the issue of the compatibility of slavery and republican ideology see Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery—American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 295–387. On the strong connection between slavery and republican values in the minds of antebellum southern politicians see William J. Cooper, Jr., *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York, 1983).

²⁸ Theodore R. Marmor, "Anti-Industrialism and the Old South: The Agrarian Perspective of John C. Calhoun," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, IX (July 1967), 377–406. On Smith see Donald Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision* (Cambridge, Eng., 1978); and John Robertson, "Scottish Political Economy Beyond the Civic Tradition: Government and Economic Development in the *Wealth of Nations*," *History of Political Thought*, III (Winter 1983), 451–82. For a thorough discussion of the emergence of economic liberalism and of the importance of Smith's work as a turning point see William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics: English Economic Thought, 1660–1776* (London, 1963), especially Chap. 8. Calhoun, like other southern politicians and political economists, selectively rejected economic liberalism's insistence on the efficiency of a free market in labor power. See Allen Kaufman, *Capitalism, Slavery, and Republican Values: Antebellum Political Economists, 1819–1848* (Austin, Texas, 1982), Chaps. 1, 5, 7. On the broad influence of economic liberalism in both Great Britain and the United States see Robert Kelley, *The Transatlantic Persuasion: The Liberal-Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (New York, 1969).

effect.²⁹ In his attacks on Clay's "American System," Calhoun drew heavily on language similar to that found in the Commonwealth and radical attacks on the so-called Walpolean system a century earlier. "Mr. [Henry] Clay's American system, which poured countless millions into the treasury," Calhoun noted in 1838, "was the source of all our oppression, disorder, and corruption." Nullification and Jackson's controversial removal of government deposits from the Bank of the United States, Calhoun continued, had "dried up the source of corruption, patronage, & power, and put an end . . . both to Congressional & Executive usurpation."³⁰ On the floor of the Senate in February 1839 Calhoun was equally explicit:

I belong to that political school which regards with a jealous eye the patronage of this Government, and believes that the less its patronage the better, consistently with the objects for which the Government was instituted. Thus thinking, I have made no political move of any importance, for the last twelve or thirteen years, which had not for its object, directly or indirectly, the reduction of patronage. . . .

It is a primary maxim under our system, to collect no more money than is necessary to the economical and constitutional wants of the Government. We have, in fact, no right to collect a cent more. Nothing can tend more powerfully to corrupt public and private morals, or to increase the patronage of the Government, than an excessive or surplus revenue, as recent and sad experience has abundantly proved.³¹

To defend his assertions, Calhoun formulated an interpretation of American political history that posited all political conflicts as struggles between forces of economy and virtue on the one hand and of patronage and corruption on the other. At the head of the virtuous republican school stood "Jefferson and his associates of the Virginia school," a party "distinguished for its jealous opposition to patronage as the bane of our political system . . ." Foremost among advocates for the "opposing school" was Alexander Hamilton, who, according to Calhoun, regarded patronage "not as a bane, but as an essential ingredient, without which the Government would be impracticable; and whose leading policy, is to enlist in its favor the more powerful

²⁹ For an introduction to the rekindled debate over the relative influence of republicanism and liberalism on the development of the young republic see Dorothy Ross, "The Liberal Tradition Revisited and the Republican Tradition Addressed," in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore, 1980), 116-29; Isaac Kramnick, "Republican Revisionism Revisited," *American Historical Review*, LXXXVII (June 1982), 629-64; Lance Banning, "Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the New American Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XLIII (January 1986), 3-19; Joyce Appleby, "Republicanism in Old and New Contexts," *ibid.*, 20-34; and Linda K. Kerber, "The Republican Ideology of the Revolutionary Generation," *American Quarterly*, XXXVII (Fall 1985), 474-95.

³⁰ John C. Calhoun to A[rmistead] Burt, December 24, 1838, in Meriwether *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XIV, 498-99 (quotations on p. 498).

³¹ "Speech on the bill to Prevent the Interference of Certain Federal Officers in Elections," February 22, 1839, *ibid.*, XIV, 560-76 (quotations on pp. 560, 565).

classes of society, through their interest, as indispensable to its support." In charging Hamilton with advocacy of corruption, Calhoun recognized that Hamilton was not a champion of "corruption in its usual sense of bribery." Instead, Hamilton viewed corruption as "something far more powerful and comprehensive; that policy which systematically favored the great and powerful classes of society with the view of binding them . . . to the support of the Government." Once in power, Calhoun charged, Hamilton engineered the adoption of "the funding system, on the British model," and on this issue "the two schools . . . have ever since . . . divided the country." Calhoun interpreted the entire Hamiltonian system as nothing less than the machinery of the power-hungry "Court" faction, whose power was based on a central bank, a public debt, and extensive patronage. The "great and leading error in Hamilton and his school," Calhoun maintained, was their failure to realize that of "all Governments that ever existed, it [ours] can stand under the least patronage, in proportion to the population and wealth of the country, without changing its character or hazarding a revolution." Attached to the flawed Court model of government, Hamilton leaned to the side of power while Jefferson "leaned more to the side of liberty" in that most ancient of political conflicts.³²

Calhoun saw Whiggery as simply an attempt to outfit the old Court-model Hamiltonian program with more modern trappings. Although it was nearly dismantled by Jefferson, Hamilton's system was granted a new lease on life by the exigencies of the War of 1812 and its aftermath and reinvigorated further by the consolidationist schemes of John Quincy Adams, until it finally remodeled itself as the Whiggery of Henry Clay and other economic nationalists. Calhoun conceded that Jackson mounted a counterattack against this revived Federalism but also charged that Old Hickory's fondness for spoilsmanship discredited and undermined his efforts to defeat the incipient Whig movement. In order to confront the Whig challenge from a position of strength and consistency, Calhoun contended, Democrats "must give up the spoil principle, cut the office holders, & throw [out] corrupt retainers & partisans, and throw themselves in good faith on the old Republican ground, with that portion of the party, which have ever remained faithful to their principles."³³ If this Whig revival of the "prostrate system of federalism should succeed," Calhoun warned, the "seat of Government and power would change, and pass from the people into the hands of one of the most corrupt and exacting moneyed oligarchies of which history has left any record."³⁴

³² *Ibid.* (first quotation on pp. 565–66; second and third on p. 566; fourth and fifth on p. 567; sixth and tenth on p. 568; and seventh, eighth, and ninth on p. 575).

³³ John C. Calhoun to S[amuel] D. Ingham, October 25, 1838, *ibid.*, XIV, 441–43 (quotation on p. 442).

³⁴ "Speech on the Report of the Secretary of the Treasury," June 21, 1841, *ibid.*, XV, 577–91

Calhoun's sweeping indictment of Whiggery was redolent of familiar arguments from the "Country" critique of Walpolean corruption, especially as those arguments were echoed by Jeffersonians in their attack on Hamilton. Whig support for a national bank and a full federal treasury recalled Walpole's financial system. The Whigs' use of the privileges and patronage generated by the national bank, federal revenues, and schemes for internal improvement created a corrupt network of party loyalists comparable to Robert Walpole's notorious "Robinocracy."³⁵ In Calhoun's more specific attacks on various aspects of the Whig program, traditional republican complaints also loomed large. His attacks on the national bank plan always included reminders that government-sponsored banks inevitably served as a fountain of patronage and corruption. The "fatal union" of the government and the banks, Calhoun told friends in Ohio in 1838, had increased "central power and patronage . . . debasing the public and private morals of the community" and spread "the spirit of lawless speculation far and wide . . ."³⁶ Calhoun held that the creation of a new national bank was "far more a political, than a commercial or money question." If a national bank was created, he maintained, the "Government will absorb the whole powers of the system, and the States will sink to dependent and petty corporations; and then we may bid a final adieu to our free and popular institutions."³⁷ In a rare stump appearance with a Whig rival in his own congressional district, Calhoun denounced the proposed national bank as "*unequal, unjust, corrupting in its consequences, anti-republican, hostile to State rights, and subversive of our liberties.*" Calhoun concluded his remarks at this public barbecue with a telling selection from Aesop's fables:

A woodsman humbly petitioned the Forest to grant him a small piece of timber . . . in order that he might make a helve for his axe. The Forest held a council, and granted the apparently moderate request. The woodsman

(quotations on p. 584).

³⁵ See Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca, N. Y., and London, 1978); Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968); J. R. Jones, *Country and Court: England, 1658–1714* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978); John M. Murrin, "The Great Inversion, or Court versus Country: A Comparison of the Revolutionary Settlements in England and America," in J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, N. J., 1980), 368–453. Forrest McDonald, *The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson* (Lawrence, Kan., 1976), found strong parallels between Jeffersonian attacks on the Federalists and Bolingbroke's criticism of the Walpolean "Court" faction. See also Andrew W. Foshee, "Jeffersonian Political Economy and the Classical Republican Tradition: Jefferson, Taylor, and the Agrarian Republic," *History of Political Economy*, XVII (Winter 1985), 523–50. For a sharp critique of Banning's and Murrin's interpretation of the Jeffersonians see Joyce Appleby, "What is Still American in the Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson?" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXXIX (April 1982), 287–309.

³⁶ John C. Calhoun to [B. G. Wright and Others], April [ca. 6], 1838, in Meriwether *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XIV, 255–57 (quotation on p. 256).

³⁷ *Ibid.* (first quotation on p. 256; second on pp. 256–57).

shaped and fitted his helve, and returning, soon felled the Forest around him. The axe . . . was the Bank. Give to it a charter, and you supply the helve, and soon the tree of American Liberty will fall prostrate before it.³⁸

Additionally, part of Calhoun's opposition to Whig proposals regarding the tariff and the distribution of revenue from sale of public lands grew out of traditional republican concern over patronage and corruption. Revenues from land sales and import duties kept government coffers full during the 1830s. A full to overflowing treasury tempted politicians into greater profligacy and bolder patronage schemes. "Economy is a cardinal republican virtue," Calhoun told the Senate in May 1840, because "patronage and extravagance are the most corrupting and dangerous" enemies of a republican government.³⁹ Calhoun attacked a Whig bill to redistribute proceeds from the sale of public lands on grounds that such a system of federal subsidies would evolve into an elaborate log-rolling scheme and create a vast new system of federal patronage. Instead, Calhoun proposed ceding public lands to the states in which the lands were situated. The federal government would retain control over public lands in the territories. "Part with them [public lands]," Calhoun urged Congress, and "lop off a large and most dangerous portion of the patronage of the Government . . ." ⁴⁰ Calhoun also saw Walpolean bogeys in the operation of protective tariffs, arguing that revenue from these duties "constituted a vast fund for extravagance and unconstitutional expenditures, corrupting the community, and extending the power and patronage of the Government beyond the limits consistent with our free institutions."⁴¹

Yet for all of his use of "Country" criticism and rhetoric and for all his attacks on patronage, corruption, consolidation of power, and spoilsmanship, Calhoun was certainly not a classical republican in the traditional sense. Calhoun never considered commerce, in and of itself, an enemy of virtue, nor did he advocate agrarian self-sufficiency and the creation of a hermetic economy as an alternative to continued commercial development. Indeed, many of Calhoun's arguments against the despised American System paralleled Adam Smith's attacks on the cumbersome mercantilism of eighteenth-century Britain. Calhoun worked to dismantle the American System in order to "break the last shackle on our commerce and industry" and to "add incalculably to the productive powers of the community." In

³⁸ "Remarks at a Barbecue in Greenville District, S. C.," August 28, 1838, *ibid.*, 405-9 (quotations on pp. 406, 407).

³⁹ "Remarks on Public Expenditures," May 7, 1840, *ibid.*, XV, 200-206 (quotation on p. 202).

⁴⁰ "Speech on the Prospective Preemption Bill," January 12, 1841, *ibid.*, XV, 423-44 (quotation on p. 425).

⁴¹ "Speech on the Proposed Repeal of the Salt Duty," January 30, 1839, *ibid.*, XIV, 536-41 (quotation on p. 539).

this sense, Calhoun was an economic liberal seeking to destroy bastions of concentrated power, special privilege, and artificial distinctions and thus free the field for the unfettered productive energies of independent citizens.⁴²

Nowhere were Calhoun's liberal antimonopoly tendencies more in evidence than in his campaign to keep the government out of the banking business. "The banking system concentrates . . . power in the hands of those who control it," Calhoun warned in 1837. "Never was an engine invented better calculated to place the destiny of the many in the hands of the few, or less favorable to that equality and independence which lie at the bottom of all free institutions," he added.⁴³ Bank charters, Calhoun charged, amounted to little more than government-granted monopolies that "discourage industry" and "convert the whole community into stock-jobbers and speculators."⁴⁴ Calhoun argued that bank charters bestowed special privileges on stockholders and directors, thus destroying "that equality between citizen and citizen, and pursuit and pursuit, which lies at the bottom of all Republican Governments." Moreover, he continued, the "conferring of such powers on chartered companies of large capital, and possessed of important chartered rights" often proved "destructive of all equality between them and the rest of the community"⁴⁵

Despite his opposition to bank monopolies and to "an artificial moneyed aristocracy engendered and fostered by the government," Calhoun realized that commercial expansion and the long-term prosperity of the republic depended on a sound currency and a reliable credit system. "I am not the enemy, but the friend of credit," Calhoun maintained. Further along in the same speech he asked, "The question is not whether credit can be dispensed with, but what is its best possible form—the most stable . . . the most convenient and cheap?"⁴⁶ Calhoun believed that a complete separation or "divorce" of

⁴² On the strength of the "Country" tradition in Calhoun's native South Carolina see Robert M. Weir, "The Harmony We Were Famous For: An Interpretation of Pre-Revolutionary South Carolina Politics," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXVI (October 1969), 473–501; and for a suggestive analysis of the "Country" ideology's continuing influence on nineteenth-century South Carolina see Weir, "The South Carolinian As Extremist," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXXIV (December 1975), 86–103. John C. Calhoun to P[atrick] Noble, October 30, 1837 (first quotation); and "Speech on His Amendment to Separate the Government and the Banks," October 3, 1837 (second quotation), in Meriwether *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XIII, 635–36, 614.

⁴³ "Speech on His Amendment to Separate the Government and the Banks," October 3, 1837, in Meriwether *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XIII, 592–616 (quotation on p. 602).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 602.

⁴⁵ John C. Calhoun to "Col." R[obert] H. Goodwyn, September 1, 1838, *ibid.*, XIV, 411–15 (first quotation on pp. 414–15; second on p. 415).

⁴⁶ John C. Calhoun to a Committee at Kingston, N. Y., September 29, 1841, in *ibid.*, XV, 777–78 (first quotation on p. 778); "Speech on His Amendment to Separate the Government and the Banks," October 3, 1837, *ibid.*, XIII, 592–616 (second and third quotations are on pp. 606–7).

the government from the banks would restore both integrity and fairness to the credit system:

What form individual credit will assume after the separation is . . . uncertain; but I see clearly that the existing fetters that restrain it will be thrown off. The credit of an individual is his property, and belongs to him as much as his land and houses, to use it as he pleases, with the single restriction, which is imposed on all our rights, that they are not to be used so as to injure others. . . . Every thing like monopoly must ultimately disappear⁴⁷

Granting the individual a proprietary claim to his own credit (or credit worthiness), Calhoun championed an enhanced version of the concept of possessive individualism that lay close to the core of economic liberalism. A citizen was entitled to enjoy his property and all the fruits and benefits arising from it, including credit, with only a minimum of interference from the government, whose primary function was to protect the citizen's property from depredation and plunder, whether foreign or domestic. This ideal of minimal government, or of the negative state, was a bulwark of economic liberalism, which emphasized individual rights and freedom *from* government exactions and obligations. On the other hand, theories of minimal government had not figured prominently in classical republicanism, which emphasized the freedom *to* participate in public life.⁴⁸

Calhoun's opposition to protective tariffs and his advocacy of free trade also revealed strong strains of Smithian liberalism. Echoing the classical free trade arguments of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Richard Cobden, Calhoun maintained that in the long run tariffs hobbled rather than nurtured manufactures by limiting American goods to a finite domestic market and weakening incentives for technological innovation. Calhoun wanted to expose American manufacturing to the spur of competition. Obviously free trade served the sectional self-interest of Calhoun's South, but the South Carolinian believed that it served the long-run interests of the nation as a whole as well. Calhoun conceded that some argument could be made for protecting infant industries from mature competition, but he argued that such protection must be withdrawn once the industry became well established. Calhoun told the Senate in 1840, "We have arrived at the manhood of our vigor. Open the way — remove all restraints — take off the swaddling cloth that bound the limbs of infancy, and let the hardy,

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII, 613–14.

⁴⁸ C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (London, 1962); Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York and London, 1984); Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, Chaps. 13, 14, 15; J. G. A. Pocock, "Cambridge Paradigms and Scotch Philosophers: A Study of the Relations Between the Civic Humanist and the Civil Jurisprudential Interpretation of Eighteenth-Century Social Thought," in Hont and Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Eng., 1983), 235–52.

intelligent, and enterprising sons of New England march forth fearlessly to meet the world in competition, and she will prove, in a few years, the successful rival of Old England.”⁴⁹ Doubtless a degree of political gamesmanship colored Calhoun’s public rhetoric, but he seemed genuinely confident in the productive and competitive abilities of the northern people, judging them without superior in “skill, invention, activity, energy, perseverance, and enterprise.” Under the Democratic program of minimal government, Calhoun advised New England interests, the “shackles” would be thrown off industry and “its burden lightened just as far as the just wants of the Government may possibly admit.” Once these burdens were lifted, the benefits of open markets would be realized.⁵⁰

In August 1841 Calhoun attacked Henry Clay’s agenda for economic nationalism, and especially the protective tariff, in a manner that emphasized the South Carolinian’s economic liberalism and explicitly distanced Calhoun from Tory sentiments. Drawing a comparison between American and British politics, Calhoun insisted that the “aims of the Tory party there, and of the Whig party here” were identical. Both British Tories and American Whigs, Calhoun contended, were enemies of free trade and Smithian liberalism. Calhoun challenged Clay in bold terms:

The identity of the two parties is remarkable. The Tory party are the patrons of corporate monopolies; and are not you? They are advocates of a high tariff; and are not you? They are the supporters of a National Bank; and are not you? They are for corn laws – laws oppressive to the mass of the people, and favorable to their own power; and are not you? . . . The Tory party in England are not supported by the British people. That party is the representative of the mere aristocracy of the country, which th[r]ough the most odious and oppressive system of coercion exercised over the tenantry of the country, has obtained the power of starving the mass of the people, by the continuation of laws exclusively protecting the landed interests, that is, the rent rolls of the aristocracy. . . . The success of that [Tory] party in England, and of the Whig party here, is the success of the great money power The struggle of both is a struggle for the ascendancy of this great money power.⁵¹

Certainly Calhoun, the unfailing critic of Whiggish economic nationalism and the champion of free trade, minimal or limited government, and equality among republican citizens, hardly sounded like the erstwhile architect of a reactionary alliance between landed gentry and wealthy capitalists that might dragoon the republic into

⁴⁹ “Speech on Felix Grundy’s Report on the Assumption by the General Government of the Debts of the States,” February 5, 1840, in Meriwether *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XV, 70–94 (quotation on p. 92).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 91–92.

⁵¹ “Remarks on the Bill Relating to Tariff Duties and Drawbacks,” August 28, 1841, *ibid.*, 741–44 (first quotation on p. 742; second on pp. 742–43).

the industrial future. In fact, Calhoun fought in defense of economic liberalism against a potentially reactionary alliance of government and capital. In opposing the Whig program, Calhoun aligned himself against special business interests and “the moneyed aristocracy,” as he did on most other occasions during his long political career. This made Calhoun a good “Jacksonian” in economic matters despite his other disagreements with Jackson but hardly qualified the South Carolinian as the dialectician of reaction or the “Marx of the Master Class.” Indeed, as Clyde N. Wilson has noted, the occasional warnings concerning the radical potential of labor that Calhoun directed at northern capitalists were essentially taunts reminding his opponents that the northern social order was no more egalitarian for whites than was the southern one and perhaps less so.⁵² With little sense of irony and no guilt, Calhoun argued that slavery freed the South from the conflict between labor and capital that made it “so difficult to establish and maintain free institutions in all wealthy and highly civilized nations” Free of this deadly conflict, the South became “the balance of the system; the great conservative power, which prevents other portions, less fortunately constituted, from rushing into conflict.” As Calhoun succinctly stated: “In this tendency to conflict in the North between labor and capital, which is constantly on the increase, the weight of the South has and will ever be found on the Conservative side; against the aggression of one or the other side, which ever may tend to disturb the equilibrium of our political system.”⁵³ Again, Calhoun’s full statement clearly rejects an alliance between southern planters and northern capitalists. Calhoun promised that southern influence would always be found “on the Conservative side,” but the conservative side was not necessarily that of the business or commercial elite. For Calhoun, the conservative side was the side of republican equilibrium in which neither capital nor labor was positioned to plunder or oppress the other. The slaveholding South served as a check on the revolutionary tendencies of both capital and labor and sought permanent identification with neither. The South intended to support whichever side needed protection from the oppressive depredations of the other. Moreover, during the 1830s and 1840s, Calhoun, as his vigorous opposition to Whiggery revealed, clearly felt that labor needed protection from the aggression of capital, which sought alliance with an active government and the creation of a powerful neomercantilist system that identified the national interest with those of bankers and manufacturers. Calhoun’s efforts in this regard won him substantial support among “the hard-fisted, iron-nerved, rank and file” workingmen of New York City

⁵² Wilson’s introduction to Meriwether *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XV, xii.

⁵³ “Further Remarks in Debate of His Fifth Resolution,” January 10, 1838, *ibid.*, XIV, 80–86 (first quotation on p. 84; second and third on p. 85).

and among other northern “Locofocos.”⁵⁴

At the same time, despite his belief that slavery provided the best foundation for republican liberty, Calhoun never tried to fashion a systematic defense of a static, patriarchal society. In February 1837, during a Senate debate in which he boldly defended slavery as “a good to both [races],” Calhoun also flatly denied “that his doctrines had any thing to do with the tenets of Sir Robert Filmer” Calhoun announced that he “abhorred” Filmer’s dogma and referred to himself as “the known and open advocate of freedom” Calhoun never endorsed any hierarchical society in universal terms and defended slavery only “where two races of men, of different color . . . were placed in immediate juxtaposition.”⁵⁵

Neither an advocate of an alliance of planters and industrialists nor a defender of social hierarchy generally, Calhoun articulated a modified republicanism that he believed viable in the face of Jacksonian realities. Calhoun’s republicanism had long since lost whatever naked anticommercial or antimarket characteristics that might properly be attributed to classical republicanism. Instead, Calhoun fashioned an accommodation between ancient republican ideals and the realities of modern commercial capitalism.⁵⁶ The South Carolina planter preferred an economy dominated by independent producers who were free to find markets with neither hindrance nor protection from the government. Ownership of productive property freed these producers from dependency on other men and placed them beyond the reach of scheming demagogues. Slaveholding, Calhoun posited, allowed independent producers to expand their entrepreneurial endeavors without engendering the tension between labor and capital that naturally arose in a free-labor society as household production gave way to workshops and factories. Calhoun’s famous declaration that the South was “an aggregate . . . of communities, not of individuals” was part of an attempt to explain how slavery allowed southern producers to expand the scale of their operations without generating a white proletariat. In this address to the Senate, he explained, “Every plantation is a little community, with the master at its head, who concentrates in himself the united interests of capital and labor, of which he is the common representative. These small communities

⁵⁴ Meriwether *et al.*, eds., *ibid.*, XVI, xiii. Quotations are from the *New York Herald*, August 16 and 22, 1842.

⁵⁵ “Remarks on Receiving Abolition Petitions (First Report),” February 6, 1837, in Meriwether *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XIII, 387–91 (first and second quotations on p. 391; third on p. 390).

⁵⁶ On the classical republican tension between virtue and commerce see J. G. A. Pocock, “Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, III (Summer 1972), 119–34. On the highly commercial nature of the early republic see Joyce Appleby, “Commercial Farming and the ‘Agrarian Myth’ in the Early Republic,” *Journal of American History*, LXVIII (March 1982), 833–49.

aggregated make the State in all, whose action, labor, and capital is [*sic*] equally represented and perfectly harmonized.”⁵⁷ Thus Calhoun argued that the potentially destructive tensions generated by the expansion and maturation of modern capitalism and the threat those tensions presented to the republic were defused through the creative application of seemingly outmoded classical remedies. In the slaveholding South the conflict between labor and capital was “harmonized” by the institution of slavery, which united the interests of both in the slaveholder.

For the republic as a whole, the slaveholding section, with its internal harmony, served as the “balance” wheel that prevented either capital or labor from gaining ascendancy. To be sure, Calhoun’s recognition that capitalism, especially as it entered its industrial phase, produced conflicts between differing economic interests reflected the influence of Smithian liberalism on his thought. But his solutions for the problem of these conflicting interests relied on inventive use of such familiar classical republican ideals as harmony and balance.⁵⁸

The Whig economic program seemed especially dangerous to Calhoun because it raised twin bogeys in his mind. On the one hand, the national bank, federal coffers bulging with revenue from tariffs and land sales, and generous government subsidies for internal improvements threatened to generate a vast system of federal patronage and the concomitant network of spoilsmen eager to receive the largess. Calhoun equated such patronage with corruption and inveighed against it on much the same grounds that British “Country” thinkers had criticized the so-called “Financial Revolution” during the first half of the eighteenth century.⁵⁹ On the other hand, Calhoun feared that the Whig desire to mold government into an engine to

⁵⁷ “Further Remarks in Debate on His Fifth Resolution,” January 10, 1838, in Meriwether *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XIV, 84–85 (quotations on p. 84).

⁵⁸ For an excellent study of the economic and ideological conflicts generated by early industrialization in Jacksonian America see Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York, 1984). On the fears of common whites in the South regarding “dependency” or proletarianization see Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York, 1983). On the importance of balance to classical republican theorists see J. G. A. Pocock, “Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXVI (October 1965), 549–83; on the classical tradition of harmony see Weir, “The Harmony We Were Famous For,” 473–501.

⁵⁹ Peter G. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England, 1688–1756* (London, 1967); Quentin Skinner, “The Principles and Practice of Opposition: The Case of Bolingbroke versus Walpole,” in Neil McKendrick, ed., *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society* (London, 1974), 93–128; Linda Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party, 1714–1760* (Cambridge, Eng., 1982); J. H. Plumb, *The Origins of Political Stability in England, 1675–1725* (London, 1967); and John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, Eng., 1976).

drive economic development would inevitably align the government with the capitalists. Such an alignment would create an artificial elite whose power was based on special privileges granted by the government. On this point, Calhoun's opposition to the American System seems remarkably analogous to Adam Smith's criticism of mercantilism, the cumbersome national growth strategy pursued by the British for much of the eighteenth century.⁶⁰ In sum, the Whigs wanted to use the power of government positively to foster entrepreneurship. Calhoun, like many other Democrats, opposed such government activism as inimical to the rights of independent producers, a category that Calhoun widened to include wealthy slaveholders as well as artisans, mechanics, and yeomen farmers.⁶¹ In fashioning his defense of independent producers Calhoun drew on a special blend of republican and liberal ideas.⁶² Despite the limitations of Calhoun's vision, it was a popular one during the Age of Jackson and one not peculiar to Calhoun or even to the South. Calhoun's attacks on Whiggery were vintage Democratic criticisms. "Our system is built on justice and equality," Calhoun told the Senate in 1841 in language worthy of Andrew Jackson. "Justice to all, and privileges to none, is my maxim."⁶³

⁶⁰ Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics*, especially 70–102; and Letwin, *Origins of Scientific Economics*, 207–28.

⁶¹ John Ashworth, "Agrarians" and "Aristocrats": *Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837–1846* (London, 1983), offers a related view of the ideological orientation of the second American Party system. James Oakes, "From Republicanism to Liberalism: Ideological Change and the Crisis of the Old South," *American Quarterly*, XXXVII (Fall 1985), 551–71, gives a provocative preliminary analysis of the tensions between liberalism and republicanism in the South during the 1840s and 1850s. Oakes sees reasonably clear-cut partisan conflict between a planter-dominated, market-oriented, ideologically liberal Whig party and a yeomen-dominated, subsistence-oriented, ideologically republican Democratic party. My argument in this essay suggests that Jacksonian Democrats drew on both republicanism and liberalism to construct a broadly defined producer ideology and to oppose a Whig party committed to government sponsorship of entrepreneurial and financial activity.

⁶² Still useful on this point is William W. Freehling, "Spoilsmen and Interests in the Thought and Career of John C. Calhoun," *Journal of American History*, LII (June 1965), 25–42. Freehling acknowledged Calhoun's ideological kinship with the Founding Fathers and rightly pointed out that Calhoun grappled with the problem of interests and the problem of spoilsmanship or patronage. Calhoun addressed the problem of spoilsmen largely in republican terms. The problem of interests was analyzed through the prism of economic liberalism as well as that of republicanism. Freehling's description of Calhoun as "a democrat with the brakes on" (p. 37) was more apt than he realized, since the expression is a good shorthand characterization of republicans generally.

⁶³ "Speech on the Report of the Secretary of the Treasury," June 21, 1841, in Meriwether *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, XV, 590.