**Historical Context of the Nullification Crisis**

*by Elise Stevens Wilson*

The relationship between the North and the South was **tenuous** when Andrew Jackson came to office in 1828. Ever since the Constitutional Convention of 1787, northerners and southerners had fought over slavery and tariffs. Each region wanted to make sure their economies were protected in the new Union. Several times states threatened to leave the Constitutional Convention and abandon the writing of the Constitution. By the end of the Convention, both sides had made significant compromises to the Constitution such as the three-fifths clause, the fugitive slave clause, and Article 1, Section 8, which allowed Congress to lay and collect taxes and duties. These compromises were shaky. Neither side was truly pleased with the results.

Forty-one years later, in 1828, the issue of **tariffs** surfaced again. Congress passed a high protective tariff on imported, primarily manufactured, goods. The South, being predominantly agricultural and reliant on the North and foreign countries for manufactured goods, saw this tariff as an affront to their economy. Vice President John C. Calhoun called it a “tariff of abominations” meant to favor the North. South Carolina declared that Congress was overstepping its power by offering such support of the North’s manufacturing industries. The confrontation quickly spun into a debate over the power of the federal government to decide the rights of states.

In 1832, after the passage of another tariff, South Carolina declared the tariffs null and void, and threatened to leave the Union in the Ordinance of Nullification. Jackson responded swiftly, calling the action **treasonous**. He asked Congress for the power to use military force to ensure that states adhered to federal law. While Congress debated the resulting Force Bill—which would grant the President his wish—Kentucky’s Henry Clay introduced a compromise tariff. Both bills passed in 1832. In the end, the North and South compromised, but not without revealing how fragile the relationship was. The Nullification Crisis foreshadowed the eventual secession of the South in 1860–1861.

**Tenuous – weak or flimsy**

**Tariff – tax on a imported or foreign made good**

**Treasonous – offensive; overt action to overthrow the government or injure the government**