

To Nathaniel Macon

[In a July 31 circular to his constituents, North Carolina congressman Samuel P. Carson included a letter written to him on February 9, 1833,

by former longtime Jeffersonian North Carolina congressman and senator Nathaniel Macon (1758–1837). Macon's letter was widely reprinted, and appeared in the American Beacon and Norfolk and Portsmouth Daily Advertiser on August 17. Macon said that the constitution had been dead since 1824, replaced by "oppression." He denied the legitimacy of nullification but defended the right of secession as "the best guard to public liberty and to public justice that could be desired." He charged that Jackson's December 10, 1832 proclamation against nullification "contains principles as contrary to what was the Constitution, as Nullification. It is the great error of the administration, which, except that, has been satisfactory in a high degree, to the people who elected the President" (Richmond Enquirer, August 13).]

Rip Raps august 17th. 1833—

My dear Sir,

I have read in the Norfolk paper of this morning, for the first time, a letter addressed by you to Mr Carson, in which you say "*the proclamation contains principles as contrary to the constitution as nullification.*"

Our early acquaintance and long continued regard (at least on my part) will justify me, I trust in your eyes, for ~~desiring~~ requesting you to point out specifically what principles are advanced in the proclamation contrary to the doctrines avowed by the republican party with which you & I have so long acted, (and which we advocated, as the true reading of the constitution) and which, however poorly I may have succeeded, it has been my purpose to maintain throout my administration.¹ The proclamation as carried out by the measures suggested in my message to congress, is but a repetition of the precedent established by Mr Jefferson administration in relation to the resistance of the embargo laws. This precedent had your sanction, as appears by journals & proceedings in congress, and if there be any difference between the steps then taken and those proposed by me to give effect to the laws of the Country, there is no one, I am sure, from whom I could receive elucidation, ~~and~~ ~~correcting~~ the error into which I have fallen, if error there be, more respectfully or kindly than from yourself.² Many have denounced the principles of the proclamation & its consequent measures—some denounces the whole without specify the objections—others by wresting it entirely from its meaning by the most unfair interpretation. You I am persuaded will construe my expressions according to their obvious meaning and import, will ~~construe~~ ~~my expressions according to their obvious~~ mark no sentiment with your censure unless the terms used by me lead without doubt to the meaning you impose upon them, and that meaning, to a conclusion adverse to the Republican principles which we have both so long professed.

As the chief magistrate of the union, called to execute the trust reposed in me and looking to the constitution under which I am sworn to act, I

have not been able to find any clause which provides for such a contingency as *nullification* or secession I see nothing in any law, usage or principle which appear in the annals of our government, to authorise an Executive officer to recognise such a state of things and which would justify him in considering the Government extinguished in any one of the states, upon the declaration of any convention of Citizens of such state, however respectable and with whatever form surrounded—no declaration of any body ~~out~~ of men in or out of convention, except as pointed out & recognised by the constitution can the Executive ~~be bound to obey or~~ in the performance of his duties acknowledge. I consider the constitution which I am called to administer as forming a government—a government formed by the joint consent of the people ~~of the people~~ of the several states respectively—a government in which all have an interest & which is obligatory on all & extends its sanction over the people of each State & over all independently of the State governments. To allow that the people of one State have a right at mere will or pleasure to secede to sever & dissolve such a government, is in effect to admit that it is no government & that the general interest which the more perfect union based upon the confederation was created to subserve are at the mercy of the caprice or passion of the smallest member of the confederacy—for unless all are bound, none are bound—not even Louisiana, for which it cost the other states so many millions, to make a part of this union & confederacy.

I am ~~fearful~~ sure you have not given my proclamation that calm and impartial reading to which I think it entitled, or you could not have said of it, what you have in your letter to Mr Carson, there is no part of it that can justify such a remark—your old republicans friends of the old school say you are mistaken. I beg you to read it again, give to its text, & contex, its true & appropriate meaning and then with your usual candor point out to me wherein, any part, of my proclamation “*which contains principles as contrary to the constitution, as “nullification”*”

I shall expect your reply as a friend, and with your usual candeur nothing extenuating, or naught set down in malice, but your calm deliberate review of the proclamation compared with the constitution & the precedents set by Washington & Jefferson. Those by Washington as it regarded Pennsylvania, those by Jefferson to enforce the embargo laws sustained by the vote of the whole republican party—the south and west united with one exception.³

Accept my dear Sir my kind salutations and good wishes for your health & happiness & believe me as usual your friend

Andrew Jackson

[*Endorsed by AJ:*] Copy of letter to N. Macon Esqr 17th. august 1833—to be kept on file—A. J. Private to be carefully put away at Washington & preserved A. J

· August 1833 ·

ALS draft, DLC (43). Macon replied on August 26 (below).

1. AJ had briefly served with Macon in the House of Representatives in 1796–97.
2. Macon had voted in the House for an Act of January 9, 1809, authorizing use of the military to enforce the 1807 embargo (*Statutes*, 2:506–511).
3. AJ bracketed this paragraph and wrote “shortened & changed” in the margin. In 1794 President Washington had called out troops to suppress the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania.