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Andrew Johnson and the Coming of the War*

BY LEROY P. GRAF

Andrew Johnson is principally recalled for his Presidency; especially for the fact that he alone among our presidents was impeached. As a consequence of his impeachment, even though the effort was not successful, the average person has an unfavorable impression of him. Abraham Lincoln likewise is primarily known for his presidency. But in the case of Lincoln the average person's view (outside of unreconstructed Southern circles) ranges from favorable to rhapsodically laudatory.

That Lincoln should be known only as President is understandable, since his career prior to that event had been on a relatively limited stage; he had spent but little time in public office. Not so Johnson! Beginning in 1828, when he first assumed a public office as an alderman of Greeneville, Tennessee, he held office at every level of government; in fact, if we ignore the county level, he held every elective office within the gift of the people—alderman and mayor of Greeneville, member of both houses of the state legislature, governor of his state, ten years in the national House of Representatives, two terms in the Senate, vice-president, and president. Johnson was proud of his accomplishment. In a letter to his son Robert in April, 1860, giving advice on strategy for the forthcoming Democratic nominating convention, Johnson remarked that if Tennessee could get her candidate (Johnson) as vice-president, she might expect to get the presidency for him four years later, thereby "passing one of her citizens through all the gradations of office from the lowest to the highest which would be a very remarkable fact to record in history."¹

Most people are first aware of Johnson as he emerges onto the national scene during the crisis of 1860-61. He there stands forth in the threefold role as Southerner, Unionist, and Democrat, a man who chose to reject secession and adhere to the federal government, despite the ultimate decision of his state to withdraw from the Union. Basically, this is an accurate view, though careful examination will reveal that on all three counts—Southerner, Unionist, and Democrat—he differs from the stereotype.

*A paper from University of Chattanooga Civil War Centennial Symposium, Oct. 23-24, 1959.

¹ Andrew Johnson to Robert Johnson, April 22, 1860, Henry J. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. This and all letters subsequently cited in this paper are to be found as paper facsimiles in the files of the Andrew Johnson Project, University of Tennessee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee, and have been used in this form by the writer. Hereinafter the citation will refer only to the location of the manuscript letter.

His decision to stand with the Union, announced in clarion tones in December, 1860, elicited thunderous applause, both literally and figuratively, during the succeeding months. In the Senate he received the vociferous approval of the galleries on many occasions during the early months of 1861. The *National Intelligencer*, reporting his speech just before the close of the Congressional session in March, 1861, noted that at the end of the speech a scattering of clapping

instantaneously gathering strength, it lighted up the enthusiasm of the packed galleries in the west and northwest quarters, and a tremendous outburst of applause, putting to silence the powerful blows from the hammer of the Presiding Officer, succeeded. Three cheers were given for the Union and three for ANDREW JOHNSON, of Tennessee: and as by this time the Senators on the floor gave the strongest token of indignation and outraged dignity, the retreating crowd uttered a shower of hisses. Altogether, the exhibition was the most vociferous and unrepressed that has ever taken place in the galleries of either House of Congress.²

In the meantime, since December 20, Johnson had been deluged with approving mail from all levels of Northern society and from many Southerners whose Union sentiments, regardless of past political affiliation, coincided with his. These letters varied in length, exuberance, and literacy. We can imagine that one of those which most pleased the embattled Senator from Tennessee came from a fellow Democratic politician—the Ohioan, Salmon P. Chase—who wrote a two sentence letter from Columbus on January 11, 1861. The first sentence asked for a copy of Johnson's speech of December 18-19, in which the Tennessean repudiated the imminent secession movement. The second sentence announced—"Andrew Johnson is Andrew Jackson differently spelled; and I am glad to see the identity is not in name only."³

What manner of man was this who was being approached by numerous groups, principally in the North, to come and speak to them on "the issues of the day"?⁴ What course had he followed in the decade before he became the darling of Northern Unionists? Had

² Quoted at the end of the *Speech of Hon. Andrew Johnson, of Tennessee, in Reply to Senator Lane, of Oregon; Delivered in the Senate of the United States, March 2, 1861* (Washington, 1861), 8. Hereinafter cited as *Speech in Reply to Senator Lane*.

³ Salmon P. Chase to Andrew Johnson, January 11, 1861, Andrew Johnson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Hereinafter cited as Johnson Papers, L.C.

⁴ In replying to one of these invitations Johnson observed, "I have been most cordially invited by Literary and Political Associations in almost all the States now loyal to the Union to visit and address them. . . ." Andrew Johnson to E. R. Miller, August 28, 1861, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois. An examination of his papers reveals that he was not exaggerating.

his previous public life and private opinions been such as to foreshadow what would be his choice in the weeks following the election of 1860? Perhaps we can glimpse answers to these questions in the course of discussing the following phrases which seem to me to characterize the Andrew Johnson who held public office throughout the decade of the 1850's—*i.e.*, the pre-Civil War Andrew Johnson, the man who served in the House of Representatives until 1853 (having begun his five terms in 1843), was governor of Tennessee for two terms (1853-57), and represented Tennessee in the Senate after 1857. The five phrases are: (1) a spokesman for “the people”; (2) a staunch, out-of-step Democrat; (3) an *in* the South, yet not *of* the South, Southerner; (4) a personally ambitious man; and (5) a champion of the constitutional union. How appropriate and accurate are these phrases?

1. *A Spokesman for “The People.”* Certainly Johnson so considered himself and repeatedly, almost *ad nauseam*, made reference to his concern for and activity in behalf of the “laboring man.” His detractors would frequently charge him with demagoguery, a charge for which there seems to be more foundation in his politically youthful days of the 1840's than in his more mature days of the next decade. On all possible occasions, Johnson rang the changes on his humble beginnings. His speeches and letters abound with allusions to his workingman origins. On one occasion he is reported to have trumpeted: “Sir, I do not forget that I am a mechanic. I am proud to own it. Neither do I forget that Adam was a tailor, and sewed fig-leaves, or that our Saviour was the son of a carpenter.”⁵

What did Johnson *do* to justify his claims that he was the protagonist of the “little man”? On every and all occasions he made a great fuss about economy, especially in the national government, in order to reduce the demands upon the public coffers. When he became President, several authors and editors rushed to print biographies and collections of speeches. In his biographical introduction to the *Speeches of Andrew Johnson*, published in 1866, Frank Moore pointed out Johnson's stand on “retrenchment in governmental expenses.”⁶ The following are among the examples he listed: opposition to the establishment of the Smithsonian Institution; efforts to pre-

⁵ Frank Moore, *Speeches of Andrew Johnson, . . . with a Biographical Introduction* (Boston, 1866), xi. As Johnson began his presidency, one of his correspondents referred to himself “as one of those ‘toiling’ millions from whom you virtuously boast of having sprung from—” Thos. G. Fitzgibbon to Johnson, April 18, 1865, Johnson Papers, Second Series, L.C.

⁶ Moore, *Speeches*, xii-xiii.

vent an increase in the clerical force in government offices; a proposal to reduce the salaries of Congressmen and other officers of the government by 20%, if those salaries were over \$1000; opposition to appropriations for monuments and funeral expenses of Congressmen; and efforts to prevent expenditures for the purchase of Madison's papers and the manuscript of Washington's Farewell Address.

As a champion of the people he showed his faith in the people and his desire to increase their voice in the government in his efforts to bring about the election of the president and vice-president by popular vote. Such a revision of the Constitution would be part of his compromise proposal in December, 1860. He expressed sharp disapproval of the national nominating convention, which he felt was worse than the caucuses which Jackson—according to Johnson's interpretation of history—had broken down. Perhaps his distaste for the nominating convention arose from his frequent disagreement with the choice of the convention and his feeling that, as one attuned to the people, he could be confident that the people, given their choice, would have chosen his candidate. He also advocated the election of senators by the people instead of by the state legislatures.⁷

Johnson was vigorous in his attacks on banks and their lending activities, seeing them as harmful to the people. Here was an issue in Tennessee on which he took a strong stand. In a letter of advice to Robert when his son was in the state legislature, Johnson expressed his distaste for "Banks and the're [*sic*] foul appliances."⁸ In language which was both forceful and picturesque, language which helped to make him a colorful and successful stump speaker in the Tennessee hustings, he announced:

Bank democrats and democrats who have Banks to control are very much like putting virtuous females in houses of illfame to protect their honesty and purity of character— They may enter virtuous women: but they never fail to come out prostitutes of the most accomplished order— Instead of removing any of the restrictions now placed upon the state and other banks I would put more upon theme [*sic*] and still more stringent in their character than they are now—⁹

But most especially Johnson espoused the people's welfare in his promotion of the Homestead Bill—"a measure calculated in its results to do so much good for the laboring millions in all time to

⁷ Andrew Johnson to A. O. P. Nicholson, May 11, 1851, A. O. P. Nicholson Papers, New York Historical Society, New York, New York.

⁸ Andrew Johnson to Robert Johnson, October 20, 1859, Huntington Library.

⁹ *Ibid.*

come.”¹⁰ Though not the only proponent of a Homestead measure, he was a most vigorous agitator in the early years of the fight. Introducing his bill in 1846, he was able to push the measure to acceptance by the House in 1852, just before he left Congress to become governor of Tennessee. Upon his return to Washington, this time to the Senate, he persisted in his efforts and had the satisfaction of seeing the bill through the Senate in June, 1860—44 to 8; only to have President Buchanan veto it.

2. *A Staunch, Out-of-Step Democrat.* There can be no question but that Johnson considered himself a “200%” Democrat. During his exuberant youth in the House, he wrote a friend “defeat with a majority of my party holding to principles is far more preferable than success as a deserter.”¹¹ As his gubernatorial term was closing, and as the state campaign of 1857 was being fought, he wrote, “If I can only once see the State settled down permanently democratic I will be content and be prepared to die happy without regard to any future of mine.” And then the remark of the battle-scarred politician referring to his political opponents—“I have felt their power and born[el] their taunts and jeers long enough.”¹²

He fretted and worried about the party and its strategy. His letters to his political associates are full of advice about how best to advance the party’s interest. During the apathetic presidential campaign of 1852, he averred that the Democrats would do well to recognize that

The platforms as laid down by the two parties are Substan[t]ially the Same with one exception and our friends instead of trying to prove that our platform is better than theirs Should claim that they have Surrendered their own principles and adopted ours, thereby acknowledging the democracy to be right and they wrong.¹³

But, though he was a dedicated Democrat, Johnson was much of the time out of step with the national party during the 1850’s, despite the fact that he was a Southerner and the party was notably responsive to Southern interests and leaders. After the candidacy of Cass in 1848, he had no enthusiasm for the party’s presidential candidates, though in each canvass he used his vote-winning campaign talents in an effort to elect the party’s candidate. Following the Democratic

¹⁰ Andrew Johnson to Thomas Ritchie, September 21, 1850.

¹¹ Andrew Johnson to Jno. Standberry, April 27, 1849, Johnson Papers, L.C.

¹² Andrew Johnson to William M. Lowry, July 17, 1857, *ibid.*

¹³ Andrew Johnson to Sam Milligan, July 20, 1852, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.

victory in the campaign of 1852, Johnson unburdened himself to his good friend and political confidant, Sam Milligan, on the subject of the president-elect, Franklin Pierce.

You know my opinion about New England men generally and I fear Pierce will prove himself to be a mere Yankee after all—I fear Mr. Pierce has been made President before he was prepared for it, the transit has been too Sudden and unexpected, he lacks that political probation So necessary to prepare *ordinary* men for a position that is new, with heavy and increasing responsibilities.¹⁴

When confronted with Buchanan as the party's candidate in 1856, Johnson remarked that Buchanan was harder to defend than any of the candidates who had been before the convention.¹⁵ Writing from Washington where he was attending the Senate in January, 1858, he found no reason to alter his poor opinion of the President.

I fear his administration will be a failure[.] it is too timid to venture upon any thing new or risk much upon any thing old—His administration will be I think *eminently Conservative* with a pretty fair proportion of grannyism—To hear him talk one would think that he was quite bold and decided; but, in practice he is timid and hesitating.¹⁶

Though critical of the successful presidential aspirants, perhaps Johnson, along with many Democrats of the time, was enthusiastic about the leading Democrat of the decade who aspired to but never reached the presidency—Stephen A. Douglas. Not at all! His position was quite the reverse during the first part of the decade and underwent only a slight moderation during 1860. Writing about Douglas in April, 1852, Johnson revealed his bitterness against the Illinois Democrat.

Douglas, the candidate of the cormorants of our party and Some few adjuncts from the other, is now considered a dead cock in the pit, unless Some throe in the agony of political death Should enable him to kill off his opponents which is not likely to occur—He is a mere hot bed production, a precocious politician wormed into, and kept in existence by a Set of interested plunder[er]s that would in the event of Success, disembowel the treasu[r]y, disgrace the country and damn the party to all eternity that brought them into power—There [*sic*] arms thrown about his neck along the Street—reading peices [*sic*] to him in the oyst[e]r celler [*sic*] of a complimentary character which are to be Sent off to Some subsidised [*sic*] press for publication, then a drink, next a *haugh*,—, *haugh*—then Some claim to be discussed by which

¹⁴ Andrew Johnson to Sam Milligan, December 28, 1852, *ibid*.

¹⁵ Andrew Johnson to William Lowery, June 26, 1856, Johnson Papers, L.C.

¹⁶ Andrew Johnson to Robert Johnson, January 23, 1858, *ibid*.

they expecte [*sic*] to practice Some Swindle upon the governm[en]t—If you were here where you could See Some of the persons engaged and the appliances brought to bear for the purpose of securing his election, you would involuntarily denounce the whole concern a poor miserable vile *Banditti* and much fitter to occupy cells in the penitentiary than places of State.¹⁷

Here is a castigation better suited to one's political opponents than to a fellow Democrat.

Later in the decade Johnson would persist in his antagonism toward the Little Giant. Writing to his son in January, 1858, Johnson suggested that Douglas had thought his bolt from the party line on the admission of Kansas with the Lecompton Constitution would bring all the anti-slavery men of the North to his support and that he would also be able to hold onto his Southern support. But

he has lost the confidence of the South while he has gained none north, So in the effort to gain both he has lost both and at present is perfectly flat and might be considered a dead cock in the pit—It may be that he may recuperate [*sic*] after a while, time must determin[e]— He has been a very precocious politician and I think has had gro[w]th and will now decay as all other premature things—If it was his (D) intention to bolt and I think it was & leave the democratic party he Could not have Selected a better time for doi[n]g the party as little harm as possible—I say let him go and the party will very Soon recover from the shock and move on as though it had never occur[re]d.¹⁸

Johnson's own presidential aspirations, as well as his concern for the party's success in the coming campaign, may have prompted him to take a more moderate view of Douglas early in 1860, when he wrote to Robert:

In reference to Douglas I would not Say any hard things at present for, it might So turn out that he might be the nominee and as against a B. Republican we might be compelled to go for him, for at present he is the Strong man in the free States and will go into the convention the strong man of the party[.]¹⁹

But Johnson was not merely out of step with respect to the party leadership. He was also out of step with the party in his major legislative effort—the Homestead Bill. Though Thomas Devyr, New York Land Reformer, might point out to Johnson that in its inception in New York, the movement for Land Reform was principally promoted and espoused by Democrats, even Devyr had to admit that the Home-

¹⁷ Andrew Johnson to D. T. Patterson, April 4, 1852, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Andrew Johnson to Robert Johnson, January 23, 1858, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Andrew Johnson to Robert Johnson, January 12, 1860, Huntington Library.

stead cause had been taken over in 1848 by the Free Soilers, during the 1850's by Whigs like Greeley, and later by the Republican Party.²⁰ Devyr and Johnson might agree that what the Democratic party needed in order to offset the slave question was to "recapture" the Homestead issue and thereby carry enough free states to win the election of 1860; but the leadership of the Democratic Party did not share this view. Buchanan's veto of the measure in the summer of 1860 was a decisive rebuke to Johnson's energetic efforts on its behalf.

3. *An IN the South, Yet Not OF the South, Southerner.* This statement is predicated on the assumption that the spokesmen for the plantation South represented *the* South. It was the Southern leadership of the party that was most opposed to the Homestead measure, seeing in it a stimulous to the growth of free territories and states. It is possible that Johnson's vociferous espousal of the laboring man or mechanic may have had in it an element of compensation—compensation for his own feelings of insecurity because of his own humble beginnings and because of his failing to gain acceptance by the political and social leadership of his own section. He never became part of the Southern "high-command" in Congress, nor yet was even on very intimate terms with anyone who was in that "high-command."

Yet he was from the South and certainly on the burning issue of slavery agreed with his section, he himself owning eight slaves. In fact, on many issues he could stand with the South, as, for example, in backing the annexation of Texas, in supporting the settlement of 1850, especially the Fugitive Slave Law (As did other Southerners, he castigated the failure to enforce that law in the North.), and in favoring the Kansas-Nebraska Bill as it opened the territories to slavery. But he was not an ultra on the slavery issue. Just as he deplored the efforts of free-soilers to influence President Pierce, so he deplored the influence which some of the ultras had with that chief executive.²¹ That he should join his Southern colleagues in denouncing the Harper's Ferry attack is not surprising, since such an attack flouted law, order, and the Constitution, all of which Johnson held in high regard.

As for the question of slavery in the territories, he would have preferred that the more moderate 1856 Democratic platform, essentially popular sovereignty, be re-adopted in 1860, but he was willing to go along with the Breckenridge wing of the party on a platform of

²⁰ Thomas Devyr to Andrew Johnson, December 9, 1859, Johnson Papers, L.C.

²¹ Johnson to Milligan, December 28, 1852.

Congressional protection of slavery in the territories. Perhaps in this circumstance the overriding consideration with Johnson was a desire to keep the Democratic party alive and, if possible, united in Tennessee in the face of the Opposition; perhaps he felt that the arguments, which he and others used, of equal protection for all property were morally sound, and according to the spirit of the Constitution. In the actual campaign of 1860 he reluctantly cast his lot with the Southern wing of the party in supporting the Breckenridge ticket, a course of action which misled many people, both North and South, as to what his final stand would be when the secession crisis arose.

4. *A Personally Ambitious Man.* Perhaps a clue to Johnson's attitude toward his proper place in the scheme of things may be found in the advice which he gave to Robert in February, 1859, as that young man was embarking on a career in politics. In commenting on a recent letter of Robert's, the Senator observed, "I would occupy a place if I were in your position that would make others court me instead of courting anybody high or low."²² Johnson was never a good "courter." There can be no question, that he gloried in his own rise in power and prominence, and little question but that he was eager to achieve the presidency. Before each presidential year during the 1850's, at least one friend, and usually more, suggested both the appropriateness and the likelihood of his occupying the highest office.

During the spring before the nominating convention of 1860 met in Charleston, Johnson's presidential aspirations received some encouragement from a source which can aptly be described by our modern colloquialism "out of this world." A correspondent from Graysville, Kentucky, reported that a young lady "medium" of the neighborhood had not long since been in communication with John Brown, a recent newcomer to the spirit world. Although this young lady and her family were politically opposed to Johnson, she transmitted Brown's answer in reply to the question, who would be the next Democratic candidate for President—"Andrew Johnson of Tennessee."

Upon the suggestion of a gentleman present that he (Brown) did not know any more about that matter than he (the gentleman) did; Brown repeated that "Andrew Johnson would be the candidate." These answers were, what is termed 'spelled out' by raps at certain letters as the finger was passed over an Alphabet.

²² Andrew Johnson to Robert Johnson, February 22, 1859, Huntington Library.

The correspondent, assuring Johnson that this medium a week before the presidential election of 1856 had told with remarkable precision the result of that election, went on ruefully to remark, "The only thing I particularly object to in the communication is the professed intimacy of John Brown with *our* affairs, and more especially making *you* his *pet*."²³

At Charleston Johnson's friends and his son Robert hoped that they might bring a deadlocked convention around to accepting Tennessee's nominee.²⁴ Johnson himself was so eager that he was even willing, as we have noted earlier, to take the second place on the Douglas ticket, counting on ascending to the presidency in the election of 1864.

5. *A Champion of the Constitutional Union.* As with most men in political life, Johnson had on many occasions avowed his espousal of the Constitution, especially since that document, as he read it, seemed providentially intended to endorse those positions which Andrew Johnson had taken. Yet it is obvious that Johnson, treading a moderate path of state rights arguments during the decade before 1860, though he later would embrace the Union cause, had no corner on the Constitution. The arguments of those who more enthusiastically supported the rights of the sovereign states, even the ultimate right of sovereignty—secession—were interlarded with citation of the Constitution.

That Johnson would fall short of secession in his defense of state rights, is foreshadowed in a long and revealing letter on political affairs written to his old friend, Sam Milligan of Greeneville, in July, 1852, as the presidential campaign of that year was getting underway. The recently drafted Democratic platform cited the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1789-99—a step regretted by Johnson who observed,

For those resolution[s] when examined closely furnish the very germ of nul[l]ification and disunion which gives the ultras to the South a decided advantage over the Union men—and there is a Spirit existing among the ultras to crush ev[er]y Union man in the whole South—Many of the Union

²³ M. E. Wilcox to Andrew Johnson, March 18, 1860, Johnson Papers, L.C.

²⁴ "We ask for a Southern Conservative man for President, (And Johnson) we ask nothing more." Hu Douglas to Andrew Johnson, March 19, 1860, *ibid.*, Second Series. Johnson advised that the Tennessee delegation be "prepared to stand by the nomination the State has made [Johnson] without being offensive to any other candidate—" When Douglas, failing to get the nomination, withdraws "he can if he will dictate the nomination: hence the importance of occupying an acceptable position to him and friends—" Andrew Johnson to Robert Johnson, April 8, 1860, Johnson Papers, L.C.

men begin to fear that this division [*sic*] of the democracy to the South are to be favored by the administration in the event of Peirce's [*sic*] election and if this fear takes root to any extent, will cool off ma[n]y of the best union men in the whole country—²⁵

Clearly, Johnson in 1852 regarded himself as a southern union Democrat—precisely what he would be under highly dramatic circumstances in 1860-61.

Yet as late as January, 1859, during a debate on the Pacific Railroad Bill, Johnson, in speaking against it, made what seems to be rather petulant observations about the Union. Proponents of the measure had argued for the Railroad as “a great bond of Union.” After tartly remarking that if the Union were held together by no stronger tie than such a Railroad, it was not likely to survive, he went on to expostulate:

“The Union! the Union!” is the constant cry. Sir, I am for the Union; but in every little speech I have to make, I do not deem it necessary to sing peans and hosannas to the Union. I think the Union will stand uninterrupted; it will go on, as it has gone on, without my singing peans to it; and this thing of saving the Union, I will remark here, has been done so often that it has got to be entirely a business transaction.²⁶

Somewhat inaccurately he concluded his remarks by saying, “I have never considered the Union yet in danger.”

During 1860 Johnson's eagerness for Southern support on the Homestead Bill, his alarm over the split within the Democratic party, and his fear of the results if Lincoln were to be elected help to account for his efforts to conciliate the Southern wing of his party. Thus we find him in the campaign of 1860 inveighing against the Personal Liberty Laws of the northern states and insisting that southern slave property must be protected in the territories.

But when the election was over, when Southern hot heads were moving toward disruption of the Union, Johnson reassessed the situation, placed first things first, and announced for the Union, though still hoping to mediate between North and South and help achieve a reconciliation. To have any chance for a reconciliation it would be necessary to protect Southern interests in the Union. It was to accomplish this objective that Johnson, the border-state unionist, offered a proposal—that the Constitution be amended so as to incorporate

²⁵ Johnson to Milligan, July 20, 1852.

²⁶ John Savage, *The Life and Public Services of Andrew Johnson . . . Including His State Papers, Speeches and Addresses* (New York, 1866), 145.

some of his long desired political reforms and at the same time afford protection to the South.

On December 13, 1860, Johnson offered resolutions suggesting five constitutional amendments:²⁷ (1) the election of United States senators by direct popular vote; (2) the presidential vote to be by districts equal in number to the congressional representation of each state, each district to cast one vote for president and vice-president in accordance with the majority popular vote; (3) in case no one received a majority, then a second election between the two candidates receiving the highest number of votes; (4) the president to be from the northern states and the vice-president from the southern states in 1864, to alternate every four years; (5) the division of the Supreme Court into three classes, one-third to retire every four years and each class to be equally divided between the North and the South. Though referred to the Committee of Thirteen, these proposals were never brought to a vote either in the Committee or in Congress.

The Senator from Tennessee was willing to engage in every possible expedient however great or small to try to preserve the Union. We are told that Johnson was one of those who worked with J. C. G. Kennedy, Director of the Census, over the week-end before the South Carolina Convention met, compiling a list of southern voters to whom twenty of Kennedy's clerks addressed and sent Union speeches.²⁸

Following his December speech, Johnson was viciously attacked in Congress by Southerners and Southern sympathizers, notably Senator Lane of Oregon. At the same time he began to be lionized by the North. To Northerners Johnson was the voice of what they hoped and believed were large numbers of silenced Southern unionists.

The results of Johnson's unionist course have been variously interpreted by students of these early months of disunion. That his "destroy treason" speeches aroused the North to a firmer, more uncompromising, more belligerent stand, as one of Johnson's biographers implies, is hard either to prove or disprove.²⁹ Recently J. Milton Henry has quite ably set forth the view that Johnson, by becoming during the early months of 1861 the principal channel for

²⁷ Dwight L. Dumond, *The Secession Movement, 1860-61* (New York, 1931), 159.

²⁸ Roy Franklin Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (New York, 1948), 404.

²⁹ Robert W. Winston, *Andrew Johnson, Plebeian and Patriot* (New York, 1928), 186. George Fort Milton in *The Age of Hate: Andrew Johnson and the Radicals* (New York, 1930), 101, similarly emphasizes Johnson's great influence in the North following his firm stand in behalf of the Union.

dispensing the patronage of the new Lincoln administration in Tennessee and by his channelling that patronage to Democrats rather than to Constitutional Unionists, most of whom had been Whigs, contributed significantly to the collapse of the strength of the Constitutional Union Party in Tennessee.³⁰ In this manner was Unionist leadership lost for Tennessee during the crucial spring months, thereby rendering easier, perhaps inevitable, the secession of that state.

It is clear that Johnson was regarded in many quarters as the most influential patronage broker for the new administration. Numerous applications from "former political foes," as well as from loyal Democrats, seeking federal offices, came to Johnson. Furthermore, Johnson does seem to have permitted party, and perhaps personal political considerations, to influence, perhaps even determine, his choices. That he conceived of a "Johnson" Party as the best hope for Unionism in Tennessee is probably true. Johnson was a good political hater—he gave up his partisan prejudices slowly. Ultimately in the face of the crisis produced by Tennessee's secession from the Union, he would learn to work closely with former Whigs like Horace Maynard and even to cooperate with "Parson" Brownlow; but the lying down of the lion and the lamb would require the shock of exile and Confederate persecution.

How did Johnson regard the sectional conflict as it had developed by the summer of 1861? Perhaps it is not too uncritical to accept at something like face value the view presented in Johnson's resolutions defining the objects of the war—resolutions which the Senate passed on July 26 after long debate. Though Johnson in the heat of aroused passions immediately before and during the war would thunder against traitors, shouting that treason must be punished,³¹ there is in these resolutions a foreshadowing of his policy of Presidential Reconstruction.

Resolved, That the present deplorable civil war has been forced upon the country by the disunionists of the Southern States, now in revolt against the Constitutional Government, and in arms around the Capitol; that, in this national emergency, Congress, banishing all feeling of mere passion or resentment, will recollect only its duty to the whole country; that this war is not

³⁰ J. Milton Henry, "The Revolution in Tennessee, February, 1861, to June, 1861," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (1959), 99-119.

³¹ In his speech in reply to Senator Lane in March, 1860, he forthrightly asserted that the secessionists were traitors. "Sir, treason must be punished. Its enormity and the extent and depth of the offense must be made known." *Speech in Reply to Senator Lane*, 4.

prosecuted upon our part in any spirit of oppression, nor for the purpose of authorizing or interfering with the rights or established institutions of those States, but to defend and maintain the supremacy of the Constitution and all laws made in pursuance thereof, and to preserve the Union, with all the dignity, equality, and rights of the several States, unimpaired; that as soon as these objects are accomplished, the war ought to cease.³²

In this statement we hear the bereaved Southerner, bound by his background, temperament, and convictions to oppose the dissolution of the Union, yet seeking, even in the midst of war, to pave the way for an early and easy healing of the tragic wound. When in the post-war years, the assassin's bullet brought Johnson to the long-dreamed of presidency, his effort to act according to the propositions laid down in these resolutions would prove to be a major factor in bringing on his impeachment, the event most generally associated with his name. Just as Johnson's behavior in the 1850's affords clues to his behavior in the face of disunion, so his objectives on the threshold of the war serve as a preview of his objectives in the post-war years!

³² Moore, *Speeches*, xix.