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Andrew Johnson Loses His Battle*

BY GREGG PHIFER

“Speeches to a few crowds . . . are not in themselves, I fear, sufficient. In the mean time there is want of sagacity, judgment, and good common sense in managing the party which supports him.”—*Diary of Gideon Welles*¹

In his swing around the circle in the fall of 1866 President Andrew Johnson tried to convince the voters of the North that in the approaching congressional elections they should vote for candidates pledged to support the President and his policies. This was the battle between the congressional reconstruction of harshness and vengeance supported by Radicals like Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens and the presidential reconstruction of reconciliation inaugurated by Abraham Lincoln and adopted by his successor.

Three earlier articles in this volume of the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* have focused in turn on the occasion, the speech, and the speaker. The first set the scene; the next two described the arguments and speech methods Johnson used. This fourth and last paper in the series raises the most important question of all, the effect of the President's tour upon his audience.

Any study of Johnson's speaking on this western tour must eventually come to an evaluation of his effectiveness. How well did his techniques achieve their objective? Did he win or lose, and in either case how much of the responsibility belongs to his speaking? What measures should be used to determine his success or failure? How is a judgment to be made?

In the following pages these specific questions will be asked and answers attempted: What were the attitudes of the President's auditors? How did his immediate listeners react? What were the results of the congressional elections and what causal connection can reasonably be drawn between them and the President's speaking? How did Congress react? What were Johnson's strengths and limitations?

* For reasons set out in Volume XI, Number 1, p. 96, this article is published substantially as sent in by the contributor. The editor of the *Quarterly* has not edited either for content or form.

¹ Boston, 1911. Volume II, 591.

Cause-and-effect relationships in the social sciences are difficult to establish. Voters cannot be isolated under laboratory conditions and their reactions studied experimentally. Relationships that are difficult to evaluate in contemporary politics are even more difficult when the election took place nearly a century ago. Nevertheless, for the serious student of rhetoric and history, the effect of Johnson's speaking is a vitally important question, and the critic must seek out the best answers obtainable. The judgments expressed in this paper, therefore, are the best this critic of rhetoric has been able to reach up until now on the basis of all the evidence studied. No other claim is made for them.

THOSE WHO HEARD THE PRESIDENT

How many heard Johnson speak? No speaker, depending as the President did on his powers of immediate oral persuasion, can be expected to persuade those who do not listen. The approximate number and percentage of voters who heard the President becomes, therefore, an important consideration in evaluating his effectiveness.

With the exception of his New York address at Delmonico's and a few replies to official welcomes all the President's speeches were delivered in outdoor situations: from hotel balconies, specially constructed platforms, or the rear platform of his train. Under these conditions few of the reporters accompanying or witnessing the swing around the circle attempted to estimate the size of the crowds that gathered to hear the President. In most cases they were content to describe streets "packed with people"² or a "complete jam from curbstone to doorways."³ "Thousands"⁴ or "crowds"⁵ or a "multitude"⁶ is about as close an estimate as most reporters gave of the size of the President's audience.

Here and there a reporter estimated the number of people he thought listened to the President. Because of the outdoor location of the President's speeches, the lack of seats or tickets or any other systematic check on numbers, such estimates are of doubtful reliability. Prejudice for or against Johnson may have led to overestimates or underestimates, just as it affected the same reporters

² *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia), August 29, 1866. All newspapers are from 1866.

³ *New York Herald*, August 30.

⁴ *New York Tribune*, September 5. Johnson's reception at Schenectady.

⁵ *Chicago Republican*, August 29. Johnson's reception at Wilmington, Delaware.

⁶ Associated Press report in the *National Republican* (Washington, D. C.), September 3. Johnson's reception at Canandaigua, New York.

in their descriptions of audience response.⁷ For what they are worth, however, estimates like these may be cited: Albany, 5,000;⁸ Syracuse, 15,000;⁹ Elyria, 2,000;¹⁰ Terra Haute, 4,000;¹¹ Greencastle, Indiana, 4,000;¹² Indianapolis, 2,000;¹³ Columbus, Indiana, 3,000;¹⁴ Louisville, 15,000.¹⁵

Another factor that makes estimates of crowd size comparatively unimportant is the disparity between the large numbers who saw the President and his party during processions or parades at New York, Buffalo, Chicago, and other points, and the comparatively smaller crowds who heard any significant part of what he had to say. Descriptions of packed streets along parade routes are scarcely a fair indication of those whom the President had a chance to affect through his argument. Many who watched and listened, moreover, were women and children and could not vote.

Detailed reports for all the President's whistle stops—places like Lemont, Lockport, Joliet, Dwight, Pontiac, Chenoa, Atlanta, Illinois; Seymour, Vienna, Jeffersonville, Indiana; Loveland, Morrow, Xenia, London, Coshocton, Dennison, Ohio; Conemaugh, Gallatin, Lewis-town, Cuncannon, Pennsylvania—are not available. At some he may have merely waved his hat; at others he probably gave a sentence or two of greeting and good-by before the train pulled on; at still others timetables gave the President five minutes to speak.

The best estimates that can now be made suggest that Johnson spoke at least one hundred times during his swing around the circle. Four fifths of these speeches, however, ranged from a sentence or two of greeting to the sort of generalized argument which characterized his short speeches at Fonda, New York;¹⁶ Ypsilanti, Michigan;¹⁷ and Mifflin, Pennsylvania.¹⁸ Twenty times he made what might be called "major addresses" ranging in length from twenty minutes to more than an hour: Philadelphia, New York, Albany, Auburn,

⁷ Contrasting stories appear, for example, in the pages of three Buffalo papers after Johnson's visit. The *Buffalo Evening Post* (September 3) headlined an "Enthusiastic Reception." The *Buffalo Morning Express* (September 4) wrote about "A Popular Cold Shoulder" and "Frigid Silence of the People . . ." The *Buffalo Courier* (September 4) said that "loud and prolonged vivas rent the air, while fair hands waved plaudits from a thousand windows . . ."

⁸ *Albany Evening Times*, August 31.

⁹ *New York Tribune*, September 5.

¹⁰ *Elyria Democrat*, September 12.

¹¹ *National Republican*, September 11.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Chicago Republican*, September 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *National Republican*, September 12.

¹⁶ *Buffalo Courier*, September 1.

¹⁷ *Daily Morning Chronicle* (Washington, D. C.), September 6.

¹⁸ *Chicago Republican*, September 15.

Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago (2), Alton, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Louisville, Cincinnati, Columbus, Pittsburg, Harrisburg, Baltimore, and Washington (2). Because of differences in the completeness of the report several names on even this list are uncertain.

The distinction between short speeches and major addresses is not paralleled by proportionate numbers in his audience. Estimates for Syracuse and Louisville both place Johnson's audience at fifteen thousand, though he spoke only briefly at Syracuse and at considerable length at Louisville. But the average size of his audience probably varied somewhat with the occasion. If the average attendance at what are called here his major addresses stood between five and ten thousand, then between one hundred thousand and two hundred thousand heard a considerable portion of the President's argument. Probably at least a hundred thousand more heard him give some word of greeting or make one of his shorter persuasive speeches.

Nearly four million citizens voted in the congressional elections in the fall of 1866 and the spring of 1867.¹⁹ Even if the most generous of the reasonable estimates of his audience be taken, and if it be assumed that all who heard him also voted, not one in ten of the voters even heard the sound of the President's voice. The actual proportion, could it be determined, would undoubtedly be much smaller. For Johnson this was a far cry from Tennessee days, when, with no more strenuous a campaign than this, he could present his direct, verbal appeal to a sizeable share of the voters of the state.

Johnson's audiences brought to the speaking situation strong opinions conditioned by the experiences of the past six years. The people of the North had fought and won one of the longest, bloodiest, and bitterest civil wars in modern history. Their President had been assassinated by a southerner. After a short period of indecision his successor—also a southerner—forgot wartime demands for vengeance and continued Lincoln's attempts to reconstruct the Union as quickly as possible. Radical members of Congress promptly took issue with the President and finally succeeded in passing Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights bills over his veto. Both Radicals and Conservatives recognized the crucial importance of the 1866 congressional elections and called no fewer than four national conventions in an attempt to influence the voters of the North.²⁰

The South made serious mistakes. Confederate generals were

¹⁹ *Tribune Almanac for 1867* (New York, The Tribune Association), 49-67.

²⁰ Some of the events conditioning Johnson's audiences are sketched briefly in the first article of this series, "Andrew Johnson Takes a Trip." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XI, (March, 1952), 3-22. See any good history of the period, such as J. G. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 1937).

elected to the Federal Congress. Southern "black codes" suggested a return to slavery under another name. And in the summer of 1866 riots in Memphis and New Orleans made many doubt the readiness of the southern states for representation. Southern acts, fully exploited by the Radical press, had erected high psychological barriers against those who would picture a repentant South. Repeatedly on his tour Johnson faced crowd calls of "New Orleans!" "New Orleans!"

These and similar facts and events were uppermost in the minds of Johnson's hearers as he swung around the circle. Their responses—immediate and vocal, ultimate and at the ballot box—were conditioned by all of these. The President had a difficult task to persuade northerners of the desirability of reconciliation.

How about the attitudes of various political groups in Johnson's audiences? Bitter partisanship characterized post-Civil War days. Newspapers and orators alike stressed party regularity. But as Andrew Johnson went around the circle of the northern states he appealed to his listeners to forget party labels and sustain him and his policies regardless of party.²¹ Actually, party lines did not define attitudes toward reconstruction among his listeners. A political transition marked 1866—a shift from the wartime National Union Party back to normal Republican and Democratic Party lines.

One group vigorously and vituperatively opposed the President and everything he stood for. They were the Radicals, based on abolitionism, tied to the banking and mercantile interests of the Northeast, indeterminate in numbers but strict in discipline and skillful in politics. After their defeat by Lincoln in 1864, when they sought to force him out of the race, they worked intensively to seize control of the machinery of the Republican Party, acted as if they constituted a majority of that party, identified Republican policy with Radical policy, and governed the nation through the reconstruction period. At first they stayed away from Johnson's speeches, then went to heckle and sometimes to prevent his from speaking.

One group understandably sympathized with the President and his mission in Chicago. Nobody knows how many War Democrats abandoned the Democratic Party in 1864 because of its antiwar platform and lent their support to Lincoln and his National Union Party. Johnson himself had been chosen by Lincoln from this group to symbolize the creation of a new party and to win the support of this group. In the 1864 campaign Johnson had spoken extensively in

²¹ See the second article in this series, "Andrew Johnson Argues a Case." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XI, (June, 1952), 148-70.

several northern states and was by no means a stranger to either War Democrats or, for that matter, Republicans. In 1866, however, the President was on his way to Chicago to honor the 1860 candidate of northern Democrats—Stephen A. Douglas. Several times²² he reminded his audiences of this fact. Lacking a party press, party organization, or skillful leaders, War Democrats were virtually impotent in the postwar period. They were welcome in neither Republican nor Democratic councils.

Regular Democrats had held together a strong party organization throughout the Civil War. They had bitterly opposed the Lincoln-Johnson ticket in 1864. Two years later these men saw in readmission of the southern states their best chance for national political power. Their political interests therefore coincided with their natural sympathy with the South and made them approve the policies of presidential reconstruction. Johnson himself, however, had in their eyes deserted his party in 1864, and regular Democrats found it difficult to give the President enthusiastic personal support.

Conservative Republicans like Senator J. R. Doolittle of Wisconsin and Representative Henry J. Raymond of New York thoroughly agreed with the policy of presidential reconstruction. Many who belonged to this group, however, held political ambitions that could be satisfied only through the Republican Party. They might applaud the President's ideas, therefore, but hesitate to take a public stand in his favor.

Even though both Democrats and Conservative Republicans favored the President's policies on reconstruction, they hesitated when he appealed for abandonment of party. There were virtually no independent papers and probably few independent voters for whom this presidential idea struck a responsive note. In a day of violent political partisanship Johnson was a President without a party.

Besides these diverse groups in the population, geographical differences in the attitudes of Johnson's audiences soon became apparent. The President faced not one audience but many. The attitudes of his audiences changed with time and geography. His first audiences awaited his speeches with a certain expectancy, but for later audiences the freshness of his favorite phrases had been destroyed by newspaper caricature. This fact helps to explain the ovations that greeted the opening days of the tour and the less favorable response of the second and third weeks.²³

²² At Schenectady, New York (Dubuque, Iowa, *Times*, September 4); Cleveland (Cleveland *Daily Leader*, September 12); and Detroit (Chicago *Republican*, September 6.) Future references to any of these speeches are to the same texts.

²³ "Andrew Johnson Takes a Trip," *loc. cit.*

Democratic strongholds in the border states—Kentucky, Delaware, and Maryland—and in the big city of New York could be expected to give the President a more favorable welcome than Republican centers. Johnson avoided New England, where he judged the Radicals too strong to be dislodged. But in the Western Reserve, along the southern shore of Lake Erie, he found a bit of New England transplanted and a striking change in the attitudes of his Ashtabula, Cleveland, and Oberlin audiences, for example. Bitter partisan rivalries in Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana were reflected in the reception given by those states. And on the latter part of his tour, in Kentucky, southern Ohio, and Maryland, Johnson again found favorable receptions.

Even though Johnson made his major addresses in the big cities, many farmers undoubtedly came to town for the event and stood in the crowds that listened to the President. Several time laborers were mentioned by the reporters as making up a considerable portion of the audience; occasionally Johnson himself noted that fact in his speech.²⁴ Seemingly, however, the President made no special appeal to economic, regional, or national groups. Tariffs, for instance, found no place in his argument. The Radical Congress made a special effort to win Fenian votes;²⁵ Johnson did not. He sought to unite the people of the United States upon the fundamentals of the Union and the Constitution and refrained from appeals to special groups.

REACTION OF THE IMMEDIATE AUDIENCE

The reaction of Johnson's immediate audience has been described in some detail in the first article of this series: "Andrew Johnson Takes a Trip." Some of the President's audiences were enthusiastic; others were openly critical of him and his policies; few, if any, were apathetic. Applause and heckling cries greeted him in mixed measure, at least from Albany or Cleveland on. The swing around the circle began as a triumphal tour at Philadelphia and New York; turned into mob scenes at Cleveland, St. Louis, and especially Indianapolis and Pittsburg; included, even in its closing days, some wonderful receptions for the President at Louisville, Cincinnati, Baltimore, and Washington.

Measuring the response of the President's immediate audience is difficult. The modern sampling poll had not yet been invented. Truly independent newspapers were virtually unknown. Reliance must be

²⁴ At Baltimore, for example.

²⁵ Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 810. See also Howard K. Beale, *The Critical Year, a Study of Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (New York, 1930), 301-04.

placed upon the judgment of those in a position to know, and trustworthy evaluations are difficult to find.

How about the chief actor of this little drama? Johnson repeatedly expressed confidence in the collective judgment of the people and in their support for his cause. At Buffalo he said that "no one . . . can be mistaken in the signs of the times."²⁶ At Cleveland he reminded his listeners that he had "always been sustained" by the people. In the same speech he said:

I am free to say I am flattered by the demonstrations I have witnessed, and being flattered, I don't mean to think it personal, but as an evidence of what is pervading the public mind, and this demonstration is nothing more nor less than an indication of the latent sentiment or feeling of the great masses of the people with regard to this question.

The same idea found expression at Toledo,²⁷ Alton,²⁸ Baltimore,²⁹ and Washington,³⁰ where, at the end of his trip, he said:

For this demonstration . . . please accept my heartfelt thanks . . . I will add that the sentiment which you exhibit tonight is not peculiar to yourselves, but is that which pervades the country wherever I have been. My own opinion is that the expression which has gone abroad in the country with regard to sustaining a Government of Constitutional law is unmistakable and not to be misunderstood; and I believe . . . I can safely testify that the great portion of your fellow-citizens that I have visited—and I have seen millions of them since I left you—will accord with you in sustaining the principles of free government in compliance with the Constitution of the country.

Radical editors did not see it that way. The mob scenes were to be deplored, of course; but they showed plainly how the people felt about their accidental President and his pro-southern policies. Crowds along the way appeared because

The mass of the people of the North have been accustomed to turn out to see and hear their Chief Magistrate . . . We have seen such cheered by their political opponents, from a sense of respect to themselves as the constituent body, and to the Chief Magistrate as their chosen servant, under institutions which they seemed especially to appreciate on such occasions.³¹

²⁶ Cincinnati *Daily Gazette*, September 4.

²⁷ Pittsburgh *Daily Post*, September 5.

²⁸ Cincinnati *Daily Gazette*, September 10.

²⁹ *National Republican*, September 18.

³⁰ *National Republican*, September 17.

³¹ *National Intelligencer*, September 19.

The people, thought the Radical press, "would have gone to see one of Barnum's exhibitions" in much the same spirit.³² The *Chicago Journal* (September 17) blamed the "Bread and Butter Brigade" for tickling the President's fancy and confirming him in his belief "that the crowds that met his party at every railroad station were drawn thither because they indorse him." The *Daily Morning Chronicle* (September 17) likewise attributed the President's receptions to "Copperheads and rebels, with a few bread-and-butter loving Republicans," adding that "there are none so blind as those who will not see."

For the Radicals, Grant and Farragut became the lions of the expedition:

The President was treated respectfully but coldly by the people, while they lavished their acclaims upon Grant and Farragut, as if desirous of showing by contrast the little regard they had for the President.³³

Certainly this technique was used by Indianapolis and Pittsburg Radicals, who sought, successfully, to prevent the President from speaking.

In a summary view the *Chicago Journal* (September 7) thought that "the Western people never before had so intense a dislike for a President of the United States as they have for Mr. Johnson, even Buchanan not excepted." The *New York Tribune* (September 14) thought that Johnson might be glad to get back to Washington, "but the people will be even more gratified," and quoted the description of the tour from *The Nation*: "an evil dream." The *Elyria (Ohio) Democrat* editorialized on September 12:

If the copperheads can ascertain the amount of capital they have made by bringing the President to Elyria, without using a pair of apothecarie's scales, they should be credited with a large degree of ingenuity.

Even the friendly *Buffalo Commercial Traveler* (September 17) thought the trip "unwisely conceived, and still more unwisely carried out." Why?

His words and actions were entirely consistent with his life-long political education and experiences. They were in harmony with the Southern style, and had the trip been made at the South, instead of at the North, there would have been no impropriety connected with it. The President . . . is accustomed to submit his political thoughts and policy to the test of popular scrutiny

³² *Daily Morning Chronicle*, September 19.

³³ *Daily Morning Chronicle*, September 7.

from the stump. He has no concealments, no politic reticence, no controlling sense of official dignity. He does not conceive language to be a medium for concealing thoughts, but for expressing them.

Despite the President's good intentions, in the opinion of the *Commercial Traveler* a blunder had been committed:

No orator or statesman that ever lived could make half a dozen speeches a day for two weeks, without making repetitions. When we remember that every word which the President uttered was immediately reported, and subjected to the eager criticism, misrepresentation, and ridicule, of fierce partisan opponents, the wonder increases that he went through the ordeal as well as he did.

The President had neither abandoned his principles nor changed them "one jot or tittle; yet it cannot be denied that he is not as strong with the people as he was two weeks since."

Despite the undoubted significance of such critical comments, especially from supporters of the President's policies on reconstruction, they were written by editors who did not accompany the President on his tour. At best the authors of such criticisms heard only one of Johnson's speeches. Contemporary reports of his speeches, by on-the-spot reporters, show repeated audience approval—cheers and approving calls after specific appeals for peace and reconciliation or attacks upon Congress and the Radicals. Frequently separate reports from Radical or Conservative-Democratic sources agree in reporting such crowd responses.

Two of the President's speeches attracted such attention (mostly unfavorable) that the Radicals based Article X of the impeachment charges upon them: those at Cleveland and St. Louis. Eyewitness William Crook of the President's staff described his chief's loss of temper at Cleveland, his reply to insulting interruptions, and concluded, "for a time all semblance of dignity was lost. Ultimately he pulled himself together, silenced his tormentors, and closed triumphantly."³⁴

As a veteran of the stump Johnson was by no means helpless under heckling but could fight back and often turn the crowd's attacks to his own advantage. After the St. Louis speech Reporter Cadwalader of the New York *Herald* (September 10) wrote: "The speech was rapturously applauded throughout, and certainly pleased nine tenths of his listeners."³⁵ Even the mob scenes at Indianapolis and

³⁴ William H. Crook, *Through Five Administrations* (New York, 1910), 110.

³⁵ "The Herald furnishes almost the only trustworthy reports of the trip; it was non-partisan; its representative, Cadwalader, as Grant's press-agent, would not have been biased in favor of Johnson; Cadwalader's reports had the merit of intimate accuracy, of freedom from either Democratic or Radical coloring . . ." Beale, *The Critical Year*, 363 (footnote).

Pittsburg may not have been a total loss from the President's viewpoint. Respectful attention from the Indianapolis crowd on the morning after the evening riot suggests as much. Other hints, such as this note from Thomas Stilwell, are to be found in the Johnson Manuscripts:³⁶ "There is a tremendous [sic] reaction over the outrageous proceedings of the Radical mob at Indianapolis."

Perhaps the best firsthand account is to be found in the diary of Gideon Welles, who stood by the side of his chief throughout the swing around the circle. Almost alone in the cabinet circle, Father Gideon, Secretary of the Navy, had advised strongly against the tour when the President first suggested it. At Cleveland he warned the President against wrangling with partisan crowds. More than once in his diary he recorded his belief that the President should be paying more attention to politics and less to stump speaking. To Gideon Welles the receptions along the way were "enthusiastic," "magnificent," given with "a cordiality and sincerity unsurpassed." What of the success of the President's speeches?

I was apprehensive that the effect would be different, that his much talking would be misapprehended and misrepresented, that the partisan press and partisan leaders would avail themselves of it and decry them. I am still apprehensive that he may have injured his cause by many speeches; but it is undeniably true that his remarks were effective among his hearers and that within that circle he won supporters.

To a great extent the Radicals are opposed to him and his policy, yet when the true issue was stated, the people were, and are, obviously with him.³⁷

A careful weighing of all available evidence suggests that Secretary Welles was right, that within the circle of his immediate hearers Johnson "won supporters."

How can the response of Johnson's audiences be explained? Their presence in large crowds to hear the President can easily be understood. Popular curiosity concerning the President was widespread; his distinguished companions likewise helped guarantee large audiences. Labor saw in Johnson a fellow workman in high position. Whether men agreed or disagreed with the President, they found him a colorful figure, a fighter throwing verbal punches at every stopping place, a constant source of excitement. It would be difficult to imagine anyone leaving before he finished speaking; none of the reports mention such a reaction. Nobody could be quite sure what might happen next or what the President might say in response

³⁶ Volume CI, 12524.

³⁷ *Diary of Gideon Welles*, II (Boston, 1911), 590-95.

to some call or question from the crowd. Neither, for that matter, could Johnson himself.

The cheers which greeted the President at many stopping places along the swing around the circle can be understood by anyone who remembers the strong residual sentiment among the people of the North for reconciliation and speedy restoration of the Union. Perhaps a majority favored presidential reconstruction policies. Just two years earlier the same Radicals—Sumner, Stevens, Phillips—had not been able even to keep their candidate (Fremont) in the field until election time. Both major party candidates endorsed virtually the same policies toward restoration of the Union.³⁸

Why, then, was the President virtually mobbed at Indianapolis and refused a hearing at several points? One explanation can be found in geography and the political attitudes of the people of the Western Reserve. Another is the influence of the Radical press in caricaturing the presidential tour. But are these adequate explanations in themselves, or did the Radicals concoct a plot to destroy the President's effectiveness?

On the very day that the presidential party left Niagara Falls for Cleveland, after nearly a week of triumph, a Radical convention for "Southern Loyalists" met in Philadelphia. Coincidence may explain the fact that Cleveland was the home town of Radical Senator Ben Wade, the propaganda barrage in the Cleveland *Leader*, and heckling that attended the President's speech. Citizens of the Forest City may have acted independently. No connection between Radical leaders and local partisans has been established. No proof has been offered of the use of Union League funds to subsidize local hecklers. Two letters in the Johnson Manuscripts³⁹ charge that the interruptions were prearranged, but the writers point to local rather than distant responsibility. The Cleveland *Plain Dealer* (September 5) charged "deliberate and preconcerted arrangement." The Cleveland city council debated and defeated a resolution offering official apologies for indignities

preconcertedly offered [Johnson] during his speech of last evening, with a view, knowing his sensitive and somewhat irascible nature, of throwing him off guard, diverting him from the topic he was discussing, and compromising his dignity as Chief Magistrate of these United States.⁴⁰

And the following night Johnson himself told a Detroit audience:

³⁸ Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 624.

³⁹ Volume CI, 12405; Volume CI, 12554.

⁴⁰ Cleveland *Daily Leader*, September 5.

I am not afraid to talk to the American people [cheers] and all their little boys may be gathered up and ranged and placed about in the crowd to get up particular calls with a view of producing disrespect; I care not for them. Fellow-citizens, I have passed that point. The kennel—the whole kennel has been turned loose long since. [Laughter] Their little Trays, Blanches, Sweethearts, and little dogs and all have been yelping and snapping at my heels for the last eight months. [Great laughter]⁴¹

Gideon Welles agreed:

At Cleveland there was evidently a concerted plan to prevent the President from speaking or to embarrass him in his remarks. . . . They did not succeed, but I regretted that he continued to address these crowds.⁴²

William Crook commented upon the disorderly crowd at Cleveland, adding, "There was evidently an organized movement to prevent his speaking."⁴³

A situation similar to that at Cleveland faced the President at St. Louis, where he returned to the same theme:

I know that there are some who have got their little pieces and sayings to repeat on public occasions, like parrots, that have been placed in their mouths by their superiors, who have not the courage and the manhood to come forward and tell them themselves, but have their understrappers to do their work for them. [Cheers.]⁴⁴

A third city, Indianapolis, greeted the President with profound disrespect. After the riot at Indianapolis the *Herald* of that city (September 11) wrote of "an organized scheme on foot to prevent the President from being heard." The *Herald* reporter described "prominent Republicans—men who profess to be law abiding citizens and who pretend to be lovers of fair dealing—. . . industriously mingling with the crowd, encouraging the roughs to do their work well." Names were printed, and "these sober, sedate, God fearing, 'respectable' and eminently loyal patriots" described as "rubbing their hands in frantic glee, and chuckling over the 'fun' they were having." Again Gideon Welles agreed that the disturbance had been planned:

There was turbulence and premeditated violence at Indianapolis more than at any other and at all other places. At Indianapolis I became convinced of what I had for some days suspected,—that there was an extreme Radical conspiracy to treat the President with disrespect and indignity and to avoid him.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *Chicago Republican*, September 6.

⁴² *Diary of Gideon Welles*, II, 589, 593.

⁴³ Crook, *Through Five Administrations*, 110.

⁴⁴ *Missouri Republican*, September 9.

⁴⁵ *Diary of Gideon Welles*, II, 594.

The *Daily Post* of Pittsburg wrote in similar vein on September 14 about the disturbances attending the President's reception in that city:

Prominent radicals of the city—men who call themselves gentlemen and respectable citizens—men engaged in business, who daily wait upon conservative customers—were observed active in encouraging the mob they had hired to insult the President. A crowd of rowdies availed themselves of the roofs and the warerooms of W.S. Haven-Kay & Co., and made themselves conspicuous in egging on the mob of rowdies below them. A citizen whose name is in our possession, halloed from the top of Kay's Building at the President, "How are you, you s-n of a b-h?" Pandemonium was revived through the efforts of these ruffians in broadcloth. Their miserable tools of half-grown boys and drunken men deserve blame only partly. . . .

To gratify curiosity, we passed through a squad of eighteen or twenty of the most terrific "howlers" on Wood street. We found them perfectly organized, not more than one-tenth voters, and under the direction of a leader who directed the disturbance with the airs of a commander.

Writing about the entire series of interruptions which, for many contemporary writers and historians, characterized the entire tour, Gideon Welles had this comment:

In some instances party malignity showed itself, but it was rare and the guilty few in numbers. It was evident in most of the cases, not exceeding half a dozen in all, that the hostile partisan manifestations were prearranged and prompted by sneaking leaders. . . .⁴⁶

Spontaneous or subsidized, these interruptions and hecklings and mob scenes served Radical propoganda purposes perfectly.

Because of his special place in the favor of his countrymen the reactions of one man accompanying the presidential party deserve special attention. General Ulysses S. Grant had for more than a year demonstrated his personal preference for a lenient reconstruction policy. His surrender terms to Robert E. Lee had been a bitter pill for vindictive Radicals to swallow. His report on conditions in the South pictured a people more loyal and more anxious for restoration and reunion than he had expected.⁴⁷

Grant's friendly relations with the President are demonstrated by a carriage race through Central Park during the party's visit to New York City. General Grant held the reins in one carriage, and a Mr. Hewitt of the American Express Company drove

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 589. See also Beale, *The Critical Year*, 366: "The rioting and heckling were the work of radicals, probably directed by their campaign managers."

⁴⁷ See the letter from Ulysses S. Grant appended to the *Report of Carl Schurz on the States of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana*. Senate Executive Document No. 43, 39th Congress, 1st Session.

for the President. Grant won.⁴⁸ Temporarily at least the General enjoyed the swing around the circle. His advisers were delighted with the General's prospects. Sometime during the first week of the tour General James A. Rawlins, Grant's chief of staff and later Secretary of War in the Grant administration, wrote his wife:

The ovations to the President have been very fine all the way from Washington here. The one in New York perhaps has never been excelled in this country. General Grant and Admiral Farragut came in for a large share of the cheering, I assure you. And I am now more than ever glad that the General concluded to accompany the President, for it will do Grant good, whatever may be his aspirations in the future, and fix him in the confidence of Mr. Johnson, enabling him to fix up the army as it should be, and exert such influence as will be of benefit to the country.⁴⁹

In conversations during the tour with his friend and admirer Secretary Welles, Grant gave him

to understand in one or two conversations which we had that our views corresponded. He agreed with me that he is for reestablishing the Union at once in all its primitive vigor, is for immediate representation by all the States. . .⁵⁰

Grant detested pageants and agreed only reluctantly to accompany the presidential party on the swing around the circle. He hated speechmaking. One of the standing jokes of the expedition concerned his reluctance to talk to crowds. At Brockport, New York, Admiral Farragut urged him, "Go ahead, Grant, and make a speech." But the General remained speechless, and the Admiral was forced to add: "There is no use of trying. I can't get it out of him."⁵¹ At Carlinville, Illinois, crowds called for a speech from Grant, who pleaded a bad cold and "promised" that he would give them a speech "next time" he came along.⁵²

Johnson's speaking got on Grant's nerves. Whenever he could, the General retired from the balcony or platform during the speaking and came out only on call. After much speechmaking at Niagara Falls, for instance, Grant walked on the balcony with the remark, "I have had a long nap since I have been here."⁵³ And according to Grant's biographer—Albert Richardson—the General told a friend soon after leaving Buffalo: "The President has no business to be talking in this way. I wouldn't have started if I had expected any thing of this kind." Richardson, a reporter for the *New York Tribune*,

⁴⁸ *New York Tribune*, September 5.

⁴⁹ Quoted by Beale, *The Critical Year*, 308.

⁵⁰ *Diary of Gideon Welles*, II, 591.

⁵¹ *New York Tribune*, September 5.

⁵² *Daily Morning Chronicle*, September 10.

⁵³ *New York Tribune*, September 5.

says that Grant was "thoroughly disgusted" at Johnson's "gross vituperations of Congress and leading Republicans."⁵⁴

Gideon Welles had a different explanation for Grant's change of attitude. He thought that the Radicals had advised Grant of their plans to embarrass the President at Cleveland. This made the General morose, and he turned to drink for relief of the conflict within him.⁵⁵ For another thing, Grant found it much easier to forgive Rebels than Copperheads. He was sorely distressed when Representative Hogan of Missouri, Copperhead and supporter of presidential reconstruction, joined the party at St. Louis and insisted on introducing the distinguished visitors, including Grant, to audiences along the way.⁵⁶

Radical editors and politicians did everything they could to drive a wedge between General and President. Republican newspapers played up applause and crowd calls for Grant in preference to the President. On September 7, for example, the *Chicago Journal* wrote of the party's visit to the Windy City:

Wherever the Presidential party went yesterday, while on the way to the Douglas Monument, while at the grounds, in the streets and at the hotel—the crowd persisted in cheering and calling for "Grant," "Grant," "Grant," "Farragut," "Farragut," "Farragut," ignoring the President and his cabinet officers almost entirely.

Radicals in the Indianapolis mob used calls for "Grant" as a silencer for the President. New Market and Pittsburg Radicals followed suit. All these factors had their influence in Grant's decision, which Gideon Welles dated as follows:

. . . until we had completed more than half of our journey, Grant clung to the President. . . . But, first at Detroit, then at Chicago, St. Louis, and finally at Cincinnati, it became obvious that he had begun to listen to the seductive appeals of the Radical conspirators. The influence of his father, who was by his special request my companion and associate at Cincinnati in the procession, finally carried him into the Radical ranks.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Albert D. Richardson, *Personal History of Ulysses S. Grant* (Hartford, Connecticut, 1868), 527-28. Richardson accompanied the swing around the circle at least part of the way.

⁵⁵ *Diary of Gideon Welles*, II, 593. See also the Manuscript Diary for June-December, 1866, deposited in the Library of Congress. The story of Grant's drunkenness has been omitted from the printed diary. In his Cleveland speech Johnson covered up for the General by calling him "extremely ill."

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 591-92.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 592. Historian William Best Hesseltine lists four causes for Grant's decision to join the Radicals: his father's influence; Johnson's intemperate speeches and mob ballyhoo; obnoxious Copperhead support; "the most important factor was Grant's belief that the people did not approve of the President." Grant did not understand the complexities of constitutional government, but believed in simple majority rule. *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician* (New York, 1935), 75.

Grant's reactions are important not only because of his own enormous prestige and influence but also because they probably typified those of many other soldiers who hated Copperheads. Johnson himself summarized Grant's action thus:

Grant was untrue. He meant well for the first two years, and much that I did that was denounced was through his advice. He was the strongest man of all in the support of my policy for a long while, and did the best he could for nearly two years in strengthening my hands against the adversaries of constitutional government. But Grant saw the Radical handwriting on the wall, and heeded it. I did not see it, or, if seeing it, did not heed it. Grant did the proper thing to save Grant, but it pretty nearly ruined me.⁵⁸

From there on Grant's name and influence were fully exploited by the Radicals, who in return nominated Grant for the presidency just two years later. Grant did not speak or issue statements to the newspapers. Radical politicians and editors did that for him, put words into his mouth, and exploited his name and fame as one of their potent campaign weapons. Later Grant's defection and failure to keep a promise to the President helped lead directly to the impeachment trial.⁵⁹ Johnson was right. Grant looked out for Grant's interests but nearly ruined the President.

It was a mixed response that President Johnson received from those who heard him speak. The opening week of the swing around the circle provided nearly one continuous ovation for the presidential party. Radical politicians in Wilmington and Philadelphia refused the President an official welcome, but the people took matters into their own hands and turned out in crowds. Unfavorable signs began on Monday of the second week, when Ashtabula, Ohio, in the Western Reserve, refused even to listen to Johnson. Cleveland and St. Louis provided persistent heckling and attempts to silence the President, while both Indianapolis and Pittsburg Radicals succeeded in preventing him from being heard. At least one death and several injuries were attributable to mob action in Indiana's capital city. But even on the latter part of the tour, Louisville and Cincinnati, Harrisburg and Baltimore, to say nothing of the nation's capital, furnished splendid welcomes.

It is probably not too much to say that Johnson gained support among his immediate hearers. Many—perhaps one or two hundred

⁵⁸ Personal letter from Johnson to Benjamin C. Truman, August 3, 1868. Quoted in an article by the latter, "Anecdotes of Andrew Johnson," *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, LXXXV (January, 1913), 439.

⁵⁹ Robert Watson Winston, *Andrew Johnson, Plebeian and Patriot* (New York, 1928), 418-19.

thousand—heard his arguments, and probably a majority agreed. Disturbances were caused by a small minority within the crowds, organized and incited by the Radicals either locally or on a national scale. But the Radicals won a major victory when General Grant stopped supporting the President and his policies.

RESPONSE OF THE NATION'S VOTERS

Johnson lost. Voters in the congressional elections of 1866 and 1867 confirmed the Radical two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives.⁶⁰ And Radical-dominated state legislatures began to replace Conservative Republican senators one by one as their terms expired. In both the Thirty-ninth and the Fortieth Congress the Republicans held an imposing majority, though in both, their ranks held a few Conservatives who voted with the President on key issues like the Civil Rights and Freedmen's Bureau Bills and later on impeachment. Here was the division according to the *Tribune Almanac*:

	39th Congress		40th Congress	
	Rep.	Dem.	Rep.	Dem.
Senate	42	10	42	11
House	145	47	143	49

Maine voted first in the fall of 1866, going to the polls while the President was still on his western tour. All five members of its House delegation in the Thirty-ninth Congress were Republicans, and four of the five ran for re-election. Five Radical Republicans won by somewhat increased majorities. Republican Chamberlin won more than 60 per cent of the votes for Governor, and in the state legislature Republicans held a 31-vote majority out of 31 votes in the Senate, 125 votes out of 138 in the House. With the reports from Maine the *New York Herald* (September 15), which had up till then supported Johnson and his policies, gave up the battle:

The fog and clouds in which the great question of Southern restoration have been covered up since the adjournment of Congress are at last breaking away. We know what to do. We have been taught by the famous mariner Daniel Webster, after drifting about for many days in thick weather and in an unknown sea, to avail ourselves of the first glimpse of the sun. . . We thus find from the bearings of the Maine election that the true course for the Southern States and the administration is laid down in the constitutional amendment of Congress. In other words, we are convinced from the significant results of the Maine election that this amendment will carry all the Northern States yet to come, and that against the solid North any further

⁶⁰ *Tribune Almanac for 1867*, pages 49-67; *Tribune Almanac for 1868*, pages 43-62. It is sometimes hard to differentiate between Radical and Conservative Republicans.

resistance from the administration or the excluded Southern States will be a waste of time, foolish and suicidal to all concerned.

As Maine went, so went New England: Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island—all except Connecticut, which elected a Republican governor in 1866 but replaced him with a Democrat in 1867 and sent three Democrats and one Republican to the House. Aside from Connecticut not a single Democrat represented New England in either House or Senate. Except for Wisconsin's single Democratic representative out of her six, the Northwestern States—Michigan, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska—went straight Republican. On the Pacific Coast, Nevada and Oregon elected single Republican representatives, while California sent two Democrats in her three-man delegation. Republicans controlled West Virginia, Tennessee, and Missouri; but the other border states—Maryland, Delaware, and Kentucky—voted Democratic.

Republicans and Democrats waged a bitter battle over the central states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, and Indiana. Republicans won all these states, but Democrats showed strength throughout. In New York, Republicans captured twenty seats; but the Democrats took eleven, including all of New York City, Albany, and Buffalo. One of the best indices of the close election is the vote for governor in New York and Pennsylvania, in each of which states Republicans won by a majority measured in tenths of 1 per cent.

Radicals were in command in both House and Senate of the Thirty-ninth Congress. They retained their control of the Fortieth Congress, again by a majority large enough to sweep aside presidential vetoes. Johnson had made his bid and lost.

Why did Johnson and his Conservative supporters lose out in the elections of 1866? The answer is not simple, but some of the most important factors can be easily identified. One factor certainly is that the Conservatives lacked strong leadership.

In April, 1866, Connecticut, home state of Secretary Welles, provided a preview of the coming elections. Three groups appeared: Democrats, who nominated English; Radicals, who forced the nomination of Hawley on the Republican ticket; and Conservatives, who did not know what to do. The Republican platform commended Johnson personally, claimed his support, but condemned presidential reconstruction—his most important policy. On March 27 the President telegraphed Conservative W. S. Huntington this ambiguous advice: "I am for that candidate who is for the general policy and the spe-

cific measures . . . in my [administration]. . . . I presume it is known or can be ascertained, what candidates favor or oppose my policy."⁶¹

Hawley, the Radical candidate, won. But despite the failure of Welles or Johnson to encourage Conservatives to run their own candidate or to support English, despite Hawley's claim of administration support, despite Republican unwillingness to vote for a Democrat, the Republican majority of 1865 was reduced from 11,035 to 541. After the election the Conservative leader Babcock wrote Secretary Welles, "The friends of the President and his policy are a power in this state although they had no way of showing it at the recent election."⁶² Babcock's elation was short-lived, however. In May, Connecticut chose another senator. Effective use of the Republican Party whip, supported by votes of Conservative Republican legislators who did not dare break with the party, defeated Conservative Senator Foster in his attempt for reelection and replaced him by a Radical named Ferry.⁶³

Johnson did not quite realize that the National Union Party died with the end of the war. More than once he declared that the party that had won the war and had elected the Lincoln-Johnson ticket in 1864 should also direct the course of reconstruction.⁶⁴ Although personally a lifelong Democrat, he was unwilling to use the prestige and patronage of his high office to support the party that had provided his wartime opposition. Secretary Seward, motivated by a desire to win control of the Republican Party organization in New York, strongly advised the President against reliance on the Democrats and assured him that the team of Seward-Weed-Raymond could win control of the National Union Party. To this end Seward and his colleagues promoted the Philadelphia convention and advised the President against any steps that might break the party that elected him and form a new political alignment.⁶⁵ Seward-Weed-Raymond clung to the Republican Party (erroneously called the National Union Party) and persuaded the President to do likewise long after such a course could lead to anything but disaster. Only a bold pronouncement and dynamic leadership could have united Democrats and Conservative Republicans in support of presidential policies on reconstruction. Such leadership was lacking.

⁶¹ Quoted by Beale, *The Critical Year*, 384.

⁶² *Ibid.* See also *Diary of Gideon Welles*, II, 468-69, 474.

⁶³ *Diary of Gideon Welles*, II, 505.

⁶⁴ Frederick W. Seward, *Seward at Washington, as Senator and Secretary of State* (New York, 1891), 338.

⁶⁵ *Diary of Gideon Welles*, II, 540; *passim*. Secretary Welles thought Seward an even bigger handicap to the President than Stanton: "I do not see how it is possible to sustain himself with Seward on his shoulders." Page 541.

A second reason for Johnson's loss lies in the firm control Radicals exerted over the Republican Party. While the Conservatives lacked both leadership and direction, the Radicals knew exactly what they wanted and formed a tight-knit political organization to attain their objectives. In 1864 Lincoln's control of the Republican Party machine, as well as his political sagacity in organizing the National Union Party, defeated attempts of Radicals to force nomination of Fremont for President. Defeat here only spurred Radical determination to win in 1866 and 1868. Had Lincoln lived, he would have been in for a show-down political battle for control of party machinery throughout the North.

Connecticut illustrated the Radical pattern. Indefatigable Radicals controlled the Republican convention, though they had to concede an unimportant and meaningless platform endorsement of the President personally. Once in power, Radicals wielded the party whip ruthlessly to force Conservatives into line. Political suicide faced any Conservative who dared break with the party machinery. This is well illustrated from later history, for only one (Henderson of Missouri) of the Republicans who voted against Johnson's impeachment ever again held office in the Republican Party.

Contrasting elements—manufacturers and bankers in the Northeast and farmers of the Northwest—made up the Republican Party and lent strength to the Radicals. Such a coalition had no great unity, “but by not daring to split it, Johnson handed it over complete to the radicals.”⁶⁶ Radicals in the President's cabinet—Stanton, Dennison, Harlan, Speed—remained undisturbed and distributed patronage and advertising at the behest of Radical leaders. Only at the last minute did the President do anything to disturb the Radical political machine by turning out Radical postmasters and collectors of internal revenue and other appointees of executive departments. And this was just in time to encourage “bread and butter” cries from his opponents during the swing around the circle. By the time of the elections Radicals had virtually undisputed control of Republican Party machinery.

How did it go with the Democratic Party? While Conservatives—Republicans and War Democrats alike—wandered leaderless, and Radicals progressively won control of the Republican Party machinery, the same Democrats who had guided the Democratic Party to defeat in 1864 controlled its destinies in 1866. And since the leading War Democrats had joined President Lincoln in the National Union Party, opponents of the war like Hoffman, Clymer, Wood, and Val-

⁶⁶James Truslow Adams, *The March of Democracy*, II (New York, 1933), 118-19.

landigham—Copperheads all—determined the policies and nominated the candidates of the Democratic Party in 1866.

In the Maine campaign Democratic leaders went out of their way to proclaim their independence of both Conservative Republicans and War Democrats. They nominated for governor a prominent Copperhead named Pillsbury, who had been identified with draft riots during the war. Parsons of Alabama and Wood, New York Copperhead, were imported to stump Maine for the Democratic ticket. Such support repelled anyone who had had any part on the northern side in the Civil War.

In Ohio, Conservative Republicans organized a Committee of Five under the chairmanship of R. P. L. Baber. First they sought to write their beliefs into the Republican Party platform, but Governor Cox led a compromise movement that split Conservative ranks and resulted in a complete Radical victory. Here and there the Committee of Five agreed with Democrats in nominating a mutually acceptable candidate. But Judge Thompson, chairman of the Democratic Central Committee of Ohio and a stout follower of Vallandigham, forced constant “compromise” on a Democratic candidate by refusing to recognize anything but “regular Democratic nominees.”⁶⁷

When Ohio Democrats and Johnson men “compromised” on George H. Pendleton for Congress in the first district of Ohio, that was the last straw for the Cleveland *Herald* and many others of Conservative inclinations. As the *Herald* reminded its readers on September 5, Pendleton had been Democratic vice-presidential candidate in 1864, had consistently opposed the war, had held that the thirteenth amendment abolishing slavery was invalid because southern states ratified it under duress, and had refused a seat in the Philadelphia convention. Groesbeck, a War Democrat perfectly acceptable to the Conservative Republicans, had been passed over in favor of Pendleton. Even the chairman of the Committee of Five himself lost out in Franklin County when Democrats insisted on nominating a regular—and Copperhead—Democrat.

Pennsylvania Democrats nominated Heister Clymer, well-known opponent of the war, for governor. New York Democrats passed over the candidate favored by the New York *Herald* and other Moderates in that state—General John A. Dix, who had been temporary chairman of the Philadelphia convention. In his place Democrats nominated H. W. Hoffman, a man smeared with both Tammany and Copperhead labels. Dix called the resulting defeat a natural consequence of Democratic blunders:

⁶⁷ Beale, *The Critical Year*, 388-90.

I foresaw the inevitable result in this State from the moment that the democratic party was put prominently forward in the Albany Convention as the leading interest to be promoted. The understanding at Philadelphia was that in the movement we were inaugurating we were to follow the lead of the Conservative republicans. Our failure in the State is due to the utter selfishness and folly of the democratic managers.⁶⁸

Democrats refused to sacrifice their party interests to the preservation and protection of the Constitution and the Union. Instead, since their party counsels were controlled by the same men who had led the Democratic Party in opposition to the war, they nominated "regular" Democrats with Copperhead reputations for key posts in the northern states. With victory almost in their grasp they chose to turn it aside in the name of party regularity. They might have won. In the only two districts in New York state in which Conservative Republicans entered candidates, they won. In the Sixth District, New York City, Thomas E. Stewart, Conservative, defeated both Republican and Democratic candidates. And in the strongly Republican upstate Twenty-eighth District, Independent Republican Lewis Selye piled up a two-thousand-vote margin over Radical Republican Roswell Hart.⁶⁹

In Ohio in the following year Democrats and Conservative Republicans combined on Samuel F. Cary, an "independent Republican" candidate for the vacancy created by the resignation of Rutherford B. Hayes. Cary won by a majority of nearly a thousand votes, Democrats won control of both houses of the Ohio legislature, and a Radical-sponsored Negro-suffrage amendment was defeated by more than fifty thousand votes.⁷⁰ Escaping the Copperhead label in 1867, Pennsylvania Democrats elected their candidate for judge of the supreme court, and New York chose a Democratic secretary of state and a full slate of state officers.

In typically caustic fashion Secretary Welles passed judgment upon the regular Democratic leaders:

. . . there has been an attempt to revive the old Democratic organization, instead of joining in the new issues, and to have very pronounced Democrats—Copperheads, or men of extreme anti-war feeling—for candidates. The rebuke to them is deserved, but it is sad that so good a cause should be defeated by such vicious, narrow partisanship.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Letter to Andrew Johnson, November 8. *Johnson Manuscripts*, CV.

⁶⁹ *Tribune Almanac for 1867*, page 52.

⁷⁰ *Tribune Almanac for 1868*, pages 45-46. Beale, *The Critical Year*, 390, concludes that "Ohio [was] really for Johnson against the Radicals but with no means of expressing that preference."

⁷¹ *Diary of Gideon Welles*, II, 615.

In the congressional elections of the fall of 1866, while the Democrats strengthened their party organization, Johnson and presidential reconstruction were lost in the shuffle.

Democrats would not nominate Conservatives; except in a few cases they would not even nominate War Democrats who had deserted the party only to back the Lincoln-Johnson National Union ticket in 1864. In like manner most Conservatives found it impossible to support Copperhead Democratic nominees, even though they were often the only candidates favoring the President's policies on reconstruction.

Two illustrations will suffice: Pennsylvania Democrats nominated Heister Clymer. Conservative Republicans and War Democrats found it difficult to forget that Clymer had been a notorious southern sympathizer, rejoicing in the defeat of Union arms and refusing to vote for military appropriations. In 1862 in the Pennsylvania Legislature he had opposed a reception for Andrew Johnson, just appointed military governor of Tennessee, and had blistered his name with fluent invective. Clymer's Republican opponent was General J. W. Geary, the popular war hero. Forced to choose between a Radical war hero and a Copperhead, many who would otherwise have supported Johnson's policies voted for Geary as the lesser of two evils. The United States Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania, for example, wrote the President, citing his constant support but refusing absolutely to vote for Clymer or "any Copperhead Congressional and County ticket which may be got up . . ."⁷² And after the election a man named Wilson from Erie, Pennsylvania, wrote the President as follows:

The result of this election is a substantial victory for you—and had the only issue been with us, Congress or the President, you would have swept the state. Thousands who were your friends could not be induced to vote for Clymer and other anti-war Democrats.⁷³

The situation in the Empire State paralleled that of the Keystone State. Before the New York state convention the New York *Herald* (September 7) issued an editorial ultimatum:

⁷² *Johnson Manuscripts*, IC, 12034. See also the editorial, "Johnson and Clymer," in the *Cleveland Herald*, September 5. In part it says, "Union men who in Pennsylvania would support the Philadelphia Johnson movement, must fellowship with the copperhead Democracy, and must march under a banner bearing the name of a man who sympathized with traitors, who rejoiced at the defeat of loyal arms, who refused to vote for a dollar appropriated to the defense of our institutions against slave-holding traitors. . . ."

"The Union Philadelphites of Ohio are in a like predicament with those of Pennsylvania. They must make choice of the disloyal Democratic organization or of the loyal Union Republican organization. There is no other ground on which to stand."

⁷³ *Johnson Manuscripts*, CV.

We are satisfied that with General Dix as the Johnson Union candidate [victory] can be achieved; but we are as well satisfied, on the other hand, that with a candidate of any more democratic ring set up against Fenton the result will be the latter's re-election. . . . General Dix, therefore, is our ultimatum to the Johnson Union conservatives.

The nomination of Tammany-Copperhead Hoffman for governor, even more than the results from Maine, turned the *Herald* from ardent support of presidential reconstruction to a search for possible compromise on congressional terms.

In state after state the same thing happened. Democrats nominated Copperheads; Conservative Republicans—supporters of the President and his policies—were forced to an unwelcome choice between Copperhead and Radical. From Kentucky, James Speed wrote Senator John Sherman of Ohio:

God only knows what we are coming to. The Democratic or disloyal party has swallowed up the Johnson Union men in Ky; if the same is done at Phila, what is to become of the country? Jeff Davis will be President and R. E. Lee, general if that party triumphs before the people.⁷⁴

In view of these facts can one doubt the force of the Radical appeal to save the Union all over again at the ballot box by defeating the Copperheads? Even those who disliked Radical policies, on reconstruction and otherwise, found Copperheads even more distasteful.

Another potent factor in determining the outcome of the elections was Radical control of the purse and press. Radicals were "radical" on reconstruction only. On the great economic issues of the day—tariff, banking, money, land, subsidies to the great corporations—Radical views coincided with those of the big business and financial interests of the Northeast. Factors like this help explain the ability of the Radicals to seize control of Republican Party machinery, including the press, between their complete defeat in 1864 and the congressional elections of 1866.

Democrats recognized the handicap under which they labored. An official postelection letter from the Democratic State Committee to "The Democracy of Pennsylvania" mentions some of the sources of Radical power:

For the first time since the disbandment of our armies, you have met the forces of the republican organization. They fought for the life of their party; they concentrated against you the influence of almost every manufacturer, corporation and bank; they had at their command a large prepon-

⁷⁴ *John Sherman Manuscripts*, CVI, 24662 et seq.

derance of the public press of the state, speakers without number, all the money that a dynasty of contractors—to whom the public treasury has been a mine of wealth—could furnish; memories of the war still fresh enough to be the means of exciting hatred; laws enacted with a view to their own political ascendancy; a well-disciplined organization, and all of the advantages that the possession of municipal power could bring them; and yet, unaided and self-dependent, you have combatted this powerful combination and almost carried the state.⁷⁵

Certainly the Radicals enjoyed the support of big business and the press.

Johnson must bear part of the blame for his own defeat. In the face of many handicaps Democrats cut the Radical margin of victory in pivotal states like New York and Pennsylvania to such a point that a strong national political leader might have tipped the scales against the Radicals. Lincoln might have held in line enough congressmen with Conservative tendencies to sustain presidential reconstruction policies. A few votes in the Senate, still elected by state legislatures, would have upheld presidential vetoes and upset Radical reconstruction plans.

Johnson blundered repeatedly in the 1866 campaign. He allowed Edwin M. Stanton to remain as Secretary of War, a Radical spy in the inner circle of his confidential advisers. He failed to take a definite political stand but continued to rely upon Seward and a non-existent political party. He failed to ask his auditors on the swing around the circle for a response they could give if convinced, failed to name a candidate or candidates for whom they could vote. He failed to carry the battle to the Radicals on issues like Negro suffrage and the fourteenth amendment; instead he spent most of his time on issues chosen by his political opponents. He failed to compromise and conciliate Moderates who sought a working formula for cooperation with the President; he could only fight. He failed to perfect a political organization through which the people could endorse his policies; he relied instead on a stumping tour through the North.

How, then, must the influence of the swing around the circle be assessed? There was no doubt in the minds of Radical editors. They followed a strategy of success; of course Johnson's speaking tour ensured his defeat. All Republicans who wanted to be on the winning side or who hoped for any preferment in party or government, they urged, had better jump aboard the Radical bandwagon. On September 7 the *Daily Morning Chronicle* editorialized upon "The Lesson of Vermont":

⁷⁵ Quoted by the *Chicago Times*, October 26.

Instead of improving his chances of success by taking the stump he has unquestionably damaged them. As one of the immediate results of his tour we expect a general increase of radical majorities and a more bitter opposition to his administration. . .

The next day it added an appreciation "of the important service that Johnson and Seward had done the Republican party by covering themselves with disgrace and ridicule through their crazy speeches." Likewise, the *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, September 8) criticized "The President's Speeches": "Instead of influencing the people against the Congressional majority he has been so industriously and unscrupulously denouncing, he has disgusted them with himself." The *Elyria Democrat* (September 19) called "The President's Pilgrimage"

worse than a failure. Not only has the President failed to add to his political strength, but he has driven from him thousands of men who are thoroughly disgusted with his humiliating attempt to transfer the Union men of the North to the Copperhead Democracy.

*Harper's Weekly*⁷⁶ thought that "this Presidential progress has unquestionably carried the autumn elections for the Union Party." Even Democratic papers like the *New York Evening Post* viewed the swing around the circle with critical eyes.

In view of this nearly unanimous opinion from the contemporary press, it is not surprising to find many historians and popularizers joining the chorus. Alphonse B. Miller called this "most vulgar sort of campaign tour" the worst of all Johnson's "errors of political judgment during that hectic summer . . ." ⁷⁷ George Creel called the tour "a journey through Bedlam," adding that

The sentiments of the country had not supported Sumner and Stevens, but Johnson's disorderly progress from city to city worked a change, and when Congress met again in December the radicals had an overwhelming majority in Senate and House.⁷⁸

Andrew C. McLaughlin called the results of the tour "disastrous," arguing that "If there was any well-grounded doubt of Radical success and the downfall of Johnson's policy, he made those results certain by his 'swing around the circle.' "⁷⁹

⁷⁶ X, 508 (September 22, 1866), 594.

⁷⁷ *Thaddeus Stevens* (New York, 1939), 285.

⁷⁸ "The Tailor's Vengeance," *Collier's Weekly*, 72 (November 27, 1926), 22, pages 23-24, 43.

⁷⁹ *A Constitutional History of the United States* (New York, 1935), 659.

Other historians followed the same pattern. James G. Randall thought the tour "a humiliating spectacle," whose main effect "was to disgust many Americans who were shocked to see the high office of President outraged and belittled."⁸⁰ Paul Leland Haworth wrote about "an unseemly wrangle with the audience" while Johnson was "intoxicated" at Cleveland.⁸¹ Woodrow Wilson characterized Johnson's speeches as "coarse and intemperate."⁸² James Schouler called the whole journey "a disastrous and discrediting failure," arguing that if Johnson had avoided "out-of-doors oratory, and popular stumping tours for the newspapers to report" he "might have kept his hold upon a third . . . of the House of Representatives, and thus caused his vetoes to be respected."⁸³ David Miller Dewitt was even more emphatic:

. . . perhaps it is not too much to say, that if Andrew Johnson had kept himself within the doors of the Executive mansion during this critical campaign, the result of the election would have been the beginning of the triumph of his policy.⁸⁴

In accepting the verdict of the President's enemies, these historians are too harsh upon Andrew Johnson and place too great emphasis upon the political importance of the western tour. The swing around the circle was not a humiliating and degrading spectacle, and the President's speeches were not crude and coarse—unless the spectacle of a man fighting for what he believes in the only way he knows how deserves such adjectives. Johnson maintained his dignity during most of the tour, though occasionally he became excited under tremendous provocation and lashed back at his critics in words only less harsh than they applied to him every day on the floor of Congress.

Historians who believe that if the President had stayed in Washington his policies might have been sustained simply forget the political facts of the times. A victory by the President would have been a political miracle. He would have had so to inspire the people that in two months they would create new and effective party machinery, build and finance a party press, nominate and elect candidates pledged to support the President and his policies. Even Truman in his 1948 whistle-stop campaign faced no such obstacles as these.

Perhaps the fairest evaluation of the effects of the swing around

⁸⁰ Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 756.

⁸¹ *Reconstruction and Union: 1865-1912*. (New York, 1912), 29.

⁸² *Division and Reunion, 1829-1889* (New York, 1897), 266.

⁸³ *History of the Reconstruction Period* (New York, 1913), 11, 69.

⁸⁴ *The Impeachment and Trial of Andrew Johnson, Seventeenth President of the United States* (New York, 1903), 124.

the circle is that Johnson failed to achieve a political miracle. He may even have won support from his immediate audience. Johnson's record as a stump speaker, both before and after the 1866 campaign, lends credence to the evaluation of Gideon Welles. But the people whom he persuaded found no way to express their agreement at the ballot box. And while he faced and won his thousands or tens of thousands, the Radical-controlled Republican press created a picture of the tour which repelled voters and convinced most historians. What the President said and did became for his contemporaries and historians alike less important than what the papers said that he said and did.

So much for the failures of President Johnson, the negative causes of the Conservative defeat in the 1866 congressional elections. There was at least one major positive cause for Radical victory. In those elections for the first time Radical editors and orators learned the potency of campaign strategy based on a revival of wartime passions and hatreds. Horrors of Andersonville and Libby Prison were recalled and contrasted with Jefferson Davis's life of ease at Fortress Monroe.⁸⁵ Carl Schurz pictured a South bent upon re-enslaving, whipping, and murdering Negroes.⁸⁶ Riots at Memphis and New Orleans were made to seem everyday occurrences throughout the former Confederacy. Charles Sumner complained that northern immigrants ("carpetbaggers") found harsh treatment south of the Mason-Dixon line.⁸⁷ Typical Sumner phrases included "sickening and heartrending outrages," "Rebel Barbarism," "returning Rebels emboldened from Washington."

Radical papers filled their news columns with attacks upon southerners, Democrats, and the President. On September 4 the Norwalk (Ohio) *Reflector* printed this choice bit:

A REPENTANT REBEL.—It is seldom we hear of a rebel being sorry for an act of cruelty perpetrated during the rebellion, and we give one Blackburn, of Kentucky, credit. He says that when he was riding into a little town in Georgia, on a bridge, he met two little girls, beautiful and neatly dressed, carrying Union flags, and hurraing for the Union. He drew his pistol and shot them both dead. He says he is sorry for it. He is a Democrat, politically.

The Chicago *Tribune* (September 2) gave its leading editorial to

⁸⁵ See for example the cartoon by Thomas Nast in *Harper's Weekly*, X, 496 (June 30, 1866), 409.

⁸⁶ *Report of Carl Schurz*.

⁸⁷ Speech in the Senate by Charles Sumner on "Actual Conditions of the Rebel States." *Works of Charles Sumner*, X (Boston, 1874), 82; 55-97.

an "Advance in Rebel Bonds," due, of course, to Johnson and his reconstruction policies. Another headline read: "Johnson Murders in Maryland." The Pittsburgh *Gazette* (September 5) quoted a report in the New York *Methodist* that guns and ammunition were accumulating in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with only a single regiment to protect them. Asked the *Gazette*, "Is President Johnson stocking up the Southern States with military supplies, as President Buchanan did, preparatory to a renewal of the rebellion?" "News notes" and editorials like these played upon popular prejudice and crowded into the background any discussion of political issues.

In their campaign Radicals drew an indictment against a whole region and a whole people. Waving a shirt freshly bloodied at Memphis and New Orleans served as a potent substitute for campaign issues. For nearly a generation serious political debate yielded before a cheap revival of wartime emotionalism. Republicans gave the people claptrap instead of issues.

In summary, then, Johnson and presidential reconstruction lost the congressional elections in the fall of 1866 and the spring of 1867. Realignment of political-party organizations, demonstrated by the collapse of the National Union Party, constituted perhaps the major cause for the President's defeat. Conservative Republicans and War Democrats remained virtually leaderless as Johnson, guided by Seward, failed in Connecticut state elections, at the Philadelphia convention, or on his western tour to strike out with a bold demand for a new party organization to meet new political issues. Radicals seized the machinery of the Republican Party while Copperheads remained safely in control of the Democratic Party. Forced to an unwelcome choice between Copperheads and Radicals, enough Conservatives voted with the latter to ensure a Radical victory.

A political genius was needed, and Andrew Johnson fell short of that mark. He blundered by relying on speech-making rather than party organization, by failing to provide a response sympathetic voters could make at the ballot box, and by fighting the issue of reconstruction on arguments chosen by his bitterest enemies.

The dominant Radical-controlled press pictured the swing around the circle as an abject failure, a disgraceful scene that ensured the President's defeat. Many historians have accepted this picture at face value. But all the drunkenness and much of the humiliating spectacle existed only in the newspapers. Many other writers exaggerate the significance of the western tour in influencing the results of the congressional elections. Johnson may even have won support within the circle of his immediate audience. Almost without question

the dominant influence of the tour, however, came not through what Johnson said and did but what the Radical press reported concerning what the President said and did. To that extent the total influence of the tour may have been negative, though political considerations and the Radical "bloody shirt" strategy had much more to do with the defeat of presidential reconstruction than the President's three-week stumping tour.

REACTION OF CONGRESS

Repeatedly during his tour, President Johnson launched bitter attacks against Congress.⁸⁸ Although his language may have been mild in comparison with some of the things Thaddeus Stevens⁸⁹ and "Parson" Brownlow⁹⁰ were saying about him, they were not inhibited, as was Johnson, by the restraints of high office. Congressmen probably resented from the President what they might have paid little attention to from one of their colleagues.

Not even Johnson's supporters in House or Senate escaped the President's blanket condemnations. Congress, the President charged, had done nothing but spend wildly. It was bent on destroying the Constitution, offering nothing to replace the reconstruction policies they attacked. Seldom on his tour did Johnson mention either Congress or an individual congressman in a favorable light.

At the same time Republican congressmen were being bombarded by complaints from the comparative handful of Radical office-holders removed from office by the President. Such removals were too close to the election to win solid support for the President's policies but were perfectly timed to antagonize congressmen and provide a ready-made campaign issue for Radical use. Unfortunately for the President, most new executive appointments had to be Democrats, since they were about the only politically influential men who dared proclaim publicly their support of presidential reconstruction policies.

Congress in its turn conspicuously avoided the President on his swing around the circle. The presidential party traveled more than two thousand miles through perhaps thirty or forty congressional districts. Only three Republican congressmen appeared to pay their

⁸⁸ "Andrew Johnson Argues a Case," *loc. cit.*

⁸⁹ *Thaddeus Stevens Manuscripts*, viii, 54196 *et seq.*

⁹⁰ William G. "Parson" Brownlow attended the Southern Loyalist Convention at Philadelphia, which met while the President was swinging around the circle. After leaving Philadelphia, Brownlow organized a "flying squadron" of Radical orators to wipe out Johnson's "moccasin tracks." Ellis Merton Coulter, *William G. Brownlow: Fighting Parson of the Southern Highlands* (Chapel Hill, 1937), 321 *et seq.*

respects to the President. Theodore M. Pomeroy, Radical Republican representative from Secretary Seward's home town of Auburn, called on the President there. Rufus P. Spalding, Radical Republican from Cleveland, boarded at the Kennard House, where the presidential party stayed. Henry T. Blow, Radical Republican of St. Louis, came to call. John Hogan, Copperhead Democratic representative from St. Louis, accompanied the party from St. Louis to Washington.⁹¹ And that is all.

Johnson's speeches on the swing around the circle probably helped spur the movement for impeachment. Indeed, his Cleveland and St. Louis speeches, together with one delivered in Washington on August 18, formed the basis of the tenth article of impeachment adopted by the House of Representatives on March 3, 1868.⁹² Article X accused Johnson of being

unmindful of the high duties of his office and the dignity and proprieties thereof, and of the harmony and courtesies which ought to exist and be maintained between the executive and legislative branches of the government of the United States, designing and intending to set aside the rightful authority and powers of Congress, did attempt to bring into disgrace, ridicule, hatred, contempt and reproach the Congress of the United States. . .

Members of Congress thought that the President did

make and deliver with a loud voice certain intemperate, inflammatory and scandalous harangues, and did therein utter loud threats and bitter menaces as well against Congress as the laws of the United States duly enacted thereby, amid the cries, jeers and laughter of the multitudes then assembled and in hearing. . .

These "utterances, declarations, threats, and harangues" were "peculiarly indecent and unbecoming in the Chief Magistrate" and constituted "a high misdemeanor in office."

Even Thaddeus Stevens found it difficult to make the House of Representatives swallow Article X. It received only 88 affirmative votes—20 fewer than any other article. Nays (44) and those not voting (57) also proclaimed this the least popular of the articles of impeachment.⁹³ In what was at best a flimsy structure this plank was perhaps the flimsiest.

⁹¹ *Diary of Gideon Welles*, II, 589-93. Radical governors of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, and Pennsylvania also fled before the President's approach.

⁹² *House Miscellaneous Document 91*, 40th Congress, 2nd Session.

⁹³ *Tribune Almanac for 1869*, page 25.

JOHNSON'S STRENGTH AND LIMITATIONS

How, then, should Andrew Johnson be remembered? First, he was a staunch defender of the Constitution and the Union. In turn he battled two of the most powerful movements of his day. First, though himself a southerner, he refused to take the easy and popular course and go along with the secession movement in Tennessee and the South. Secondly, with the end of the war he put aside his hatreds and refused to support Radical plans for vengeance on the South. Both these stands won enemies, but Johnson never waited to consider the popularity of a position in which he believed. He would not and did not trim his sails to fit the winds of either secession in the South or postwar hatred in the North.

Johnson's claim to a place in American history rests at least partly on his work as a defender of our federal system: the Constitution and the Union. His one contribution to the progress of the nation was the Homestead Act, itself an adequate monument for any United States legislator. Indeed, when congressmen gathered to pay their last respects to Andrew Johnson, Senator Paddock of Nebraska had this to say:

Especially, sir, do I offer here for the memory of the departed Senator the gratitude and the unselfish reverence, homely though it be, of the thousands in my State who to-day occupy farms of broad fertile acres secured to them through the beneficent provisions of the homestead law.⁹⁴

Aside from the Homestead Act, however, Johnson should be remembered primarily as a conservator, not an innovator. He believed in, treasured, and fought to protect the heritage transmitted to him and his contemporaries by the nation's founders. Senator Key of Tennessee emphasized this aspect of Johnson's character:

Mr. Johnson's skill was not so much in construction as in resistance to the schemes and measures of others. His great desire and aim were to maintain and preserve what our fathers had handed down to us. He was afraid that change might mar their work.⁹⁵

By his stubborn resistance to the Radicals, concludes Professor Howard K. Beale, one of the most careful students of the period, Johnson

prevented the establishment of a parliamentary system with Congress omnipotent in a Washington where checks and balances had been scrapped, and

⁹⁴ *Memorial Addresses on the Life and Character of Andrew Johnson, A Senator From Tennessee*. Delivered in the Senate and House of Representatives January 12, 1876. 44th Congress, 1st Session, 26. Hereafter referred to as *Memorial Addresses*.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

with the central government all-powerful in a nation from which state lines had been obliterated.⁹⁶

Such was certainly Johnson's objective. At times he must have thought his efforts a complete failure. Beale's words would have been very comforting.

Andrew Johnson did not have all the answers to problems of reconstructing the Union. He had no remedy for the friction between the white and black races. He knew no way to guarantee qualified Negroes the right to vote. Neither did the Radicals. For ten years the Radicals had complete control of the Federal legislature, eight of them without opposition from the President. Stevens and Sumner persuaded Congress to pass virtually whatever legislation they wanted. Yet only in the twentieth century, by action of the individual southern states, have Negroes begun to vote in any sizable numbers. Presidential reconstruction on the Lincoln-Johnson pattern could scarcely have produced a poorer record and might well have done much better.

Secondly, however, it must be remembered about Johnson that he was not a master of national politics. Following one of the greatest of American political geniuses, Johnson failed in human relations, and his failure stands in sharp contrast to the success of his predecessor.

In many ways Johnson set a fine example as President. He was an honest man, devoted to duty, hard-working, constantly battling for the best interests of the people, especially laboring men. Representative Waddell of North Carolina called him "an honest man, a truthful man, and incorruptible. He obstinately adhered to the opinion . . . that personal integrity and political dishonesty are absolutely irreconcilable . . ." ⁹⁷ William Crook emphasized his "hard-working and businesslike" qualities, reporting that "he rarely left his desk until midnight." ⁹⁸ And in view of Johnson's remarkable political record, a mastery of Tennessee politics can scarcely be denied him.

But while recognizing the President's many excellent qualities and denying the validity of the portrait drawn by his enemies, the critic must not ignore Johnson's serious limitations. He never obtained a real grasp of the national political picture. He relied too heavily on Seward and put off essential political steps that might

⁹⁶ *The Critical Year*, 7.

⁹⁷ *Memorial Addresses*, 72. See also Hugh McCulloch, *Men and Measures of Half a Century* (New York, 1888), 377.

⁹⁸ Crook, *Through Five Administrations*, 84.

possibly have preserved the essentials of presidential reconstruction. He could not conciliate, could not compromise; could only fight. According to Oliver P. Morton of Indiana, Johnson

was distinguished for his tenacity of purpose, perhaps for his impatience of opposition. He was combative in his temperament; and that quality of his mind, I have no doubt led him to do many of those things to which objection was taken.⁹⁹

Senator Bogy of Missouri agreed, picturing Johnson as “so far from attempting to avoid opposition” that he invited and seemed to enjoy it. “His combative temper always brought about very great opposition.”¹⁰⁰ In a wartime military governor these were excellent qualities; in a postwar President they helped to bring disaster.

Johnson had many admirers, few if any real friends. Even Gideon Welles, whose diary paints vivid word pictures of many great and near-great of the war and postwar period, fails to bring to life the Chief whose ideas he approved so heartily. Probably the most intimate picture of Johnson the man in the White House is given by Colonel William Crook, his secretary and certainly not a politician. But Crook admits that “there was nothing in Mr. Johnson’s self-contained, almost sombre manner to take possession of the hearts of those about him, as did the man with whom we were forced to compare him.”¹⁰¹ None of the frequently published pictures of the President show him smiling. He had little of Lincoln’s genius with men.

Thirdly, Johnson can be remembered as a powerful stump speaker who once forgot position and press. Representative Thornburgh of Tennessee called Johnson “a great leader of the people, an orator possessing peculiar power to inspire, persuade, convince, and control the honest masses of the country . . .”¹⁰² The evaluation is fair and just. Johnson’s whole political career testifies to his skill at oral persuasion.

Nothing said here should be allowed to detract from Johnson’s reputation as a speaker.¹⁰³ The swing around the circle was part and parcel of his entire speaking career. It had the same type or lack of preparation, the same style of language, the same strengths and weaknesses. Probably, considering the postwar prejudices of

⁹⁹ *Memorial Addresses*, 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

¹⁰¹ Crook, *Through Five Administrations*, 82.

¹⁰² *Memorial Addresses*, 80.

¹⁰³ Joseph Harold Baccus, *The Oratory of Andrew Johnson*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1941. See page 250 *et seq.*

his audience, he had proportionately as much success in changing the opinions of his immediate hearers. But he forgot his position as President and his resultant weakness when reported by the Radical-controlled Republican press. He forgot that people would expect from him as President something different from what they had applauded in Senator, Military Governor, or candidate for the Vice-Presidency. He forgot how his words would be lifted from their context, distorted, and twisted until the thousands to whom he talked would pale into political insignificance beside the millions who learned only what Radical editors wanted them to.

Finally, Andrew Johnson must be remembered as the President who came back. No story of the seventeenth President would be complete which left him defeated, discredited, almost deposed through the impeachment route. At the Democratic convention in 1868 Johnson received a formal resolution of thanks, but only sixty-five delegates could be found to cast their ballots for the President.¹⁰⁴ When he left Washington in the spring of 1869, he seemed dead politically. At home in Tennessee he found one of his bitterest enemies—"Parson" Brownlow—firmly entrenched in the governor's office in Nashville.

Johnson fought a long and difficult battle along the comeback trail. Repeated disappointments would have discouraged a less-determined man, but, as readers of the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* scarcely need reminding, in 1876 the legislature finally agreed on Andrew Johnson as the new United States Senator from the state of Tennessee. On March 4 he took his oath of office, thus becoming the only former President ever to sit in the Senate. On March 22, at the age of sixty-six, Senator Johnson stood up to challenge the tottering regime of President Grant. Two days later the session ended, Johnson returned to Greeneville, and on July 31, his final mission accomplished, he died. With all his limitations he was a brave and able patriot, who deserves better treatment from his countrymen than posterity has customarily accorded him.

FINAL SUMMARY

Military victory in the Civil War forced the North to choose between (1) quick restoration and reconciliation, urged first by Abraham Lincoln and then by Andrew Johnson; and (2) coercion of the South into adopting Negro suffrage, proposed by Radical Republicans like Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens. After blocking

¹⁰⁴ *Tribune Almanac for 1869*, page 30.

congressional approval of Lincoln's reconstruction policies through the war years, in the spring of 1866 these men whipped into line two-thirds majorities in both houses of Congress—an effective checkmate for presidential reconstruction.

Losing ground in Congress and seeing the war-born National Union Party fall apart before his eyes, Johnson welcomed an invitation from Chicago to attend cornerstone-laying ceremonies September 6 for a monument to Stephen A. Douglas. In his Tennessee idiom he would swing around the circle, see the people face to face, and ask their support in the congressional elections.

On his tour Johnson urged his audiences to believe that (1) the time had come for peace and reconciliation; (2) the Constitution forbade both secession by the South and exclusion by the North; (3) partisan politics should be abandoned in favor of immediate restoration; (4) he would do a better job of reconstruction than the Thirty-ninth Congress.

By these and supporting arguments Johnson stood forth to defend the prewar Constitution and Union—minus slavery. For him slavery was the “apple of discord,” and with its abolition strife should cease. Meanwhile his opponents effectively revived wartime hatreds, waving a shirt freshly bloodied during Memphis and New Orleans riots and urging new penance before the South could be trusted to resume its place in the Federal government. In focusing attention upon the “southern question,” upon constitutional interpretation, and upon personalities, Johnson played into Radical hands by virtually ignoring certain issues they sought to avoid: Negro suffrage, the fourteenth amendment, economy in government, banking and currency reform, business subsidy, high protective tariff.

The President used the same methods of speech preparation and delivery learned during Tennessee campaigns. He depended on general preparation, discussing each topic as it occurred or was suggested to him. His word choice arose from the inspiration of the moment, and, despite occasional lapses in grammar, which made him vulnerable to newspaper caricature, was usually easy to understand and frequently vivid in imagery. Appearance and voice helped make him a convincing speaker, though hoarseness handicapped him early on the tour. Through most of his journey, even during a mob scene at Pittsburgh, Johnson remained calm and dignified; but occasional lapses in dignity (especially at Cleveland and St. Louis) provided unexcelled material for Radical caricature.

An ovation greeted the presidential party at Philadelphia and through New York state. Conservative newspapers waxed ecstatic,

while the Radical press did not know what to make of popular enthusiasm. Ohio's Western Reserve, however, provided less sympathetic audiences. St. Louis heckled Johnson, and Indianapolis greeted him with a riot. But Radical politicians inspired such demonstrations, and Johnson probably won support within the circle of his immediate hearers. Ninety-five per cent of the voters, however, learned of the tour only from the newspapers, most of which, especially the influential ones, were controlled by the Radicals.

This has been a study in failure. Johnson lost the elections, but this defeat should be interpreted neither as a referendum on presidential reconstruction nor as a test of the President's popularity. He failed, not as a statesman or speaker, but as a practical politician who neither held nor won party support. Since Radicals controlled the Republican Party and Copperheads the Democratic, Conservatives favoring presidential reconstruction found no ballot on which to register their approval.

The importance of Johnson's swing around the circle in determining the results of the elections has been over estimated; certainly he failed to accomplish what would have been a political miracle. In the critical hour, when a lesser man might have surrendered without a struggle and a greater one master-minded victory through new political strategy, Johnson relied upon the weapon he knew best: his own powers of oral popular persuasion. He lost the hard-fought battle, and with him fell presidential reconstruction. But the Radicals' margin of victory was not large.