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Abstract

Andrew Johnson, Vice President during Abraham Lincoln presidential term, acceded on the highest political position in the United States upon Lincoln death on April 15, 1865, immediately after the end of the Civil War. President Johnson had to handle complicated issues that the government faced without preparation. His only single help was the unfinished work on Reconstruction let by Abraham Lincoln.

President Johnson went to the trouble of doing this task. But, he could not let down the bars between North and South and bring a political climate back to normal. However, he succeeded to add the 13th and 14th Amendments to the Constitution and to solve several international issues. His courage and good intentions were not enough to help him to get along with the Congress and due to this fact Andrew Johnson is the first United States president impeached.

Andrew Johnson-Continuation of Reconstruction

Andrew Johnson, the 17th president of America, is known as a controversy between him and most of the members of a Republican Congress about the Post Civil War Reconstruction. Abraham Lincoln appointed him governor of Tennessee due to the fact that he continued to support the Union as a senator even if he had come from the South. The Republican Party encouraged by President Lincoln, made Johnson his candidate for vice – president. A few hours after the assassination of President Lincoln, Johnson was named the President of United States of America. His presidency faced many difficult problems, as much internal as the external. During his presidency he was also involved with several international situations in Mexico and Canada.

Political Climate

In 1865 most Northerners, especially Radical Republicans, had come to identify security for the Union with tangible, fundamental change in southern society, particularly in black – white relations. Most important, Republicans insisted upon protection for former slaves known as Freedmen. At first many Republicans hoped Southerners themselves would voluntarily initiate the necessary changes. They quickly realized that even modest change in Southern States would require the national action that the Northerners wanted to avoid. So Republicans were faced with a difficult problem. Further complications arose in the person of Andrew Johnson.

Johnson's programs ignored some congressional laws and violated the spirit of others. Concerned only slightly with the well-being of black Southerners, President Johnson took victory of Union to mean the return of the southern white masses to loyalty and the humiliation of the southern aristocracy that had misled them into treason. Inheriting from President Lincoln

the bare outlines of a Reconstruction policy that seemed to pursue a similar goal, Johnson fixed on a program of amnesty for all Southerners who would swear future loyalty to the Union.

Foreign Affairs

During his mandate, President Johnson succeeded to solve several international issues. His most important diplomatic act was the purchasing of Alaska territory from Russian Empire in the name of United States. Johnson purchased Alaska for over seven millions dollars. In that time, most of the politicians considered the act as a lack of business sense, even if it was made with the purpose of providing security for United States. Nowadays, that act has proven a large sense of business of President Johnson because of the huge quantity of natural resources found in Alaska. In 1863 France appointed a European prince as the emperor of Mexico using armed forces. In accordance with Monroe Doctrine - this stated that the European interventions are forbidden in the western hemisphere – that action violated flagrantly the policy of United States. United States only registered the disapproval due to the fact that the civil war did not finish. After four years, during Johnson mandate, United States put pressure on France and the result was that all French troops were withdrawn from Mexico.

In June 1866 Johnson's cabinet faced with another international conflict. Over two thousand Irish revolutionaries, called Fenians, raided into Canada from United States, and were defeated by Canadians troops. The Fenians retreated in United States where they were arrested. Even if they were soon freed, the Irish revolutionaries did not raid into Canada again. One of the international problems which had connections with the Civil War that President Johnson could not solve was about the damages caused by Alabama and other cruisers owned by Confederate States of America which were built and equipped in England ports. Johnson's administration

insisted that Britain should pay for these damages. By the end of Johnson mandate, his cabinet submitted a request in solving this problem to the Senate for ratification, but it was rejected.

Reconstruction

Lincoln's assassination made Johnson angry and inclined to be revengeful in his action on the Confederacy's officials. He hunted down and put in prison Confederate leaders who were considered the privileged class which he hated. Those actions influenced the Radical Republicans approval and supported his Cabinet. President Johnson soon renounced these punishments and tried to be more constructive. Lincoln stated that the former Confederate states never broke away from Union. Following the program of conciliation started by Lincoln, President Johnson began a process to reintegrate the Confederate states in the Union. Johnson asked the white residents to uphold the Union and support it in its Reconstruction's process. He issued a proclamation of amnesty, which gave back the full rights to Confederates and restored the civil government. The former Confederation recalled the edict of secession and approved the Thirteenth Amendment which prohibited slavery in United States. Black Codes were enacted by government personnel appointed by President Johnson. These Black Codes conferred second class status on the Freedmen. In the fall of 1865 Radical Republicans responded by refusing the re-admission of congressmen from all Southern States that were considered rebellious because the states were viewed as stubborn and in opposition to authority.

Under President Lincoln's administration, the Congress established a federal agency called The Freedmen's Bureau with the aim of helping freed slaves in the Southern States. The Freedmen's Bureau maintained its role as Johnson tried to decrease its power. Most historians see the Freedmen's Bureau as impotent in regards to the freed slaves due to fund problem, opposition of the conservatives, apathy of the Southern community, and a weak organization.

However, The Freedmen's Bureau helped the black community to set schools and churches. It established offices with the aim of advising the freed slaves to negotiate fair contracts for properties and labors and offered counseling for those who wanted to establish a family.

All the former Confederate states adopted Reconstruction in accordance with President Johnson's program by the time the Congress was convened in December 1865. The Republican Party was angered because of the Black Code and the re-emergence of former Confederate officials into political life. This was the moment when the battle between President Johnson and the Congress began. The Congress enforced its position over the Johnson's veto. It passed the Freedmen Bureau Bill, providing protection for former slave's rights as well as any person born in the United States as a citizen and also provided shelter and provisions. In April 1866 the first Civil Rights Act was passed with the aim of nullifying the Black Code by guaranteeing equal civil rights to black people.

Johnson broke with the Republican Party by vetoing the Civil Rights Bill because Freedmen received citizenship while Southern states were unrepresented. The Civil Rights Bill aimed to bring equality to a level playing field between blacks and whites in every state. Johnson felt this invaded the rights of the States by an omnipotent Federal authority. He believed that it centralized and concentrated the legislative powers in the national government. Johnson wrote, "This is a country for white men, and by God, as long as I am President, it shall be a government for white men". (Wikipedia). Johnson was aligned with the Southern Democratic Party who proclaimed that all white men of the south and the north were represented by them. The Republicans in Congress had enough votes to override Johnson's veto making the Civil Rights Bill law.

President Johnson intensified his struggle against the Radical Republicans during the congressional elections of 1866. His effort remained without any positive result. Radical newspapers did everything to change his image in front of the people. The Republicans won the elections overwhelmingly and their first political act was the changing of Johnson's Reconstruction program. The new program stated that the Southern states must replace their civil governments with a military one. The Southern states had to give the right to vote to the blacks and to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment if they wanted to again have civil governments and representation in Congress. A smart move by Congress was to pass some laws which prevented President Johnson from interfering with the Reconstruction program set up by Congress. Specifically the Tenure of Office Act prevented President Johnson from replacing Executive Cabinet members and other Federal Officials without the Senate's consent. Also the Army Appropriations Act deprived the president of the constitutional right to command the army. President Johnson vetoed these acts, but congress overrode his veto, after this Congress looked to be more powerful than the President.

The Impeachment

Johnson felt he lost the popular support and the support of the Congress. He challenged the Tenure of Office Act as a response of the usurpation of presidential authority firing the Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, who was loyal to the Radical Republicans. In accordance with the U.S. Constitution, the Congress has the authority to impeach or accuse the president. In February 1868, United States Congress decided to accuse President Johnson because of his violation of the Tenure of Office Act. The Senate could not convict the President and he continued to serve the duration of the term won by Lincoln.

Upon his mandate had finished Johnson returned to Tennessee and continued to be active in state politics. In 1874 Johnson was elected senator. He became the only United States president who served in the Senate after the White House. He continued to attack the Radicals' policy and, especially President Grant. While Andrew Johnson was visiting his daughter he suffered a heart attack and died on 31 July 1875.

Under President Johnson's mandate it began the reconstruction and reunification of United States, a country which had suffered four years of war. Johnson's administration added the 13th and 14th Amendments to the Constitution which stated that slavery was abolished and provided equal protection by law for every citizen of United States. During his presidency Nebraska and Alaska were added to the United States. In the opinion of the earliest historians of Reconstruction, President Andrew Johnson was in large part responsible for the evils they perceived in Radical Reconstruction. An inept politician who thoroughly misjudged the temper of the North, a stump speaker who degraded the presidency with his speeches, Johnson may have had the right instincts, but his incapacity for leadership and stubborn refusal to accommodate even justified northern concerns played into the hands of the radicals and fixed "Black Reconstruction" upon the South.

References

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