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ANDREW JOHNSON'S REPUTATION

By WILLARD HAYS

INTRODUCTION

Robert G. Ingersoll, lawyer, skeptic, and campaign orator for the Republican party, once took time from his other activities to reflect on the fate of American politicians. In a letter to his brother, after describing how Webster had died begging to be President, how Calhoun had become infamous, and how Benton had lived to be ridiculed, the great agnostic wrote: "Look at poor Buchanan. Contemplate Franklin Pierce. View with a critic's eye Millard Fillmore. Remember Mr. Tyler. Pity Harrison. Drop a tear for *honest* Zachary Taylor. . . . Then dear Bro. get a good microscope and look at Andy Johnson."¹ A look at Andrew Johnson, or more correctly speaking, at his reputation, should be much more profitable than Colonel Ingersoll could have anticipated. The purpose of this study is to take such a look.

It is difficult to think of another figure in American public life whose treatment in history has greater intrinsic interest than that of the only President to be impeached. Johnson, like every public figure who is abused by his contemporaries, every artist whose works do not sell, and every writer whose efforts are ignored or adversely criticized, undoubtedly found consolation in the hope that he would be vindicated by posterity. To a large degree, such a hope has been justified. Indeed, if "Royal Bob" Ingersoll could see how some later observers have viewed Andrew Johnson, the shock would be enough to convert him to Christianity—or witchcraft. Few of their contemporaries would have questioned Ingersoll's consigning Johnson to disgrace and oblivion; yet the reputation of the maligned tailor from Tennessee has improved to such an extent that recently a distinguished student of the American presidency, after listing seven "great" Presidents, included Johnson among the six "near great."² It is no longer necessary to "get a good microscope" to see Andy Johnson.

¹ Quoted by C. H. Cramer, *Royal Bob, The Life of Robert G. Ingersoll* (Indianapolis, c. 1952), 68-69.

² Clinton Rossiter, *The American Presidency* (New York, c. 1956), 79.

A study of Johnson's reputation is not only interesting in itself, but it also throws light on some of the factors that determine how history looks at an individual. Douglas Southall Freeman, biographer of Lee and Washington, has pointed out "the cynical truth that a man's place in history depends, in large part, on care and good fortune—care in preserving essential records, and good fortune in having a biographer who uses those records sympathetically."³ In both of these respects Johnson was extremely fortunate. The records that he himself carefully preserved and the observations that Gideon Welles, his secretary of the navy, faithfully recorded in his *Diary* made it possible for later students to draw a picture of Johnson that was not based on the charges of his political enemies. After these records became available they were used sympathetically by not one but several historians and biographers.

Important though adequate records and sympathetic biographical treatment are, the prevailing attitudes of the time at which the study is made are just as important in determining the treatment accorded an individual. There is a striking difference in the way Andrew Johnson was viewed by a generation imbued with the concept of racial equality propounded by the abolitionists and by another that placed greater value on national unity than on equal rights for all races. The importance of the attitude of the writer, which is at least in part a result of the intellectual forces operating in his own age, is obvious when it is seen how the same fact can be used to create opposite effects. For example, the fact that the President's son, Colonel Robert Johnson, drank to excess can be used to imply a characteristic family weakness or to arouse sympathy for the father who loves his son despite the embarrassment that his actions cause. History may not be, as Charles A. Beard is said to have remarked, "just a cat dragged by its tail to places it rarely wants to go,"⁴ but the study of Andrew Johnson's reputation points up Beard's contention that any written history inevitably reflects the author's "frame of reference," his thought as conditioned by his own age and cultural setting.⁵

³ Douglas Southall Freeman, *The South to Posterity, An Introduction to the Writing of Confederate History* (New York, 1939), 73.

⁴ Whitaker T. Deinger, "The Skepticism and Historical Faith of Charles A. Beard," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (New York), XV (October, 1954), 574.

⁵ Charles A. Beard, "Written History as an Act of Faith," *The American Historical Review* (New York), XXXIX (January, 1934), 221.

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It should be made clear, before proceeding further, that this study is not an effort to show what Andrew Johnson was or to pass judgment on him. Rather, it is simply an attempt to ascertain what articulate observers of the national scene and students of our history have thought of him as a man, a political leader, and a statesman during the ninety years which have elapsed since his leaving the White House in 1869, and, whenever possible, to suggest reasons for the prevalence and change of their attitudes.

During President Johnson's four years in office, feeling toward him changed from apathy to adulation to denunciation. The first few months were characterized by a lack of interest. Occasionally, on the ground that he was proceeding with too great haste in bringing the southern states back into the Union, the President's policy was questioned, but neither his honesty nor his patriotism was doubted. His first message to Congress, delivered in December, 1865, was moderate and well-written. Because of it, he was widely acclaimed, at home and abroad, as a great and wise statesman.

Within a matter of weeks, however, Johnson was being denounced as perhaps no other President ever has been. Early in 1866 he aroused the wrath of the congressional Radicals by vetoing both the Freedmen's Bureau Bill, a measure to provide federal protection for the former slaves, and the Civil Rights Bill, which forbade discriminatory state legislation against the Negro. An unfortunate propensity for tactless offhand remarks added to his difficulties. By the end of the year the President was generally looked on as a stubborn, egotistical, ignorant, even treacherous demagogue, who, in opposition to the will of the majority of the northern people, had followed a policy which had permitted southern secessionists to regain power at the expense of the Negro. This view persisted to the end of his administration, remaining largely unchanged even during the impeachment proceedings during the spring of 1868. Those who favored impeachment were already before the end of 1866 castigating him in such language as to leave little room for more extreme condemnation, while even those who felt that impeachment was unjustified believed that he had been a failure as President and a discredit to his high office.

In this study, Andrew Johnson's reputation will be examined in four chronological periods. During the first, 1869-99, he was judged for the

most part by men whose views were conditioned by their memories of the acrimonious years of his administration. The second, 1900-1926, is characterized by the activities of the professional historian, who based his work on research rather than recollection. The next section will treat the six years, 1927-1932, in which an awakening of interest in Johnson led to a great deal of original research and a notably more favorable judgment. In the fourth and last period, 1933 to the present, this interest has receded, and writings in which Johnson is evaluated, while often scholarly, have usually been based on secondary accounts.⁶

I. CRITICISM AND THE BEGINNINGS OF UNDERSTANDING: MARCH, 1869-1899

From the time Andrew Johnson left the White House until the beginning of the twentieth century, opinions about him are to be found chiefly in the memoirs, reminiscences, letters, diaries, and autobiographies of the prominent men of his own age. Many books of this period were called "histories," but, written by such men as Alexander H. Stephens, Henry Wilson, or Horace Greeley, they tend to be more akin to the type of writing frankly labelled as memoirs and reminiscences than to the well-researched, more or less objectively written histories of today. In the works of men who had been so deeply involved in the affairs of Johnson's age it is inevitable that we find bias and emotionalism.

The writers who judged Johnson during this period were not only his contemporaries but most of them were from the North. It is not surprising, therefore, that the picture of Johnson that had prevailed during his last years in office tended to persist. It was not, however, unchallenged. Johnson's political friends, as well as his enemies, were writing; the South was becoming somewhat more articulate; and, as the animosities of the Civil War and Reconstruction gradually diminished, Andrew Johnson came to be judged, even in the North, less harshly.

For over thirty years after Johnson left Washington, very few writers devoted their efforts exclusively to him and his administration. Prior to 1900 opinions about him were generally expressed incidentally in works not primarily concerned with the seventeenth President and his problems.

⁶ Parts III and IV, covering the years 1927 to the present, and Conclusions will appear in *Publications* No. 32.

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Writings about Johnson during the decade after his retirement were infrequent and for the most part merely restatements of the Radical interpretation. Shortly after Grant took office one writer took occasion to compare the former President, unfavorably, with the new. Maintaining that Johnson was head-strong, ignorant, and incapable of understanding the problems he faced, this anonymous contributor to *The Atlantic Monthly* referred to the Tennessean's administration as "unwise and wicked."⁷ At about the same time, *The Overland Monthly*, published in San Francisco, carried an article in which the Reverend Charles Ames, a Unitarian minister, took a rather dim view of both Johnson and the martyred Lincoln. Ames criticized Johnson for having been more interested in fighting Congress than in looking after the affairs of the nation.⁸

When the former President died in 1875, *The Nation*, E. L. Godkin's noted weekly, judged him much as it had while he held office. Now, as then, it held that most of the difficulties of the Reconstruction era had arisen because Johnson, "obtuse" and "ignorant," had tried to bring the southern states back into the Union too quickly and without adequate safeguards for the rights of the freedmen. While continuing to denounce the former President's intemperate language and stubbornness, *The Nation*, after six years of Grant, reiterated its earlier approval of the honesty with which the affairs of government had been conducted under Johnson.⁹

The most violent attacks on Johnson published during the seventies came from the pen of Henry Wilson, Vice President during Grant's second term. In the February, 1870, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Wilson, then a senator from Massachusetts, charged that Johnson had denied the freedmen their just rights as well as threatened the peace of the nation by a reactionary policy.¹⁰ Later, in his *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, Wilson, by the manner in which he referred to the incident at the Tennessean's inauguration as Vice President, implied that Johnson was a habitual drunkard. Wilson averred that the presidential plan of reconstruction was "utterly inde-

⁷ "The Intellectual Character of President Grant," *The Atlantic Monthly* (Boston), XXIII (May, 1869), 628-30.

⁸ Charles G. Ames, "A Political Outlook," *The Overland Monthly* (San Francisco), II (June, 1869), 546.

⁹ "The Week," *The Nation* (New York), XXI (August 5, 1875), 77.

¹⁰ Henry Wilson, "Edwin M. Stanton," *The Atlantic Monthly*, XXV (February, 1870), 234-46.

fensible," and that Johnson himself was dishonest, treacherous, and a "standing hindrance" to the humanitarian aims of the Republican party. In this book, Grant's Vice President repeated the charge that Johnson's policy had remanded freedmen "to a condition little better than that from which the war had rescued them." "The story," he wrote, "is a long and sad one, and there is hardly a more disgraceful passage in American history. . . ."¹¹

A similar judgment was passed in an article appearing in the August, 1879, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. The author, Walter Allen, asserted that Johnson had betrayed the northern people by trying to bring an unrepentant and unreconstructed South back into the Union. He also accused Johnson of having "used the executive patronage scandalously" to further his political aims.¹²

Two of the most important works of the eighties, both of which have been widely used as sources by subsequent writers, were James G. Blaine's *Twenty Years of Congress, from Lincoln to Garfield* and Hugh McCulloch's *Men and Measures of Half a Century*. They contain contrasting pictures of Johnson, the former reflecting the Radical viewpoint and the latter a more sympathetic approach.

Blaine, congressman and later Republican candidate for President, censured Johnson for his unwillingness to give full civil rights to the Negroes and for allowing the South to fall back into the hands of former rebels. The Maine legislator attributed Johnson's attitude to the influence of southern flatterers. The seventeenth President, according to Blaine, "had two signal defects, either of which would impair his fitness for executive duty; united they rendered him incapable of efficient administration:—he was conceited and he was obstinate." Two other faults that Blaine ascribed to him were a "talent for procrastination" and "a certain indecision." Johnson, in the view of the New England Republican, was a political blunderer who, on his "swing-around the circle"—the speaking tour undertaken in support of pro-administration candidates in 1866—discredited himself and threw away whatever chance he had for carrying out his program by engaging in "undignified repartee" with hecklers. Blaine, one of the writers who

¹¹ Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, 8th edn. 3 vols. (Boston, 1872-c. 1877), III, 578, 597, 599, 733.

¹² Walter Allen, "Two Years of President Hayes," *The Atlantic Monthly*, XLIV (August, 1879), 190.

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helped spread the view that Johnson drank to excess, not only seized on the incident of his intoxication when inaugurated Vice President, but also implied that he was drunk when, on Washington's Birthday in 1866, he named as traitors three of the leading Radicals, Charles Sumner, Thaddeus Stevens, and Wendell Phillips. Admitting that Johnson's official papers were judicious and well-written, Blaine avoided praising the President, and, by crediting them to Secretary of State Seward, implied that he was too ignorant to produce such works.¹³

Hugh McCulloch, Johnson's secretary of the treasury, although friendly, was not blind to his chief's faults. Like Johnson's enemies, he observed that some of the President's offhand remarks "were in the worst possible taste." Feeling that Johnson's propensity for making tactless remarks was his greatest fault, McCulloch wrote: "If he had been smitten with dumbness when he was elected Vice President, he would have escaped a world of trouble." McCulloch also shared with Blaine the view that Johnson's effectiveness as an executive was impaired by his lack of decisiveness. The former banker was especially critical of his chief for not removing Stanton as soon as it became apparent that the Secretary of War had Radical sympathies. But McCulloch defended Johnson against charges of intemperance, and praised his honesty and devotion to the Union. The head of the Treasury Department felt that despite his lack of formal education the President "had few superiors" in intellectual capacity. Although admitting that the faults of his chief "were patent," McCulloch ventured to predict: ". . . when the history of the great events with which he was connected has been faithfully written, there will appear few names entitled to greater honor and respect than that of Andrew Johnson."¹⁴

In general agreement with Blaine were two other old enemies of Johnson who expressed themselves in the mid-eighties. George Boutwell, one of the managers in the impeachment trial, charged Johnson with treachery, stubbornness, and indecision in the *North American Review* for December, 1885.¹⁵ Carl Schurz, in a speech delivered the same year, said that "President Johnson was, perhaps, the worst imaginable" man

¹³ James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress, from Lincoln to Garfield*, 2 vols. (Norwich, Conn., 1884-1886), II, 70-71, 115, 182, 238-39, 267, 273, 306, 376-78.

¹⁴ Hugh McCulloch, *Men and Measures of Half a Century* (New York, 1888), 88, 374, 391, 392, 394, 405, 406.

¹⁵ George S. Boutwell, "Johnson's Plot and Motives," *North American Review* (New York), CXLI (December, 1885), 576.

for the task of reconstruction. The German-born immigrant, asserting that Johnson had an "ill-balanced mind" coupled with a "passionate temper," held that the President had not only rendered an injustice to the freedmen but had also caused prolonged suffering in the South as a whole by not forcing the defeated section to give the Negroes full civil rights immediately.¹⁶

Even while Johnson was being attacked by old enemies and defended by old friends a group of writers appeared who were able to take a more detached view of the events of Reconstruction. These observers, although from the North, took a more favorable attitude toward Johnson than had earlier and older writers from their section. Included in this group were Charles K. Tuckerman, whose impressions from an interview with Johnson when he was President were published in the *Magazine of American History* in 1888;¹⁷ Henry Cabot Lodge, historian and politician, who contributed an article on Seward to *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1884;¹⁸ Thurlow Weed Barnes, grandson and biographer of Thurlow Weed;¹⁹ and George Merriam, biographer of Samuel Bowles.²⁰ These four represented Johnson as courageous, honest, patriotic, and well-meaning, but often tactless and politically inept. Three—Barnes, Lodge, and Merriam—credited Johnson with having tried to carry out the policy of Lincoln, which they implied was a wise one.²¹ These men were the forerunners of the school, prominent in the early years of the twentieth century, which held that Johnson's reconstruction policy was the correct one, but that he had lacked the tact and political sagacity to carry it out.

A newspaperman of Johnson's era, Ben: Perley Poore, took a somewhat less favorable view of the presidential plan of reconstruction, but he also maintained that Johnson "was by nature and temperament squarely disposed toward justice and the right."²²

¹⁶ Frederick Bancroft (ed.), *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz*, 6 vols. (New York, 1913), IV, 270.

¹⁷ Charles K. Tuckerman, "Personal Recollections of Andrew Johnson," *Magazine of American History* (New York), XX (July, 1888), 39-42.

¹⁸ Henry Cabot Lodge, "William H. Seward," *The Atlantic Monthly*, LIII (May, 1884), 682-700.

¹⁹ Thurlow Weed Barnes, *Memoir of Thurlow Weed* (Vol. II of *Life of Thurlow Weed*, Harriet A. Weed, ed., and Thurlow Weed Barnes, Boston, 1883-1884).

²⁰ George S. Merriam, *The Life and Times of Samuel Bowles*, 2 vols. (New York, 1885).

²¹ Barnes, *Weed*, 450; Lodge, "Seward," 699; Merriam, *Bowles*, II, 18.

²² Ben: Perley Poore, *Reminiscences of Sixty Years in the National Metropolis*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, c. 1886), II, 193.

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Jacob Harris Potter's analysis of Reconstruction in the *Magazine of American History* was perhaps even more dispassionate than the works of Barnes, Lodge, and Merriam, but Potter took a much less favorable attitude toward Johnson. Potter felt that Johnson, by proceeding with his reconstruction plan without consulting Congress, both exceeded his constitutional authority and needlessly aroused the antagonism of the legislators. Potter agreed with the Radicals that reconstruction of the rebel states should have been more thorough and less rapid.²³

Two other writers of the eighties who took a rather detached view of Johnson were John Clark Ridpath, whose *Popular History of the United States of America* was published in 1883, and George Cary Eggleston, who contributed an article on American Presidents to the *Magazine of American History* the following year. Both writers treated Johnson rather superficially and neither passed judgment on his reconstruction policy, but both described him as brave, stubborn, and intelligent.²⁴ The most favorable estimate of Johnson to appear in the decade was in Laura Holloway's book on the wives of the Presidents. Although the author tended to picture the husbands of all her gracious ladies in a favorable light, her praise of Johnson verged on the fulsome. Of his administration, she wrote:

The most perilous, stormy, and trying one ever known in the history of this country; a record of rude unpleasant contact with defiled revilers, and a continued struggle from first to last to maintain untarnished the oath too sacred to be violated. Not here, but in the annals of history will all its triumphs be written; not in this day or generation can its untainted and correct measures be fully estimated, but to the coming men of America it is bequeathed, a sad acknowledgment of the tyrannous oppression of a President, and a testimony of his undeviating course, moving onward, swerving neither to the right nor to the left, but forward to the cradles of posterity who will pass judgment and wreath immortal to the memory of the patriot, whose truth will not be doubted, whose honesty cannot be impeached.²⁵

In the last decade of the nineteenth century two more erstwhile opponents of Johnson voiced their views. John Sherman, who had voted for his conviction in 1868, wrote in 1895 that Johnson's plan for reorganization of the South "was wise and judicious," but he still felt

²³ Jacob Harris Potter, "Reconstruction," *Magazine of American History*, XX (September, 1888), 207-08.

²⁴ John Clark Ridpath, *A Popular History of the United States of America* (New York, 1883); George Cary Eggleston, "Our Twenty-one Presidents," *Magazine of American History*, XI (February, March, 1884), 204.

²⁵ Laura C. Holloway, *The Ladies of the White House; or, In the Home of the Presidents* (Philadelphia, 1881), 596.

that the Tennessean's personal conduct left much to be desired.²⁶ Benjamin F. Butler, the chief manager of the impeachment, however, still maintained that Johnson's conduct of the affairs of government was so detrimental to the welfare of the nation that he was guilty of "high crimes and misdemeanors."²⁷

In the late nineties two books on the American presidency were published. One, written by Edward S. Ellis, was aimed at a youthful audience and contained little on Johnson's policy. Ellis did, however, give an inspiring picture of Johnson as a poor boy who by hard work and ambition overcame his lack of economic and educational opportunities to become chief magistrate of the nation.²⁸ A more substantial work was Edward Stanwood's *History of the Presidency*. Essentially, Stanwood was an adherent of the view that Johnson's policy, which Lincoln had originated, was wise, but that the President's defects of character brought about the defeat of his own program. Stanwood saw "in President Johnson much obstinacy, little wisdom, and no tact."²⁹

Both its scholarly nature and its specialized concern with Johnson and the problem of reconstruction set Charles E. Chadsey's *The Struggle Between President Johnson and Congress over Reconstruction*, published in 1896, apart from the other writings of the period before 1900. Chadsey was hesitant to make sweeping judgments about either Johnson or his program. He felt that both the Freedmen's Bureau Bill of February, 1866, and the Civil Rights Bill were moderate measures that should have been enacted for the benefit of the freedmen, but he respected Johnson's reasons for vetoing them. Chadsey viewed both the February 22nd speech and the "swing-around the circle" as political mistakes, but he recognized that Johnson might have failed regardless of how he tried to carry out his program. He implied that Lincoln, a man of greater tact and better judgment, might also have failed. Chadsey belabored both Johnson and the Radicals when he wrote: "The whole period of reconstruction is marked by blindness and prejudice on both sides. The spirit of compromise could find no place in either's plans."³⁰

²⁶ John Sherman, *Recollections of Forty Years in the House, Senate, and Cabinet*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1895), I, 361, 364.

²⁷ Benjamin F. Butler, *Butler's Book* (Boston, 1892), 927.

²⁸ Edward S. Ellis, *Lives of the Presidents of the United States* (Chicago, c. 1897), 147-48.

²⁹ Edward Stanwood, *A History of the Presidency from 1788 to 1897* (Boston, c. 1898), 312-13.

³⁰ Charles E. Chadsey, *The Struggle Between President Johnson and Congress over*

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Another author whose work, by both its nature and its position, foreshadowed the next period was William A. Dunning, who would himself be one of the most important writers of the early years of the twentieth century. Dunning, during the late eighties and nineties, wrote several essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction, principally for the *Political Science Quarterly* and the *Yale Review*, which were collected and published as *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction and Related Topics* in 1897. The Columbia University history professor approved Johnson's program,³¹ but felt that "the bad judgment and worse taste of the President" brought about its defeat by driving potential supporters into the Radical camp.³²

James Walter Fertig's doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, *The Secession and Reconstruction of Tennessee* (1898) was still another scholarly study which discussed aspects of Johnson's character and career. In the honest and hard-working Johnson's acceptance of the military governorship of Tennessee, Fertig saw evidence of a strong sense of duty and patriotism, since such a position could add little to his already distinguished public career. Believing that as President the Tennessean continued Lincoln's reasonable course, Fertig, while conceding that Johnson's temperament and disposition hurt his own cause, placed much of the blame for the presidential program's defeat on congressional disrespect and distrust of an executive who was not only new but a southerner as well.³³ By thus assigning factors largely beyond Johnson's control an important role in causing his policy's failure, Fertig anticipated later writers who would present an even more favorable picture of Johnson by dwelling almost exclusively on these outside influences. Fertig's work, with that of Chadsey and Dunning, also foretold the coming of the era of the professional historian.

During the last thirty years of the nineteenth century several southerners had an opportunity to express their views on Andrew

Reconstruction (Columbia University *Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law*, VIII, New York, 1896), 39, 62, 66, 70, 98, 126.

³¹ William Archibald Dunning, "The Constitution of the United States in Reconstruction," in *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction and Related Topics* (New York, 1931), 78.

³² William Archibald Dunning, "The Impeachment and Trial of President Johnson," in *ibid.*, 253.

³³ James Walter Fertig, *The Secession and Reconstruction of Tennessee* (Chicago, 1898), 35-37, 101.

Johnson. Both Alexander H. Stephens, the Confederate Vice President, and Benjamin F. Perry, a Unionist who served as provisional governor of South Carolina during Reconstruction, felt that Johnson was patriotic and that his policy was magnanimous. Perry went so far as to say that "Johnson was, in all respects, a better, wiser, and greater man than Lincoln. . . ." ³⁴ Another southerner, Hilary Herbert, who served as secretary of the navy under Cleveland, commended Johnson for trying to carry out the work of his "great predecessor." ³⁵

Richard Taylor, a former Confederate general and the son of a President, approved the broad outlines of Johnson's program, but found little to admire in the man from Tennessee. Taylor, who, while trying to obtain permission to visit the imprisoned Jefferson Davis, saw Johnson several times, was impressed by the President's intellectual ability, but found him narrow minded, obstinate, dogmatic, and indecisive. ³⁶

A more vigorous condemnation from a southerner was that of John W. Moore, who published a history of North Carolina in 1880. "Andrew Johnson," wrote Moore, "was essentially a demagogue. An intense egotism and desire for popular applause, superadded to a mulish obstinacy and the bitterest resentment, will explain all the errors and difficulties of his checkered existence." But even Moore admitted that Johnson could not be "bought by money." ³⁷

The Radical view of Andrew Johnson, which had predominated in the writings published during his last years in office, persisted through the next thirty years. In this view, Johnson was an evil man following an unjust and unwise policy. The reasons for the persistence of the Radical outlook are not hard to find. Many of Johnson's old political enemies continued to write about him, northern dominance of publications about the Reconstruction era continued, and younger writers were to a large extent dependent on the works of their anti-Johnson predecessors. While there were some—Johnson's secretary of the treasury, a

³⁴ Alexander H. Stephens, *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, c. 1868-c. 1870), II, 649; Benjamin Franklin Perry, *Reminiscences of Public Men with Speeches and Addresses* (Greenville, S. C., 1889), 249, 260.

³⁵ Hilary A. Herbert, *et al.*, *Why the Solid South? or Reconstruction and Its Results* (Baltimore, 1890), 8.

³⁶ Richard Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction. Personal Experiences of the Late War in the United States* (Edinburgh, 1879), 226-27, 239.

³⁷ John W. Moore, *History of North Carolina; from the Earliest Discoveries to the Present Time*, 2 vols. (Raleigh, 1880), II, 268.

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woman writing about the ladies of the White House, and a southern governor—who penned highly laudatory evaluations of the seventeenth President, they were out of the main trend of thought. Of much greater significance was the new attitude that became apparent in some northern writers as early as the eighteen-eighties. These writers were willing to admit that Johnson was honest, patriotic, and well-meaning, and that his policy was the correct one. However, by pointing out that the presidential plan was originated by Lincoln, and then blaming its defeat on Johnson's faults and mistakes, they accepted in large part the Radical estimate of Johnson's character and executive capacity. This view of Johnson was one that could be accepted by all sections of the country. Richard Taylor, a southerner, for example, took much the same position as Lodge, Barnes, Merriam, Stanwood, and Dunning.

The emergence of the new attitude toward Johnson may be in part accounted for by the coming to maturity of men who had not been involved in the politics of the Johnson era. Henry Cabot Lodge, for instance, was only nineteen years old when Johnson's term ended, and Dunning was only eleven. Another reason for the change was that many northerners had come to feel that the Radical program had been both unwise and unsuccessful. Both the revolt of the Liberal Republicans in 1872 and the fact that the two major candidates for President in 1876 advocated the restoration of conservative rule in the South were indications of the northern reaction against the misgovernment and corruption that had occurred in the South under the congressional plan. If the Radicals were wrong, then Johnson must have been right, but it was easier to defend his policy, which was also that of Lincoln, than his personality and ability, which had hitherto been represented, perhaps misrepresented, mainly in the works of his enemies.

Some of the trends of the late nineteenth century—the tendency toward well-researched, comparatively objective writings; the growing acceptance of Johnson's honesty and good intentions, whatever his faults; and especially, the increasing prevalence of the view that Johnson's policy was sound, but that he himself had been responsible for its defeat—pointed toward the dominant characteristics of the early years of the twentieth.

II. POLICY COMMENDED, LEADERSHIP DEPLORED: 1900-1926

The period from 1900 to 1926 is distinguished from the preceding one primarily by the type of writing that prevailed rather than by a sharp change in outlook toward Andrew Johnson. Although letters, memoirs, diaries, reminiscences, and autobiographies continued to appear, they were overshadowed in both volume and importance by the works of professional historians. The period, which was also marked by an awakening of interest in the Reconstruction era, did show a trend toward a more favorable interpretation of Johnson, although the interest in the seventeenth President was not as intense nor the interpretation as favorable as would obtain during the six years from 1927 to 1932.

Both because of their importance as source material and because most of them appeared in the early years of the century, the memoir-letter-diary type material will be examined first. In number, at least, anti-Johnson works remained predominant among writings of this class. Works in which Johnson was viewed unfavorably included *Recollections of Half a Century* (1902) by Alexander K. McClure, a lawyer, newspaperman, and politician;³⁸ *Autobiography of Seventy Years* (1903) by George F. Hoar, the former senator from Massachusetts;³⁹ *Recollections of Thirteen Presidents* (1906) by John S. Wise, an anti-Johnson southerner;⁴⁰ the *Memoirs* (1908) of Cornelius Cole, former senator from California;⁴¹ Carl Schurz's *Reminiscences* (1902);⁴² *My Memories of Eighty Years* (1924) by Chauncey Depew, lawyer, businessman, and senator;⁴³ and the *Diary* (1926) of President Hayes.⁴⁴ The charges against Johnson were the old familiar ones—he had turned the South over to the secessionists;⁴⁵ he was stubborn, egotistical, and tactless;⁴⁶ and he was addicted to strong drink.⁴⁷ There was now a tendency, how-

³⁸ Alexander Kelly McClure, *Recollections of Half a Century* (Salem, Massachusetts, 1902).

³⁹ George Frisbie Hoar, *Autobiography of Seventy Years*, 2 vols. (New York, 1903).

⁴⁰ John S. Wise, *Recollections of Thirteen Presidents* (New York, 1906).

⁴¹ Cornelius Cole, *Memoirs of Cornelius Cole, Ex-Senator of the United States from California* (New York, 1908).

⁴² Carl Schurz, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz*, 3 vols. (London, 1909).

⁴³ Chauncey Depew, *My Memories of Eighty Years* (New York, 1924).

⁴⁴ Rutherford Birchard Hayes, *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes, Nineteenth President of the United States*, Charles Richard Williams (ed.), 5 vols. (Columbus, 1922-1926).

⁴⁵ McClure, *Recollections*, 63; Hoar, *Autobiography*, I, 256; Cole, *Memoirs*, 276; Hayes, *Diary and Letters*, III, 18.

⁴⁶ Cole, *Memoirs*, 276; McClure, *Recollections*, 64; Schurz, *Reminiscences*, III, 226-27.

⁴⁷ Depew, *Memories*, 49-50; Wise, *Thirteen Presidents*, 61, 111-12.

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ever, even among those who had favored impeachment in 1868, to regard the charges against Johnson as insufficient to warrant his removal from office.⁴⁸ John S. Wise, from a prominent Virginia family and son-in-law of Hugh Douglas, a lifelong friend of Andrew Johnson, in addition to accusing Johnson of intemperance, charged him with having injured his native section both by opposing her during the war and by his later fumbling attempts to help her. Wise felt that Johnson, by his policy and irritating remarks, stimulated the Radicals to a more extreme program than they would otherwise have undertaken.⁴⁹

These attacks were at least partially offset by the writings of Johnson's friends. William H. Crook, former head of the White House guard, reported in *The Century Magazine* in 1908 that Johnson was hard-working and business-like in his performance of duty,⁵⁰ that his speeches, although they appeared illogical and in poor taste as reported in Radical newspapers, seemed forceful, sincere, and dignified as he delivered them,⁵¹ and that while seeing him almost daily he had never seen the President under the influence of strong drink. Crook believed that Johnson had sincerely tried to carry out Lincoln's policy, and that had Lincoln lived he would have been opposed and abused as was his successor.⁵²

A much more significant pro-Johnson work was the *Diary* of Gideon Welles, published in 1911, after excerpts had appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* during 1910. Welles' *Diary*, which has been used extensively as a source on the Johnson administration, was an important factor in bringing about a more favorable assessment of the President. Welles, Johnson's secretary of the navy and one of his most intimate associates, had great respect for his chief's mental capacity, patriotism, and firmness. He believed that Johnson composed his important official papers himself and mentioned that he had often seen him correct the dispatches of the well-educated Seward. Like McCulloch, however, the Secretary of the Navy spoke frankly of his superior's shortcomings, the most

⁴⁸ McClure, *Recollections*, 68; Cole, *Memoirs*, 277; Schurz, *Reminiscences*, III, 282.

⁴⁹ Wise, *Thirteen Presidents*, 109. The friendship between Johnson and Hugh Douglas began when both were young men in Greeneville. Johnson attended the wedding of Douglas' daughter and Wise.

⁵⁰ Margarita Spalding Gerry, "Andrew Johnson in the White House. Being the Reminiscences of William H. Crook," *The Century Magazine* (New York), LXXVI (September, October, 1908), 654.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 664-65. A recent student of Johnson's speeches, Gregg Phifer, whose work will be examined in Part IV, subscribes to this view.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 654, 661, 663.

serious of which he felt was indecision. Welles particularly regretted that Johnson had hesitated to remove Stanton from the cabinet as soon as the Secretary of War revealed his Radical leanings.⁵³ The former Connecticut newspaper editor also deplored Johnson's undignified speeches, and, like the President's enemies, attributed them to his background in Tennessee politics.⁵⁴ Although believing that Johnson's views on matters of policy were usually sound, Welles felt that he too often lacked the tact and administrative capacity to carry them out.⁵⁵ When Johnson left the White House, Welles, who had served in Lincoln's cabinet, wrote this final judgment:

... No better persons have occupied the Executive Mansion, and I part from them, socially and personally, with sincere regret. Of the President, politically and officially, I need not here speak further than to say he has been faithful to the Constitution, although his administrative capabilities and management may not equal some of his predecessors. Of measures he was a good judge, but not always of men.⁵⁶

Interest in the problems of Reconstruction grew after 1900. Not only were several books devoted to these problems but two national magazines, *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The Century Magazine*, during the early years of the new century each published a series of articles on Reconstruction. Although the *Atlantic* articles, which were published in 1901, were more concerned with various detailed aspects of Reconstruction than with an evaluation of presidential policy or leadership, they did reveal two characteristics of the early twentieth century which affected Andrew Johnson's reputation. First, the fact that the contributors included men of such diverse backgrounds as Thomas Nelson Page, the southern novelist, W. E. B. DuBois, the Negro historian, Woodrow Wilson, and Professor Dunning indicates that men representing all sections and opinions could now reach a national audience. Secondly, several of the writers took the position that the Negro, because of his racial inferiority, was, even in the twentieth century unprepared for the responsibilities of self-government.⁵⁷ Those who held such an opinion

⁵³ Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles*, 3 vols. (Boston, 1911), III, 7, 46, 61, 190, 315, 392.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 439.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 514.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 556.

⁵⁷ Albert Phelps, "New Orleans and Reconstruction," *The Atlantic Monthly*, LXXXVIII (July, 1901), 125; Thomas Nelson Page, "The Southern People During Reconstruction," *ibid.* (September, 1901), 304; William A. Dunning, "The Undoing of Reconstruction," *ibid.* (October, 1901), 449; "Reconstruction and Disfranchisement," *ibid.*, 434.

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could hardly avoid approving Johnson's policy, however they might judge him as a man or leader.

The writers who contributed to the *Century* series, which ran during 1912 and 1913, were generally more prone to pass judgment on Johnson than those who had written for *The Atlantic*. Yet the individual judgments are less significant than the fact that *The Century*, like *The Atlantic*, took care to insure that all viewpoints, southern as well as northern, pro-Johnson as well as anti-Johnson, were represented. The opinions themselves, whether pro or con, were usually repetitions of those that had been voiced earlier. Two authors—Harrison Gray Otis, editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, and George F. Edmonds, formerly a senator from Vermont—felt that Johnson was incompetent and his policy wrong;⁵⁸ two others—John B. Henderson, who was a senator from Missouri had been one of the seven Republicans to vote for Johnson's acquittal, and Clark Howell, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*—subscribed to the "wise policy, poor leader" school;⁵⁹ while three—Hilary Herbert, a Democrat from Alabama, Gaillard Hunt, chief of the Bureau of Manuscripts in the Library of Congress, and Benjamin C. Truman, Johnson's former secretary—presented generally favorable views. Because of its use by later writers as a source for a personal picture of Johnson, the article by Truman, in which the ex-tailor from Greeneville was depicted as neat, temperate, courteous, serious, and hard-working, is perhaps the most important single article of the *Century* series.⁶⁰

The first twentieth century biography, the Reverend James S. Jones' *Life of Andrew Johnson*, published at Greeneville in 1901, while lacking the paraphernalia of scholarship, was in many respects more akin to the works brought out between 1927-1932 than to those of the period in which it appeared. Jones' study, despite its four hundred pages, was somewhat superficial, being for the most part a simple narrative of events interspersed with long quotations, some of almost chapter length,

⁵⁸ Harrison Gray Otis, "The Causes of Impeachment," *The Century Magazine*, LXXXV (December, 1912), 187-95; George F. Edmonds, "Ex-Senator Edmonds on Reconstruction and Impeachment," *ibid.* (April, 1913), 863-64.

⁵⁹ John B. Henderson, "Emancipation and Impeachment," *ibid.* (December, 1912), 196-209; Clark Howell, "The Aftermath of Reconstruction," *ibid.* (April, 1913), 846.

⁶⁰ Hilary A. Herbert, "How We Redeemed Alabama," *ibid.*, 854-62; Gaillard Hunt, "The President's Defense. His Side of the Case, As Told by His Correspondence," *ibid.* (January, 1912), 422-34; Benjamin C. Truman, "Anecdotes of Andrew Johnson," *ibid.*, 435-40.

from Johnson's speeches and papers. The minister pictured his subject as a great and good man whose intimate knowledge of poverty led him to become the "champion of the poor and the defender of the weak," and whose benevolent nature caused him to adopt the conciliatory policy of Abraham Lincoln. Jones excused Johnson's failure by pointing out that the task he faced was so difficult that success would have been highly problematical even under Lincoln's proven leadership. Whereas later sympathetic writers might seek to explain or justify certain unpleasant incidents in Johnson's career, Jones simply ignored them. Describing the inaugural ceremonies in 1865 as "elaborate and imposing," he made no mention of Johnson's unfortunate performance. Similarly, he avoided referring to the Washington's Birthday speech, and, while admitting that some of Johnson's remarks on the "swing-around the circle" were "violent," he included a four-page quotation from the speech in New York, perhaps the most dignified one of the tour, to show "the general tone of Mr. Johnson's addresses."⁶¹

A more analytical and scholarly study of the Reconstruction era was John W. Burgess' *Reconstruction and the Constitution* (1902). Although he balked at giving an unqualified endorsement of the plan of either President, the Columbia University professor of political science and constitutional law, after showing the similarity of Johnson's plan to Lincoln's, declared: "If Lincoln was right so was Johnson, and *vice versa*."⁶² The sameness of the two plans, which had been pointed out before, but never so forcefully, would dispose others, less willing than Professor Burgess to find fault with the revered Lincoln, to accept the wisdom of Johnson's policy. As for Johnson himself, the Columbia political scientist felt that he was honest and patriotic, but incompetent. His over-all judgment was:

The truth of the whole matter is that, while Mr. Johnson was an unfit person to be President of the United States . . . he was utterly and entirely guiltless of the commission of any crime or misdemeanor. He was low-born and low-bred, violent in temper, obstinate, coarse, vindictive, and lacking in the sense of propriety, but he was not behind any of his accusers in patriotism and loyalty to the country. . . . In fact, most of them were pygmies in these qualities beside him . . . he differed with them somewhat in his conception of what measures were

⁶¹ James S. Jones, *Life of Andrew Johnson, Seventeenth President of the United States* (Greeneville, c. 1901), 14, 129, 188-89, 216-20, 317, 320.

⁶² John W. Burgess, *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876* (*The American History Series*. New York, c. 1902), 37.

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Although David Miller DeWitt's *Impeachment and Trial of Andrew Johnson*, published in 1903, was concerned primarily with the injustice of the impeachment rather than with Johnson's policy, it did present the view that time had shown the wisdom of the presidential program. DeWitt regarded the impeachment itself as the culmination of a struggle, begun under Lincoln, between the legislative and executive branches of government. By representing the impeachment as a purely political maneuver, engineered by scheming and vindictive legislators such as Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, and Benjamin F. Butler, DeWitt evoked sympathy for "the stubbornest fighter in civil affairs among the self-made champions of modern democracy."⁶⁴ Although DeWitt had access to neither the Johnson papers in the Library of Congress, which were purchased a year after his book appeared, nor the *Diary* of Gideon Welles, published eight years later, his was the first book-length study backed by sound scholarship to present a generally favorable view of Andrew Johnson. In 1906, three years after DeWitt's *Impeachment and Trial*, Frederick Trevor Hill, in a much shorter work, but which, published in *Harper's Monthly*, reached a much larger audience, took an almost identical attitude toward Johnson and the impeachment.⁶⁵

Johnson fared badly, however, in one of the most important works of the period, James Ford Rhodes' *History of the United States*. Rhodes, whose fifth volume, which with the following one covered Johnson's administration, was published in 1907, has been singled out by later partisans of Andrew Johnson as the prototype of those who unfairly abused the man they defend. Ironically, this writer has also been attacked by anti-Johnson Negro historians because of his low estimate of their race. Actually, Rhodes, a leading twentieth century proponent of the "wise policy, poor leader" school we saw developing in the last two decades of the previous century, did not differ fundamentally from some of Johnson's defenders. The attack on him stems in part from the

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 191-92.

⁶⁴ David Miller DeWitt, *The Impeachment and Trial of Andrew Johnson, Seventeenth President of the United States* (New York, 1903), 1, 625-26, 629, *et passim*.

⁶⁵ Frederick Trevor Hill, "Decisive Battles of the Law. The Impeachment of Andrew Johnson: A Historic Moot Case," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* (New York), CXIII (November, 1906), 327-40.

fame of his work and his stature as a historian, and in part from his harsh treatment of Johnson as a man and leader.

Rhodes, although he belittled Johnson, had little sympathy for the Radical leaders, and less for their program. By giving suffrage to the Negroes, "one of the most inferior races of mankind,"⁶⁶ the Radicals, according to Rhodes, committed "an attack on civilization."⁶⁷ Lincoln's program, on the other hand, he judged a sound one, and recognized that "Johnson's policy substantially followed Lincoln's." However, feeling that Lincoln, wise, tactful, and conciliatory,⁶⁸ had been ideally suited for carrying out this program, and blaming his successor for its defeat, the Ohio-born historian declared:

Of all men in public life it is difficult to conceive of one so ill-fitted for this delicate work as was Andrew Johnson. Born in the midst of degrading influences, . . . brought up in the misery of the poor white class, he had no chance for breeding, none for book education, none for that half-conscious betterment which comes from association with cultivated and morally excellent people. It is said that he never went to school for a day.⁶⁹

Rhodes, admitting that Johnson was "a man of strict integrity," and that he had "intellectual force" and physical courage, charged that the President's good qualities were nullified by his egotism, obstinacy, and tactlessness. By mentioning that Johnson, while military governor of Tennessee, "began to drink to excess," charging him with being intoxicated when he spoke at Cleveland in 1866, and uncritically repeating James Russell Lowell's contemporary charge that the "swing-around the circle" was "an indecent orgy," Rhodes became one of the chief instruments for propagating the view that Johnson was an habitual drinker. Johnson's shortcomings, then, in Rhodes' eyes, outweighed his virtues, and worst of all was his incapacity as a leader. "No one else," according to Rhodes, "was so instrumental in defeating Johnson's own aims as was Johnson himself."⁷⁰

In 1904 the Library of Congress purchased the Johnson manuscripts, a collection of documents covering the years 1831-1875 and containing over 15,000 separate items that Andrew Johnson had care-

⁶⁶ James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*, 9 vols. (New York, 1893-1922), V, 556.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, VI, 35.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, V, 516, 527, 574.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 517.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 519-20, 575, 589, 618.

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fully preserved.⁷¹ One of the first historians to make use of these papers was William A. Dunning, who had long been interested in Reconstruction. One of Dunning's contributions to Johnson scholarship was his discovery, in 1905, that the final draft of the much-praised first message to Congress had been written by the historian George Bancroft.⁷² Although others, Rhodes,⁷³ for example, might see in this discovery evidence of the President's ignorance and incompetence, Dunning, who pointed out that most Presidents, including Washington, had received help on their important papers, did not feel that making use of Bancroft's literary talents reflected adversely on Johnson.⁷⁴

Dunning's major study of the post-war period was his *Reconstruction, Political and Economic*, volume twenty-two of *The American Nation* series, published in 1907, the same year that Rhodes' fifth volume appeared. Although depicting Johnson much more favorably as a man, Dunning belonged to the same basic school of thought as Rhodes. Like Rhodes, Dunning felt that Johnson had tried to carry out Lincoln's policy, which was a wise one based on mercy and conciliation, but that his stubbornness and combativeness alienated the moderate elements of the North whose support he needed and might have won. The Columbia University historian also shared Rhodes' attitude toward the Negro and black suffrage, writing that "Johnson had none of the brilliant illusions" that "beset the radicals as to the political capacity of the blacks," and that the "Freedmen were not, and in the nature of the case could not for generations be, on the same social, moral, and intellectual plane with the whites. . . ."⁷⁵ Even as regards Johnson's character Dunning and Rhodes were to a large degree in agreement, both holding that he was honest, courageous, possessed of native intellectual capacity, stubborn, and combative;⁷⁶ but, whereas Rhodes held that Johnson's drinking, lack of education, obstinacy, and aggressive nature incapacitated him for the presidency, Dunning did not stress these shortcomings.

⁷¹ Robert W. Winston, *Andrew Johnson, Plebeian and Patriot* (New York, c. 1928), 529.

⁷² William Archibald Dunning, "A Little More Light," *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* (Boston), ser. 2, XIX (1905), 400-01.

⁷³ Rhodes, *History*, V, 546.

⁷⁴ Dunning, "A Little More Light," 401.

⁷⁵ William Archibald Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (Vol. XXII of *The American Nation: A History*, Albert Bushnell Hart, ed. New York, c. 1907), 35, 38, 43, 58, 61.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

James Schouler was the first historian to make extensive use of both the Johnson papers in the Library of Congress and Gideon Welles' *Diary*. As a self-avowed defender of Johnson, Schouler was in some ways akin to the Johnson partisans of the late twenties and early thirties, but his fundamental position was more nearly that of Rhodes and Dunning.

Schouler's interest in Andrew Johnson became evident in 1906, when he contributed two articles on the seventeenth President to *The Outlook* and presented a paper on him to the Massachusetts Historical Society. Although he made much of Johnson's honesty, courage, and patriotism,⁷⁷ and declared that his stand on Negro suffrage was "wise and honest,"⁷⁸ as was his policy as a whole,⁷⁹ Schouler, at this time, averred that the President's "wilful and inflexible temper, his adherence to plans impossible of execution, did harm to himself and his supporters, as well as to those southern fellow-citizens whom he had meant to succor." While James Ford Rhodes would not have quarreled with Schouler on these points, a difference in the attitudes of the two historians is apparent in the way they handled Dunning's discovery that Bancroft had written Johnson's first message. Whereas Rhodes used this as evidence of Johnson's ignorance and incapacity, Schouler saw in the use of wise counsel an indication of Johnson's own wisdom, and pointed out that even though Bancroft left the United States early in 1867 to become minister to Prussia, the President's papers continued "to show strength and dignity."⁸⁰

By 1912, having had more time to study the Johnson papers as well as now having available Gideon Welles' recently published *Diary*, Schouler had become convinced that Johnson had been gravely wronged both by his contemporaries and by subsequent writers. In an article published in *The Bookman*, he predicted:

We are just now at half a century's perspective from the period of Abraham Lincoln's tragic administration. . . . Next in order will Andrew Johnson's scarcely less troublesome term come up for posterity's judgment; and if we mistake not, that unhappy Executive,

⁷⁷ James Schouler, "President Johnson and Negro Suffrage," *The Outlook*, LXXXII (January 13, 1906), 69-73; *id.*, "President Johnson's Policy," *ibid.* (February 3, 1906), 264-68; *id.*, "President Johnson's Papers," *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* (Boston), 2 ser., XX (1906), 433.

⁷⁸ Schouler, "Johnson and Negro Suffrage," 71.

⁷⁹ Schouler, "Johnson's Policy," 264.

⁸⁰ Schouler, "Johnson's Papers," 432, 436.

weighted with tremendous responsibilities thrust suddenly and inevitably upon him by fate, will be held in kinder regard by posterity than he was by fellow-countrymen during his lifetime.⁸¹

Shortly after making his prediction, Schouler himself set out to make it come true. It was for the purpose of rendering justice to the seventeenth President that he undertook the *History of the Reconstruction Period*, volume seven of his *History of the United States of America Under the Constitution*, after having planned to carry his work only as far as the end of the Civil War.⁸² Schouler defended Johnson against charges of intemperance, declaring that he could find no evidence that the President was intoxicated on the "swing-around the circle," which Rhodes had called "an indecent orgy," and, while admitting that the Tennessean was not a total abstainer, pointed out that drinking was widespread during and immediately after the war.⁸³ Schouler was also diametrically opposed to Rhodes in his estimate of Johnson's qualification for handling the problems of reconstruction—Rhodes, as we have seen, found it difficult to conceive of anyone so "ill-fitted" for the task, while Schouler countered:

For patriotism, energy and courage, both in winding up the conflict, and in bringing broad statesmanship to the problem of pacification, no Vice-President likely to have been a candidate in 1864 could have been better qualified in the whole country; and Johnson's intimate knowledge, moreover, of the South and of present Southern conditions, made him of invaluable service for reunion. . . .⁸⁴

But Schouler, who charged that Rhodes' chapters on the years 1865-1869 were "quite unjust to Johnson," remained, like the Ohioan, an adherent of the "wise policy, poor leadership" school, judging that "Johnson proved himself a much wiser statesman than politician while in supreme station."⁸⁵ Elaborating on this somewhat, he wrote:

This much maligned Executive was, on the whole, hard to comprehend and his record presents aspects contradictory. . . . He was stubborn in political opinions where he thought himself right, defiant, ready to fight for them; yet those opinions were just, enlightened, and such as only a sound and independent statesman could have formed. . . .

A combatant by temperament and largely wanting in those delicate arts of tactful management which ensure co-operation, this President

⁸¹ James Schouler, "President Johnson and Posterity," *The Bookman*, XXXIV (January, 1912), 498.

⁸² James Schouler, *History of the United States of America Under the Constitution*, 7 vols. (New York, c. 1880-c. 1913), VII, iii.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 68-69, 73; Schouler, "Johnson and Posterity," 501.

⁸⁴ Schouler, *History*, VII, 45.

⁸⁵ Schouler, "Johnson and Posterity," 499.

created difficulties for himself at every step, while trying to carry out ideas of themselves sound and useful.⁸⁶

A significant point of difference between Rhodes and Schouler was that while Rhodes attributed the failure to carry through the presidential program entirely to Johnson's shortcomings, Schouler, although agreeing to a certain extent, placed part of the blame on northern distrust of the President, a "serious misfortune without his fault."⁸⁷ Schouler's position was indicative of the final step in the rehabilitation of Johnson's reputation, a step that would be taken in the late twenties, which was to blame his failure almost entirely on factors over which he had no control.

Another multi-volume history appearing during this period was Ellis Paxon Oberholtzer's *A History of the United States Since the Civil War*. Oberholtzer, whose volume on Reconstruction was published in 1917, was neither as openly anti-Johnson as Rhodes nor as frankly pro-Johnson as Schouler, but, like both, he held that Johnson's policy was moderate and sound, and ascribed its failure to the President's being a "political ignoramus."⁸⁸ In addition to extolling Johnson's honesty and patriotism,⁸⁹ Oberholtzer defended him against the charges of habitual drunkenness, but he regarded the former stump speaker from Tennessee as something of a demagogue.⁹⁰

Although perhaps less well known than the larger histories, one of the soundest works of the period was Benjamin Burks Kendrick's *The Journal of the Joint Committee of Fifteen on Reconstruction*, published in 1914. Kendrick was another who felt that Johnson's ability as a leader did not match the wisdom of his policy. Asserting that Johnson, had he been more willing to make concessions and less abusive in his language, could have won the support of conservative elements in Congress and carried out a moderate program, Kendrick assessed him as ". . . a first-rate stump speaker, a second-rate statesman, and a third-rate politician. . . ."⁹¹

⁸⁶ Schouler, *History*, VII, 142.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

⁸⁸ Ellis Paxon Oberholtzer, *A History of the United States Since the Civil War*, 5 vols. (New York, 1917-1937), I, 29-31, 143, 477.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 210.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 404, 405.

⁹¹ Benjamin Burks Kendrick, *The Journal of the Joint Committee of Fifteen on Reconstruction* (Columbia University Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law, LXII. New York, 1914), 153, 250-51, 253.

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Still another historian who felt that Johnson's policy was correct, but who, like Schouler, while admitting that Johnson had committed political blunders, blamed his failure partly on factors beyond his control, was Lawrence H. Gipson. His article, published in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* in 1915, undoubtedly reached a large audience among professional historians. The author, then teaching history at Wabash College, although he used a large number of other sources, relied heavily on Welles' *Diary*. Fifty years after Johnson took office, Gipson wrote:

. . . as time goes on it seems to testify with increasing clearness that the statesmanship of Johnson was not at fault so much as was the statesmanship of his leading critics. There were many men who far surpassed him in brilliancy of mental qualities, in idealism and culture; but it is to be doubted if there was a man living at that time who possessed a saner insight into the more vital of the national problems. . . . Always in sympathy with the Lincoln program, he promised not to break with it and he kept his promise. . . . It is to be doubted whether Mr. Lincoln with all his splendid gifts, could have won the battle. . . . There was too much misconception and sentimentalism to overcome; party necessity clamored too loudly. . . . The . . . mistakes of Johnson probably weighed little in the balance when compared to the vast opposition that at last developed under a wave of radicalism. . . .⁹²

Clifton R. Hall, author of *Andrew Johnson, Military Governor of Tennessee* (1916), judged Johnson much less generously. While the scope of his study precluded an evaluation of the Tennessean's work as President, Hall made the following estimate of Johnson himself:

His mind was narrow, bigoted, uncompromising, suspicious; his nature solitary and reticent; his demeanor coldly repellent [*sic*] or violently combative. . . . His harsh, domineering intolerance drove from him those who admired his impeccable honesty and patriotism and his brilliant abilities. . . .

He was never able to supply the lack of a good elementary education . . . his spelling and grammar were always faulty.⁹³

George Creel, who as head of Woodrow Wilson's Committee on Public Information during World War I had himself aroused the wrath of Congress by tactless and pugnacious remarks, presented an even more uncomplimentary picture of Johnson in the November, 1926, issue of *Collier's*. Regarding the ex-tailor as an arrogant, egotistical,

⁹² Lawrence H. Gipson, "The Statesmanship of President Johnson: A Study of the Presidential Reconstruction Policy," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, II (December, 1915), 382-83.

⁹³ Clifton R. Hall, *Andrew Johnson, Military Governor of Tennessee* (Princeton, 1916), 218.

and embittered demagogue whose only redeeming qualities were patriotism and courage, Creel gave Seward and Grant credit for influencing Johnson to adopt Lincoln's moderate plan rather than the vengeful course his hatred for the southern gentry disposed him to favor.⁹⁴

In *Notable Men of Tennessee*, written near the turn of the century and published posthumously in 1912, Oliver P. Temple also took an unfavorable, and somewhat unusual, view of Johnson. Although he regarded Johnson's southern policy as "wise and just," Temple, who had unsuccessfully opposed Johnson for Congress in 1847, questioned the President's motives. He charged that the former tailor was a calculating politician, totally devoid of "love and forgiveness," who, after having deserted his native section because he felt his chances for political advancement were better in the North, adopted a policy designed to win southern support and quickly restore the South to the Union in an effort to gain electoral votes for 1868. "In all the wide universe," Temple wrote of Johnson, "he worshipped no deity but that of ambition—the ambition to rise, to become great, to have his name sounded abroad, and to bestride the world."⁹⁵

After 1900 the South was not only able to voice its opinions in national magazines but it also had access to channels of publication through numerous state and regional historical periodicals which had recently appeared. In addition, there were now many competent historians in or from the South, and it was no longer difficult to find publishers for books with a southern outlook. While much interest was evinced in the effects of Reconstruction on the South, many authors were concerned with such detailed aspects of the period that they passed no judgment on Johnson or his policy.

Several of the southern or southern-oriented writers agreed with their northern colleagues who held that Johnson's faults of character had led to the defeat of the magnanimous policy Lincoln had initiated. For example, Walter Lynwood Fleming, perhaps the most important southern writer on Reconstruction during this period, shared views similar to those of James Ford Rhodes. Fleming, in his *Sequel of*

⁹⁴ George Creel, "The Tailor's Vengeance," *Collier's* (New York), LXXVIII (November 27, 1926), 23-24, 43.

⁹⁵ Oliver P. Temple, *Notable Men of Tennessee from 1833 to 1875, Their Times and Their Contemporaries* (New York, 1912), 418-22, 466.

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Appomattox (1919) wrote that Johnson "had few qualifications for the task . . . was ill-educated, narrow, and vindictive. . . ." Believing that the "work begun by Lincoln and Johnson deserved better success," Fleming attributed its failure in large part "to mistakes, bad judgment, and bad manners on the part of the President."⁹⁶ Others who were in general agreement with Fleming were Edward L. Wells, biographer of Wade Hampton;⁹⁷ P. J. Hamilton, an Alabamian who wrote a volume on the Reconstruction period in 1905;⁹⁸ J. S. McNeily, whose study of Reconstruction in Mississippi was published in 1916;⁹⁹ and John Rose Ficklen, whose volume on Louisiana appeared in 1910.¹⁰⁰ A corollary to the general proposition accepted by these writers, and more stressed by the Southerners than by their Northern counterparts, was that Johnson, despite good intentions, had hurt his native section by the blunders which not only defeated a moderate policy but, even more to be deplored, also drove the Radicals to ever harsher measures.

Some of the writings that appeared in southern publications during this period are important because they advanced ideas which would loom prominently in the writings of Johnson's advocates a few years later. In *The Sewanee Review* in 1907, Thomas J. Middleton discussed Johnson's work while in Congress in behalf of the Homestead Act.¹⁰¹ Another study on the same subject, by St. George L. Sioussat, originally published in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* in 1918, was reprinted in the *Tennessee Historical Magazine* two years later.¹⁰² Johnson's work for free land would soon be stressed to show that he was the champion of the common man. The Tennessean's nationalism and patriotism, as contrasted to the sectionalism and political ambitions

⁹⁶ Walter Lynwood Fleming, *The Sequel of Appomattox. A Chronicle of the Reunion of the States* (Vol. XXXII of *The Chronicles of America Series*, Allen Johnson, ed. New Haven, c. 1919), 71, 87, 121.

⁹⁷ Edward L. Wells, *Hampton and Reconstruction* (Columbia, S. C., 1907), 74.

⁹⁸ Peter Joseph Hamilton, *The Reconstruction Period* (Vol. XVI of *The History of North America*, Francis Newton Thorpe, ed. Philadelphia, c. 1905), 187, 220.

⁹⁹ J. S. McNeily, "From Organization to Overthrow of Mississippi's Provisional Government, 1865-1868," *Mississippi Historical Society Publications* (Jackson), Centenary series, I (1916), 80-81, 121.

¹⁰⁰ John Rose Ficklen, *History of Reconstruction in Louisiana* (Johns Hopkins University *Studies in Historical and Political Science*, XXVII, Baltimore, 1910), 98-100. Also approving Johnson's reconstruction policy, but forbearing a judgment of his leadership, were Will T. Hale and Dixon L. Merritt, *A History of Tennessee and Tennesseans*, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1913), III, 696; and John Trotwood Moore and Austin P. Foster, *Tennessee, The Volunteer State*, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1923), I, 535.

¹⁰¹ Thomas J. Middleton, "Andrew Johnson and the Homestead Law," *The Sewanee Review* (Sewanee, Tenn.), XV (July, 1907), 316-20.

¹⁰² St. George L. Sioussat, "Andrew Johnson and the Early Phases of the Homestead Bill," *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, VI (July, 1920), 14-45.

of his contemporaries, were emphasized by Curtis Nettels, of the University of Wisconsin, writing in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* in 1926,¹⁰³ and J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, a prolific southern writer on Reconstruction, whose "The Southern Policy of Andrew Johnson" was published in the *Proceedings* of the State Literary and Historical Association of North Carolina in 1915. Hamilton, when the United States was on the verge of entering World War I and Woodrow Wilson was in the White House, proclaimed:

The time has come for Americans to see him as he was; to hold up his noble qualities for the admiration and emulation of the generations of coming Americans. Never was there a more fitting time to study them; for in him was no divided allegiance, his patriotism was unhyphenated, and for such as he the inspiring phrase, fast becoming a nation-wide motto, of our Southern-born President, the first since Andrew Johnson, was unnecessary. In his doctrine and in his life he exemplified "America First."¹⁰⁴

William L. Frierson, a former solicitor-general of the United States, in a paper published in the *Proceedings* of the Bar Association of Tennessee in 1922, stressed Johnson's courage in much the same way that Lloyd Paul Stryker would a few years later. Frierson, himself a Tennessean, from Chattanooga, avowed:

Contrary to expectation, he took his stand in favor of the pacific policies of Lincoln, including opposition to negro suffrage. In view of his former utterances and the certainty that he was thus bringing on himself the resentment and hostility of party leaders, this was an act of superb courage.¹⁰⁵

Another book deserving brief mention, primarily because it foreshadowed the coming period, is Don C. Seitz's *The Dreadful Decade*, published in 1926. Seitz, in a book flamboyant in style and devoid of the external trappings, as well as internal evidence, of sound scholarship, was unable to see any flaws in Andrew Johnson, blaming Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner for all the evils that befell the nation in the years following the Civil War.¹⁰⁶

The period from 1900 to 1926 is distinguished from the one preceding it by the greater amount of interest shown in Johnson and Recon-

¹⁰³ Curtis Nettels, "Andrew Johnson and the South," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (Durham), XXV (January, 1926), 64.

¹⁰⁴ J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "The Southern Policy of Andrew Johnson," *State Literary and Historical Association of North Carolina Proceedings* (Raleigh, 1915), 80.

¹⁰⁵ William L. Frierson, "The Impeachment and Trial of Andrew Johnson," *Tennessee Bar Association Proceedings* (Memphis, 1922), 126.

¹⁰⁶ Don C. Seitz, *The Dreadful Decade. Detailing Some Phases in the History of the United States from Reconstruction to Resumption* (Indianapolis, c. 1926).

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struction, by the type of writing that prevailed, and by a generally more favorable assessment of Andrew Johnson. These three characteristics are to a large degree inter-related.

The decade of the eighteen-nineties has been called a watershed in American history.¹⁰⁷ During this decade the leadership of the nation passed from men still dominated by the prejudices and animosities of the Civil War and Reconstruction to a younger generation. Equally important from the standpoint of this study was the professionalization of all fields of scholarship that occurred during the last years of the nineteenth century. The formation of the American Historical Association in 1884 had already signalized the coming of a new era in historical writing, although the full effects of the change were not felt until the beginning of the new century. As a consequence both of the passing of the men who had lived during Reconstruction and of the rise of the professional historian, writings about Andrew Johnson tended to be much more objective and scholarly after 1900 than they had been before.

The considerable increase in attention to Johnson and Reconstruction during these years, a matter of notable interest to the student of the tailor-President, was due in part to history's becoming a profession. With a large body of trained historians at work, all phases of the American past, including the Reconstruction era, were subjected to a more careful scrutiny. William A. Dunning, perhaps more than any other individual, aroused interest in the post-war years by leading his students at Columbia University to undertake research on various aspects of Reconstruction. Southerners, by now active in teaching and writing history, as well as in other fields of scholarship and national life, found Reconstruction a particularly attractive and profitable area. There were, of course, factors other than the general increase in historical research that contributed to greater interest in Andrew Johnson. While southern historians were contributing to Reconstruction scholarship, a growing number of southern periodicals were providing publishing outlets for articles, including several about Johnson, bearing on the turbulent years that followed the Civil War. The availability of new sources, principally the Johnson papers purchased by the Library of Congress and Gideon Welles' *Diary*, stimulated some, especially James Schouler, to

¹⁰⁷ Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind; An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880's* (New Haven, 1950), 41-54.

re-examine Johnson's career. Also, since historians characteristically like to look at men and events from the perspective of a round number of years, the passing of the half-century mark from the time of his administration brought increased attention to Johnson.

Professional pride in their objectivity and an absence of emotional involvement in Reconstruction problems, perhaps reinforced by a tendency for each generation to challenge the beliefs of the preceding one, made most writers of the twentieth century reject the Radical view that Johnson was evil incarnate. In their effort to reinterpret Johnson, the historians of the new century were assisted by the Johnson manuscripts and Welles' *Diary*, both of which showed the Tennessean in a more favorable light than had the source material previously available.

A striking feature of the period was the widespread approval of the presidential reconstruction plan, even by those, like Rhodes, who held a low opinion of Johnson himself. In part, this acceptance of the soundness of Johnson's course was a result of Northern awareness, evident even among Republicans as early as the eighteen-seventies, that Radical rule had too often led to corruption and misgovernment in the South. Added to this was a changed attitude toward the Negro, manifest in the theories of the imperialists, who, during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, preached that America had a mission to look after the "backward" races of the world, and in the writings of several historians, including Rhodes, Dunning, and Schouler.¹⁰⁸ From the premise that the Negro was an inferior race, incapable of self-government even in the twentieth century, it followed that Johnson's stand against black suffrage was correct. Significantly, the reformers of this period, the Progressives, were interested in wiping out corruption in government and in regulating big business rather than in fighting for racial equality. Johnson, strictly honest, both personally and in his administration of the affairs of government, himself a workingman and an advocate of measures for the

¹⁰⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York, 1955), 52-56. Woodward feels that northern liberals began to retreat on the race issue during the eighteen-seventies, and that by the turn of the century even former abolitionists were arguing that the Negro's innate inferiority disqualified him from participating as an equal in the white man's civilization. Woodward explains that the liberals, reacting against the demagogic exploitation of old sectional animosities for political purposes, were disposed, in the interest of reconciliation between North and South, to accept a racial theory that justified dropping the Negro question. At the same time, the champions of colonialism were finding the doctrine of the superiority of the white race a convenient rationalization for their position.

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common man, stood more nearly for the things valued by this genera-
tion than did the abolitionists or the Radicals. Johnson also represented
patriotism and national unity, both highly valued by a generation which
had twice seen the country involved in war with a foreign enemy.

The most common estimate of Andrew Johnson during the years
1900-1926 was that he had tried to carry out Lincoln's program, which
was judicious and magnanimous, but that he had failed because of his
own blunders in leadership. This view was accepted by writers who took
such opposite positions on Johnson's character and capacity as James
Ford Rhodes and James Schouler. Although most authors now agreed
both that Johnson was patriotic, honest, and possessed of a great deal
of native intelligence, and that he was stubborn, combative, and tactless,
they differed greatly as to the comparative importance they placed on his
good and bad qualities. Although some, Rhodes for example, implied
that Johnson was a heavy drinker, an increasing number of writers
denied this charge, and explained his moderate use of strong drink by
pointing out that it was a characteristic of the period.

Prior to 1926 there were already indications of the next change
that would occur in judgments of Andrew Johnson. James Schouler and
Lawrence H. Gipson, while ascribing Johnson's failure primarily to his
own mistakes, mentioned the role played by certain factors over which
he had no control. During the coming six-year period pro-Johnson writ-
ers, by stressing these outside influences, would evoke a sympathetic
picture of Johnson as a victim of hate and bad luck rather than of his
own defects.

(To be continued)