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Unionism and Wartime Reconstruction in West Virginia and Tennessee, 1861-1865

By Robert Hodges*



In early 1861, as president-elect Abraham Lincoln prepared to take office, the southern states had already begun leaving the Union, seceding one by one. Once inaugurated, Lincoln faced numerous questions and problems, not the least of which was how to restore the seceded southern states to the Union. Militarily, the question was answered by the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter and Lincoln's ensuing announcement of April 15, in which he declared a state of rebellion and called for troops. Politically, though, the question of restoring the southern states was much more complex. Once the guns started firing, theoretical notions had to give way to practical solutions. In the early years of the Civil War, the process of restoring the seceded states back into the Union depended on each particular state's situation. The process would later be called wartime reconstruction and different methods were prominently tested in Tennessee and Virginia early in the war.

The mountainous areas of western Virginia and East Tennessee were geographically isolated regions with sizeable Unionist populations, and neither was ever far from Lincoln's thoughts on reconstruction. But, while these regions shared many similarities, their wartime reconstruction experience proved remarkably different. Lincoln had hoped to establish Virginia as a model of wartime reconstruction, but events quickly moved beyond his control. In Tennessee, conversely, military strategy and political circumstances prevented Lincoln's hopes of a Unionist state government from coming to fruition until much later in the war. The successes and failures of Lincoln's policies in these states demonstrated the need for a firm federal plan of reconstruction with military support and backed by military

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expediency, a plan which Lincoln instituted in December 1863, with his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction.

During the first few years of the war, Lincoln sought both the subversion of Confederate loyalty in the southern states and the restoration of Union loyalty in occupied areas.¹ He thoroughly believed that secessionists had usurped power in most southern states, and that the majority of southerners favored the Union cause.² For the next few years, Lincoln's wartime reconstruction or restoration policies followed the assumption that a large but silent Unionist majority existed throughout the South. The basis of Lincoln's reconstruction policy, which he first attempted to implement in western Virginia, revolved around the formation of a loyal state government in a seceded state. This Unionist government would serve as a nucleus around which the loyal populace of the state would rally. In Lincoln's view, once the "silent majority" of Unionists realized their strength, they would revolt against the state leaders who had led them to war against the Union, bringing an end to hostilities. But first, the Union army had to secure the regions in the South with the largest Unionist populations.

On May 23, 1861, the Virginia electorate voted overwhelmingly in favor of seceding from the Union. Three days later, Ohio forces, under the command of Major General George B. McClellan, crossed the Ohio River and entered northwestern Virginia near Parkersburg.³ McClellan quickly reassured the Virginians that his aim was to put down rebellion in the region, and not to interfere with slavery. "Understand one thing clearly," McClellan wrote, "not only will we abstain from all such interference but we will on the contrary with an iron hand, crush any attempt at insurrection on their part."⁴ Within a week, Union forces from Ohio, Indiana, and Virginia met Confederate forces in battle in Philippi. In the ensuing battle, the Union forces, totaling a little over 3,000 troops, smashed the Confederate forces, which fled in confusion.⁵ The Battle of Philippi marked the beginning of a land campaign in western Virginia between George McClellan and Robert E. Lee, which lasted until autumn of that year. By September 1861, the Union army had effectively neutralized any Confederate presence in the northwestern part of the state, leaving pro-Union Virginians in control of the region for the remainder of the war.

¹ Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia* (New York, 1982), 258.

² Abraham Lincoln, "Message to Congress in Special Session," July 4, 1861, in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy Basler (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953), 4:437 (hereinafter CWL).

³ Clayton R. Newell, *Lee vs. McClellan: The First Campaign* (Washington, D.C. 1996), 85.

⁴ United States, War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. II, 48-49 (hereinafter OR).

⁵ Newell, *Lee vs. McClellan*, 86-88; Richard Orr Curry, *A House Divided: A Study of Statehood Politics and the Copperhead Movement in West Virginia* (Pittsburgh, 1964), 56-57.

Much like Virginia in the spring of 1861. During the war, Sherman was named the head of the Department of the West in Kentucky and Tennessee, having no desire for a military career. However, in October, 1861, Sherman was ordered to lead the army. Through the late summer and early fall, orders were to go through the hands of Confederate control.⁸ Sherman and his men were Unionists who had no support.⁹ President Lincoln ordered Sherman to Unionists in East Tennessee to coordinate an invasion of the region from both exaggerated fears and poor health. Sherman's health in Cumberland, Sherman was suffering from severe anxiety and depression. Confederate forces and Sherman repeatedly wrote and sought to greatly outnumber his forces in various positions. Indeed, he was in a weak position considering the weak

In mid-November, Sherman was in command. The federal government was to pursue an aggressive policy. General McClellan refused to lead the East Tennessee.¹³ However, Sherman was the commander of the invasion of East Tennessee in February 1862, ending Confederate control.

⁶ Charles Royster, *The Destroyer: Sherman's Campaign in the West* (New York, 1997), 14.

⁷ William Tecumseh Sherman, *March to the Sea* (New York, 1964), 14.

⁸ William T. Sherman to V. Berlin, eds, *Sherman's Campaign* (Chapel Hill, 1999), 14.

⁹ William T. Sherman to Welch Patton, *Unionism*, 59.

¹⁰ Memorandum for a Plea

¹¹ William T. Sherman to V. Berlin, 148-50.

¹² Royster, *Destroyer*, 14.

¹³ William C. Harris, *War and the Frontier* (Pittsburgh, 1997), 30-31.

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urry, *A House Divided: A Study of Statehood*
Virginia (Pittsburgh, 1964), 56-57.

Much like Virginia, Tennessee seceded from the Union during the
spring of 1861. During the late summer of 1861, General William Tecumseh
Sherman was named the second in command to General Richard Anderson
in the Department of the Cumberland, which oversaw the Union war effort
in Kentucky and Tennessee. Sherman accepted the subordinate position,
having no desire for the responsibility of an independent command.⁶
However, in October, Anderson resigned, leaving Sherman in command.⁷
Through the late summer and into the autumn of 1861, Sherman's standing
orders were to go through the Cumberland Gap and free East Tennessee from
Confederate control.⁸ Both sides understood that most East Tennesseans
were Unionists who had repeatedly begged the Lincoln administration for
support.⁹ President Lincoln, who had in June approved a plan to send arms
to Unionists in East Tennessee, in September directed the War Department
to coordinate an invasion of East Tennessee.¹⁰ However, Sherman suffered
from both exaggerated intelligence reports of Confederate troop strength
and poor health. Shortly after taking command of the Department of the
Cumberland, Sherman's mental health began to fail and he suffered from
severe anxiety and depression. Though called upon to move against the
Confederate forces and support the Unionists in East Tennessee, Sherman
repeatedly wrote and said in public that not only did the Confederate forces
greatly outnumber his own, but that they were poised for an attack against his
positions. Indeed, he wondered why the Confederates had not yet attacked,
considering the weakness of his situation.¹¹

In mid-November 1861, General Don Carlos Buell relieved Sherman's
command. The federal government and the northern press expected Buell
to pursue an aggressive invasion of East Tennessee.¹² Both Lincoln and
General McClellan repeatedly instructed Buell to move quickly to secure
East Tennessee.¹³ However, with the full support of General Henry Halleck,
commander of the western theater of the war, Buell invaded Middle
Tennessee in February 1862, leaving the eastern part of the state under
Confederate control.

⁶ Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York, 1993), 93.

⁷ William Tecumseh Sherman, *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman* (New York, 1984), 199.

⁸ William T. Sherman to John Sherman, October 5, 1861, in Brooks D. Simpson and Jean V. Berlin, eds, *Sherman's Civil War: Selected Correspondence of William T. Sherman, 1860-1865* (Chapel Hill, 1999), 143.

⁹ William T. Sherman to John Sherman, January 9, 1862, in *Sherman's Civil War*, 181; James Welch Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee: 1860-1869* (Chapel Hill, 1934), 58-59.

¹⁰ Memorandum for a Plan of Campaign, ca. October 1, 1861, in *CWL*, 4:544-45.

¹¹ William T. Sherman to Salmon P. Chase, October 14, 1861, in *Selected Correspondence*, 148-50.

¹² Royster, *Destructive War*, 97-99.

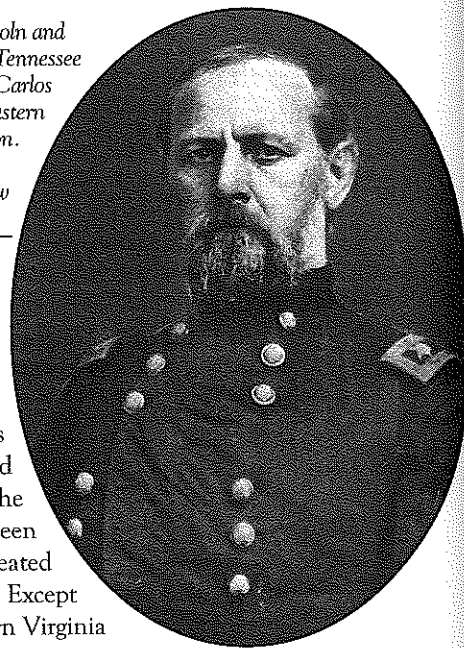
¹³ William C. Harris, *With Charity for All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union* (Lexington, 1997), 30-31.

Despite orders from President Abraham Lincoln and General George B. McClellan to secure East Tennessee for the Union, in early 1862, General Don Carlos Buell invaded Middle Tennessee leaving the eastern part of the state under Confederate occupation.

From Francis Trevelyan Miller, ed. The Photographic History of the Civil War (New York, 1911), vol. 10.

Military decisions during the first few years of the war affected whether wartime reconstruction could occur in pro-Union regions such as East Tennessee and western Virginia. McClellan's invasion of northwestern Virginia could hardly have gone more smoothly. In the initial battle at Philippi, McClellan's green troops thoroughly and decisively defeated the equally green Confederate troops. Except for a few small rebel victories, the western Virginia campaign proved an almost complete Union success, a success which pushed McClellan into the national spotlight and paved the way for his promotion to head of the Army of the Potomac and then General in Chief of all Union armies. In East Tennessee, however, the Union army had very little success. Sherman's anxiety and fears of large Confederate troop numbers stalled any potential invasion. Buell's later decision to invade and occupy Nashville and Middle Tennessee meant that any wartime reconstruction government in Tennessee would be without the aid of the sizeable Unionist population in East Tennessee.

Military advances by the Union army in the early stages of the war failed to return any seceded states to the Union. Despite McClellan's successful invasion and the subsequent creation of a loyal government in Wheeling, the move did not result in the restoration of Virginia. Likewise, Buell's advance on Middle Tennessee at the expense of East Tennessee failed to rally the necessary pro-Union sentiment to return the Volunteer State to the Union. Both of these cases represented efforts by the federal government to initiate a program of wartime reconstruction, to turn back the tide of Confederate support in the seceded states. The successes and failures of wartime reconstruction—a program and process of restoring the southern states to the Union started by Lincoln that evolved into a postwar reconstruction strategy by Andrew Johnson—were most notable in Virginia and Tennessee. Attempts at wartime reconstruction began first in these two states, with their sizable Unionist populations, before anywhere else in the South, and their experiences revealed that state politics and military necessity created a volatile mix of regionalism, divided loyalties and sympathies, and uneven results.



West Virginia

When the Virginia Convention met in April 1861, many Unionists in the western counties came out strongly against it. A convention was held in May at Wheeling in the northern panhandle. It paved the way for a second meeting there in June, after the state electorate overwhelmingly rejected the ordinance of secession. A strong movement for a separate statehood convention was held in Second Wheeling in July. This desire stemmed from a deep animosity between the western and eastern Virginia that had existed since the Revolution. The Unionist cause eventually prevailed. At the convention that met in Wheeling, the government would be a separate state carved from Virginia. The Virginia legislature gave the convention outlined in the U.S. Constitution. Convention leaders decided that all state offices were to be filled by persons supporting the Union. Also, the convention decided to "restore" Unionist government based in Wheeling. Francis Pierpont governed the restored legislature. In July, it elected John S. Wainwright and T. Willey as seats in the United States

¹⁴ Article IV, Section 3: "... of any other state . . . as well as of the Congress."

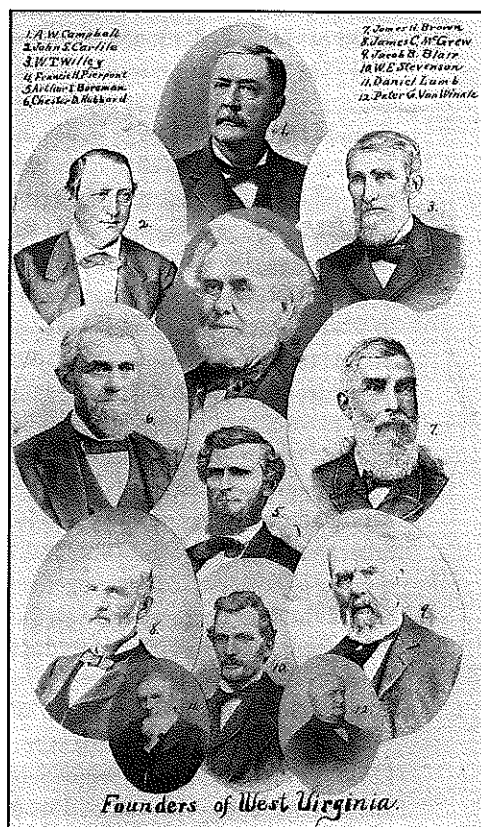
¹⁵ For general overviews see Edward Conrad Smith, *West Virginia: A History* (New York, 1922); and Curry, *An Inside View of the Reconstruction of West Virginia* (New York, 1922); and Curry, *An Inside View of the Reconstruction of West Virginia* (New York, 1922).





West Virginia: "A Precedent for Nothing"

When the Virginia secession convention moved in favor of secession in April 1861, many Unionists from the western counties came out very strongly against it. A convention held in May at Wheeling—in the northern panhandle—paved the way for a second mass meeting there in June, after the state's electorate overwhelmingly passed the ordinance of secession. Initially, a strong movement in favor of separate statehood controlled the Second Wheeling Convention. This desire stemmed from sectional animosity between western and eastern Virginia that had existed since the Revolution. Cooler heads eventually prevailed, convincing the convention that the federal government would accept a new state carved from Virginia only if the Virginia legislature gave its consent, as outlined in the U.S. Constitution.¹⁴ Convention leaders declared vacant all state offices previously held by persons supporting secession. Also, the convention created a new "restored" Unionist government, based in Wheeling, and elected Francis Pierpont governor. After the restored legislature convened in July, it elected John S. Carlile and Waitman T. Willey to Virginia's seats in the United States Senate.¹⁵



Following Virginia's secession in April 1861, representatives from counties in western Virginia convened in Wheeling and established a restored government of Virginia. These early leaders pushed for a separate state from Virginia. From, James Morton Callahan, *Semi-Centennial History of West Virginia* (Charleston, 1913), facing 140.

¹⁴ Article IV, Section 3: "... no new state shall be formed or erected within the Jurisdiction of any other state . . . without the consent of the Legislatures of the States concerned as well as of the Congress."

¹⁵ For general overviews of the statehood movement and politics in western Virginia, see Edward Conrad Smith, *The Borderland in the Civil War* (New York, 1927); Charles Ambler and Festus Summers, *West Virginia: The Mountain State* (Englewood Cliffs, 1958); and Otis Rice and Stephen Brown, *West Virginia: A History* 2d edition (Lexington, 1993). For a more conservative or Democratic viewpoint, see James McGregor, *The Disruption of Virginia* (New York, 1922); and Curry, *A House Divided*. For a pro-Unionist viewpoint, see William Willey, *An Inside View of the Formation of the State of West Virginia* (Wheeling, 1901); Granville Davisson Hall, *The Rending of Virginia: A History* (Chicago, 1901); and George Ellis Moore,

The actions of Unionists in western Virginia in the summer of 1861 presented President Lincoln with a distinctive situation: a section of a seceded state actively wished to remain loyal and in the Union. The strategic implications, both militarily and symbolically, were enormous. McClellan, aware of the great Unionist sentiment in western Virginia, wrote in June 1861 that "we have in our power to unite that people firmly to us forever. I hope the opportunity may not be permitted to pass by."¹⁶ During the first summer of the war, the Lincoln administration made efforts to secure western Virginia allegiance as well as to protect the area from Confederate attack. In the middle of McClellan's invasion of northwestern Virginia, General in Chief Winfield Scott approved of McClellan's "policy of mustering Western Virginians to defend Western Virginia."¹⁷ Secretary of War Simon Cameron notified McClellan that "it is deemed highly important that the Union men in Western Virginia be aided and encouraged in every way possible, and it is desired that you and those under your command should do so as far as you can."¹⁸ Ironically, though, Lincoln had to repeatedly prod Cameron to supply arms to western Virginia Unionists, after finding that Cameron had himself repeatedly ignored requests for such from Senator Carlile.¹⁹

Militarily, controlling western Virginia meant controlling the Ohio River and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Composing over two-hundred miles of border between Ohio and Virginia, the Ohio River was one of the major conduits connecting the eastern and western theaters of war and of the utmost importance to the Union. Similarly, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad ran over two-hundred miles through fourteen of Virginia's northern and western counties. Logistically, both transportation routes played significant roles in the Civil War.²⁰

Symbolically, the restored government of Virginia in Wheeling would be Lincoln's first attempt at wartime reconstruction and hopefully could serve as an example for other seceded states to follow. In August 1861, Attorney General Edward Bates wrote to the reconvened Wheeling Convention that he "rejoiced in the movement in Western Virginia, as a legal, constitutional and safe refuge from revolution and anarchy—as at once and [sic] example and fit instrument for the restoration of all the revolted States."²¹ In the war's first summer, Lincoln had no real model or definite policy regarding the

A Banner in the Hills: West Virginia's Statehood (New York, 1963).

¹⁶ George McClellan to E.D. Townsend, June 11, 1861, in OR 1, II, 674.

¹⁷ Winfield Scott to George McClellan, June 12, 1861, in OR 1, II, 679.

¹⁸ Simon Cameron to George McClellan, June 19, 1861, in OR 1, II, 705.

¹⁹ Abraham Lincoln to Simon Cameron, July 8, 1861, in CWL, 4:443; Abraham Lincoln to Simon Cameron, July 29, 1861, in CWL, 4:464.

²⁰ Richard Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists: Union Soldiers from the Confederacy* (Boston, 1992), 6.

²¹ Edward Bates to A.F. Ritchie, August 12, 1861, in Elizabeth Cometti and Festus Summer, *The Thirty-Fifth State: A Documentary History of Western Virginia* (Morgantown, 1966), 333.

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 Western Virginia (Morgantown, 1966), 333.

concept that became known as reconstruction. Not until his December 8, 1863 message to Congress did Lincoln actually formulate a definite process through which the reconstruction and restoration of seceded states would take place. Reconstruction held dual roles: it framed the policy to readmit the southern states back into the Union and was a method of waging political warfare with the South.

Federal recognition of Virginia's restored government in Wheeling came almost immediately after its inception. Congressional recognition took place on July 4, 1861, in the House of Representatives and on July 13 in the Senate. In the House the only serious opposition came from Henry Burnett of Kentucky, who challenged the Virginians' credentials due to an ordinance passed by Virginia's secession convention that annulled all congressional elections in the state. Despite this challenge, the House overwhelmingly voted in favor of seating John Carlile, William G. Brown, and Kellian V. Whaley.²² The Senate faced a different question. Since state legislatures chose their United States senators, the acceptance of Virginia senators Willey and Carlile would imply recognition of the legitimacy of the restored government. Eventually, over the objections of James Bayard of Delaware and a few others, the Senate acted to seat the two Virginians by a vote of 35-5.²³ Lincoln conferred formal recognition on the restored government during his July 4, 1861 message to Congress, remarking that "the loyal citizens [of western Virginia] have, in due form, claimed its protection. These loyal citizens, this government is bound to recognize and protect as being Virginia."²⁴ Throughout the war, Lincoln and his administration followed this policy of accepting the restored government as the legal government of Virginia. For instance, when Lincoln forbade trade with rebel states in August 1861, he specifically "except[ed] the inhabitants of that part of the State of Virginia lying west of the Allegheny Mountains."²⁵

The Lincoln administration's recognition of the Wheeling government stemmed from the hope that anti-secessionism would continue to grow, attracting Unionists from throughout the state. Lincoln believed that the restored government would serve two purposes. First, he wanted the loyal government to draw enough supporters that it could wrest control of the state from the rebel authorities in Richmond. He also expected that the Wheeling government would ease the transition at the end of the war when the remainder of the state wished to return to the Union. Lincoln anticipated that wartime reconstruction in Virginia would become the precedent that

²² *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong., 1st Sess., July 4, 1861, 5-6. John Carlile would only sit in the House of Representatives for nine days, as he was elected to the Senate by the Wheeling government.

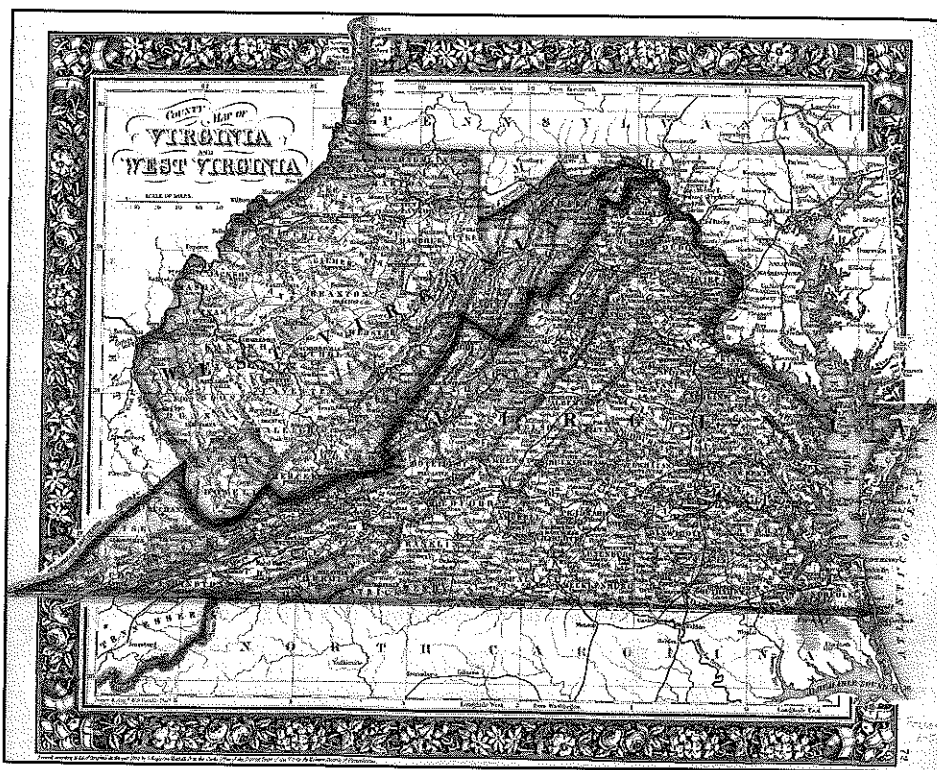
²³ *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong., 1st Sess., July 13, 1861, 109.

²⁴ Abraham Lincoln, "Message to Congress in Special Session," July 4, 1861, in CWL, 4:428.

²⁵ Abraham Lincoln, "Proclamation Forbidding Intercourse with Rebel States," August 16, 1861, in CWL, 4:487.

could be followed by other states to re-enter the Union. His hopes proved futile.

With federal recognition came a renewed desire for separate statehood, which for many delegates at the Second Wheeling convention lay behind their support of the Wheeling government. With the legislature in Richmond unwilling to consent to a division, Virginia's secession gave the people of western Virginia their opportunity. Having no desire to form a loyal Virginia government and set an example for wartime reconstruction, they wanted freedom from the oppressive easterners in Richmond. When the Second Wheeling Convention reconvened in August, it passed a resolution calling for the formation of a new state. Through a popular referendum on the resolution in October, the people of western Virginia voted overwhelmingly in favor of the resolution, while concurrently choosing delegates to a constitutional convention. Thereafter the convention met from November 1861 through February 1862 and drafted a constitution for a separate state,



A statehood movement in western Virginia began after Virginia's April 1861 secession. Lincoln approved the bill on December 31, 1862, and West Virginia was admitted to the Union the next summer. "County Map of Virginia and West Virginia," (Philadelphia, 1863), from Virginia Tech, Special Collections.

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²⁶ Curry, *House Divided*.

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³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3d Sess., Decem



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while the restored legislature passed a bill consenting to the formation of a new state within its borders. In late May 1862, Virginia congressmen Waitman Willey and William G. Brown submitted to Congress a petition for the creation of the new state from the western counties of Virginia, called West Virginia.²⁶

Debate over the West Virginia statehood bill divided the senate and the House into two camps: the moderate Republicans in favor of statehood on one side and the Democrats and radical Republicans on the other. Although there were few slaveowners in western Virginia, the deeply ingrained concept of states' rights permeated the ideology of the people of that region, and thus they had failed to include any method of emancipation into their constitution. Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, the most vocal Senator against the bill, attempted to insert an amendment calling for immediate emancipation. When that failed, and a gradual emancipation clause was adopted instead, Sumner vehemently opposed the new state, saying that "if this condition be adopted, and the bill becomes a law, a new slave state will take its place in our union. . . . Now, by my vote no new slave state shall come into this union, and send Senators into this body with this virus. Enough have our public affairs been disturbed, and enough has the Constitution been poisoned."²⁷ In addition to the slavery argument, some senators, such as Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, also realized immediately the implications that the formation of a new state would have for the long-term validity of the restored government. With the vast majority of Virginia's Unionist territory becoming West Virginia, the restored government would have to move to eastern Virginia, where it would have little, if any, support.

In the House most of the debate centered on the constitutionality of the bill. The comments of Congressman Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania best represented the feelings of most of those who voted in favor of statehood: "We may admit West Virginia as a new state, not by virtue of any provision of the constitution, but under an absolute power which the laws of war give us. I shall vote for this bill upon that theory, for I will not stultify myself by supposing that we have any warrant in the constitution for this proceeding."²⁸

The West Virginia statehood bill passed both houses by the end of the year. The Senate passed the bill on July 14, 1862, by a vote of 23 to 17 with 8 abstentions.²⁹ The House passed the bill on December 10, 1862, by a vote of 96 to 55.³⁰ Most Republicans preferred to emancipate the slaves in West Virginia immediately. However, because the new state's constitutional convention was unlikely to ratify an immediate emancipation amendment,

²⁶ Curry, *House Divided*, 69-72, 100.

²⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong., 2d Sess., June 26, 1862, 2942.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3d Sess., December 9, 1862, 50-51.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2d Sess., July 14, 1862, 3320.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3d Sess., December 11, 1862, 59.

Congress decided to allow slavery to exist with gradual emancipation. Perhaps most importantly, a majority of congressmen viewed the creation of the new state as injurious to the Confederacy, it added to the Union's strength and struck a blow at the solidarity of the southern states.

Lincoln received the bill on December 15, forcing him to make a difficult decision. In his diary, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles commented that the president "thinks the creation of this new State at this time of doubtful expediency."³¹ When Senator Orville Browning of Illinois brought the West Virginia statehood bill to the chief executive, he similarly noted that Lincoln "was distressed at its passage."³² The creation of a new state from a portion of a seceded state, aside from creating an embarrassing situation for the president, undercut the objectives of Lincoln's emerging reconstruction and restoration policy. The existence of a new state, West Virginia, made the restored government of Virginia simply a paper government, lacking support or authority. "The Virginia case," according to Charles Sumner, became "a precedent for nothing, unless it be to make us more careful in the future."³³

Lincoln polled the members of his cabinet, asking for their views on the issue and questioning the constitutionality and expediency of the statehood bill. The cabinet response was evenly split. Secretary of State William H. Seward, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton,³⁴ and Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase favored the new state, while Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, Postmaster General Montgomery Blair, and Attorney General Edward Bates opposed the bill.³⁵ On December 31, 1862, Lincoln signed the bill into law, despite his previous reservations. Following the new state's approval of a gradual emancipation amendment, West Virginia was admitted to the Union on June 20, 1863.

East Tennessee: "The Switzerland of America"

Prior to the Civil War, the regions of western Virginia and East Tennessee had much in common. Both were regions that, due to geography, were cut off from the population and political centers of their respective states. Each supported small farming and small-scale industrial pursuits. The lack of large-scale agricultural production resulted in a small slave population. Generally, the people in these two regions were pro-Union, strongly opposed to

³¹ Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson* (Boston, 1911), 1:191.

³² Orville Hickman Browning, *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning* (Springfield, IL, 1927), 1:596.

³³ Charles Sumner, *Charles Sumner: His Complete Works* (New York, 1969), 11:365.

³⁴ Stanton had replaced Cameron as Secretary of War in January 1862.

³⁵ John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (New York, 1914), 6:300.

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secession, and in the days following the vote for secession in their respective states, held mass meetings denouncing secession.

The eastern portion of Tennessee consisted of a valley surrounded by mountains, leading this region to be known as "the Switzerland of America" during the nineteenth century.³⁶ Middle Tennessee was a large basin surrounded by a rim of hills, while West Tennessee consisted mostly of lowlands, snuggled between the Tennessee and Mississippi rivers.³⁷ Just as the Shenandoah Valley and the Blue Ridge Mountains cut western Virginia off from Richmond, so too did the Cumberland Plateau cut off East Tennessee from the state capital, Nashville. When railroads made their way into East Tennessee in the 1850s, they connected the region economically and culturally not to the rest of the state, but to transportation centers in other states: to the northeast into Southwest Virginia and to the south into Atlanta. The lack of river access and few railroads caused a transportation bottleneck, and cash crops, such as cotton and tobacco, proved unfeasible, leading to a small slave population.³⁸ As a result, few of those in the eastern part of the state supported secession.

During the winter of late 1860 and early 1861, most Tennesseans did not favor secession. In February, Tennesseans from across the state voted against having a secession convention. However, in April, after Lincoln called up troops to put down the rebellion, the mood in Tennessee shifted completely. On May 7, 1861, the state legislature passed a Declaration of Independence from the United States and scheduled a June referendum on secession. Similar to the western Virginia experience, when the Tennessee legislature passed the secession ordinance in May, the Unionists in the eastern portion of the state held a mass meeting in Knoxville condemning the ordinance and urging Tennessee to adopt a policy of neutrality. While southern in outlook, the participants of this meeting held no sympathy for the slaveholding and secessionist ideals of their neighbors in Middle and West Tennessee.

On June 8, 1861, the secession referendum passed decisively. Though sixty-nine percent of voters in East Tennessee voted against secession, large majorities favoring secession in West and Middle Tennessee carried the state. In response, another meeting was called, this time in Greeneville. Intense debate took place between the most radical delegates, who believed that secession was unconstitutional and wanted an armed neutrality, and the conservatives, who argued that open defiance of the Confederacy and secession would invite repression. After three days, the convention produced a petition to be presented to the state legislature in Nashville, asking that the

³⁶ Noel C. Fisher, *War At Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1860-1869* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 16-17.

³⁷ Thomas B. Alexander, "Political Reconstruction in Tennessee, 1865-1870," in Richard O. Curry, ed., *Radicalism, Racism, and Party Realignment: The Border States During Reconstruction* (Baltimore, 1969), 37.

³⁸ Fisher, *War*, 17-19.

eastern counties be allowed to break from Tennessee and form their own neutral Unionist state. This was not the first attempt by East Tennesseans to form a separate state. In 1841, state senator Andrew Johnson, seeing distinct economic advantages for non-slaveholders, proposed the creation of the state of Lincoln, comprising East Tennessee, and adjoining portions of Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia.³⁹ And much like the fate of Andrew Johnson's earlier proposal, once the legislature received the petition from the Greeneville Convention it was promptly referred to a joint committee and no action was ever taken, thus ending East Tennessee's brief separate statehood movement of the 1860s.⁴⁰

Unionism in East Tennessee did not lie dormant, however. In August, congressional elections were held, nominally to pick legislators to send to the Confederate Congress. However, East Tennessee counties comprised almost entirely the first four districts, and Unionists from these counties



Horace Maynard, a U.S. representative from Tennessee's second district, was a staunch Unionist and one of the few southern congressmen to maintain his seat in the House. "Horace Maynard," taken from a portrait by Lloyd Branson, from the University of Tennessee Special Collections.

planned on heading to Washington if elected. The first and second districts elected Unionists, while in the third and fourth districts both the Unionist and the Confederate candidates claimed victory. Horace Maynard of the second district and Andrew Clements of the fourth district traveled to Washington without mishap and were given their seats in the thirty-seventh Congress. George Bridges, the Unionist from the third district, ran into numerous difficulties on his journey to Washington, but arrived and was seated in Congress, nine days before its adjournment. Thomas A.R. Nelson, of the first district, however, was captured by Confederate authorities while traveling through Virginia and, though freed, was required to take an oath of allegiance to the Confederacy, after which he returned home to Tennessee.⁴¹

As soon as the war began, Lincoln called for the liberation of East Tennessee. In a memorandum of military policy written soon after the Union defeat at the

first Battle of Bull Run, Lincoln on Memphis; and from Cincinnati the first year of the war, Lincoln made to seize and hold a portion of Tennessee, near the Mountains. General Sherman's fears of a Unionist-led campaign led him to call back the plan, which ultimately led to his replacement. His expectations for Buell's campaign call your attention is the need for the least possible delay, organizing the campaign into the mountains. Lincoln passed the letter on to Buell, "it is exceedingly discouraging."

Rather than focus military operations on the Union army concentrated in West Tennessee. In early 1862, Union General Ulysses S. Grant moved into Middle Tennessee, forcing the secessionists to Memphis. On March 3, 1862, as military governor of the state, he was short and open to military exercise and perform, with the and functions pertaining to the power to establish all necessary Habeas Corpus).⁴² Johnson's seat after secession, was very confirmed his appointment during the Civil War.

³⁹ Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy* (Chapel Hill, 1932) 310-11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 35, 38-41.

⁴¹ Harris, *Charity*, 26.

⁴² Abraham Lincoln, "Memorandum," 27, 1861, in *CWL*, 4:458.

⁴³ Abraham Lincoln, "Memorandum," 4:544-55.

⁴⁴ William T. Sherman to George B. Sherman, "General Order No. 100."

⁴⁵ George McClellan to D.C. Buell, 1862.

⁴⁶ Henry Halleck to Abraham Lincoln, 1862.

⁴⁷ Abraham Lincoln to Simon Cameron, 1862.

⁴⁸ Edwin Stanton to Andrew Johnson, 1862. See also LeRoy P. Graf and Ralph Haswell, *The*



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first Battle of Bull Run, Lincoln called for "a joint movement from Cairo on Memphis; and from Cincinnati on East Tennessee."⁴² By October of the first year of the war, Lincoln gave an explicit request, that "a movement [be] made to seize and hold a point on the Railroad connecting Virginia and Tennessee, near the Mountain pass called Cumberland Gap."⁴³ However, General Sherman's fears of an imminent Confederate attack on Kentucky led him to call back the planned invasion of the Cumberland Gap, and ultimately led to his replacement with Buell.⁴⁴ McClellan was quite clear in his expectations for Buell's command. "The main point to which I desire to call your attention is the necessity of entering Eastern Tennessee as soon as it can be done," McClellan wrote to Buell, "and I hope that you will, with the least possible delay, organize a column for that purpose."⁴⁵ However, Buell failed to move on East Tennessee. General Halleck supported Buell's hesitancy to act. In January, Halleck wrote Lincoln explaining that a military campaign into the mountains of East Tennessee was doomed to failure.⁴⁶ Lincoln passed the letter on to Secretary of War Cameron, commenting that "it is exceedingly discouraging. As everywhere else, nothing can be done."⁴⁷

Rather than focus military attention on pro-Unionist East Tennessee, the Union army concentrated on Middle and West Tennessee. In February 1862, Union General Ulysses S. Grant captured forts Henry and Donelson in West Tennessee. In early February 1862, Buell moved south from Kentucky into Middle Tennessee. Union forces occupied the state capital of Nashville, forcing the secession government to evacuate the city and move to Memphis. On March 3, Lincoln appointed Senator Andrew Johnson as military governor of the state. The letter conveying this appointment was short and open to much interpretation, giving Johnson "authority to exercise and perform, within the limits of the state . . . the powers, duties, and functions pertaining to the office of Military Governor (including the power to establish all necessary offices and tribunals, and suspend the writ of Habeas Corpus)."⁴⁸ Johnson, as the only southern senator to not give up his seat after secession, was very popular in the North, and the Senate promptly confirmed his appointment as the first military governor of a seceded state during the Civil War.

⁴² Abraham Lincoln, "Memoranda of Military Policy Suggested by the Bull Run Defeat," July 27, 1861, in *CWL*, 4:458.

⁴³ Abraham Lincoln, "Memorandum for a Plan of Campaign," October 1, 1861, in *CWL*, 4:544-55.

⁴⁴ William T. Sherman to George H. Thomas, November 12, 1861, in *OR* 1, IV, 353-354; William T. Sherman, "General Orders No. 1," November 1861, in *OR* 1, VI, 358.

⁴⁵ George McClellan to D.C. Buell, November 12, 1861, in *OR* 1, IV, 355.

⁴⁶ Henry Halleck to Abraham Lincoln, January 6, 1862, in *OR* 1, VII, 533.

⁴⁷ Abraham Lincoln to Simon Cameron, January 10, 1862, in *CWL* 5:95.

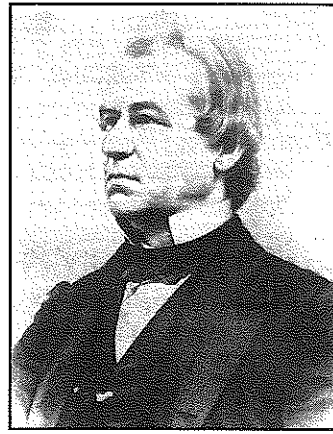
⁴⁸ Edwin Stanton to Andrew Johnson, March 3, 1862, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, eds. LeRoy P. Graf and Ralph Haskins (Knoxville, 1979), 5:177.

While Lincoln had a general idea of the steps Johnson should take to facilitate the restoration of civil government, his letter gave Johnson enough latitude to take whatever steps he deemed necessary. Lincoln had always held the view that the southern states had never left the Union, but rather their leaders had committed treason by attempting to secede. As in Virginia, Lincoln hoped to foster enough Unionist support to create another loyal civil government and reverse the tide of secessionist sentiment. But since much of Tennessee was a battleground, any newly created civil government would have to run under the auspices of the military. Thus, Lincoln's appointment of a governor came through his powers as commander in chief of the army. He created a military governorship out of necessity during time of war, which explains why Lincoln gave Johnson the rank of brigadier general along with his appointment.

Unfortunately for Lincoln, the vagueness of the appointment created problems, especially since it failed to clarify the military chain of command. Almost immediately Johnson and the military commanders in Tennessee disagreed over priorities. Johnson, wanting command of a large number of troops in order to facilitate the restoration of civil order, asked General Buell for support. Buell responded that his troops were free to help Johnson, but "any requisitions which would involve the movement of troops must of course be dependent on the plan of military operations against the enemy."⁴⁹ Clearly not the response Johnson had expected, he sent a telegram to Secretary of War Stanton, asking

*to be informed upon whom and to what extent I can rely for the military forces necessary to execute such order or orders as in the discharge of my official duties I may deem expedient, prudent, and proper to make. I am putting the State machinery in motion as fast as possible.*⁵⁰

In July 1862, hoping to diffuse the situation, Lincoln issued Johnson a mild rebuke. "Do you not, my good friend, perceive that what you ask is



In March 1862, Abraham Lincoln appointed Tennessee Senator and Greeneville native Andrew Johnson as military governor of the state. Johnson clashed with Union military leaders throughout the war, and after the war he continued Lincoln's reconstruction policies. Photograph of Andrew Johnson, 1866, from the University of Tennessee Special Collections.

⁴⁹ Don Carlos Buell to Andrew Johnson, March 19, 1862, in OR 1, X, pt. 2, 47.

⁵⁰ Andrew Johnson to Edwin Stanton, March 21, 1862, in OR 1, X, pt. 2, 56.

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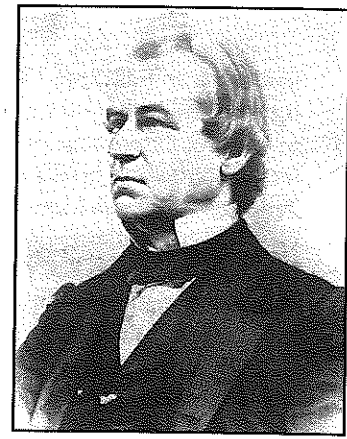
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simply to put you in command in the West?" Lincoln asked Johnson. "I do not suppose you desire this. You only wish to control in your own localities; but this you must know may derange all other posts."⁵¹ The next day, Stanton told Johnson that "the President hopes this will be satisfactory to you and that you will use efforts to prevent any disputes or collision of authority between your subordinates and those of General Buell."⁵²

Johnson did not devote all of his time to bickering with Union generals. His first official act as military governor was to appoint staunch Unionists to important state positions. He then invoked a clause in the Tennessee constitution requiring all officeholders to take an oath of allegiance to the U.S. Constitution. When members of the Nashville city council opted against taking the oath, Johnson removed all of them and replaced them with Unionists. In May, though, Johnson made an embarrassing mistake when he allowed an election to take place for a circuit judge. The election pitted Turner S. Foster, a secessionist, against Manson Brien, a Unionist. Believing the election to be unauthorized, many Unionists failed to vote, thus allowing Foster to win. Angry over the results, Johnson had Foster arrested, later releasing him and certifying his commission as judge.⁵³

The Foster election did not dampen either Lincoln or Johnson's mood towards reconstruction for long. In July, Lincoln asked Johnson about the prospects for an election under Union auspices in Tennessee: "If we could, somehow, get a vote of the people of Tennessee and have it result properly it would be worth more to us than a battle gained. How long before we can get such a vote?"⁵⁴ Johnson wrote back that "as to an expression of public opinion, as soon as the rebel army can be expelled from East Tennessee there can and will be an expression of public opinion that will surprise you."⁵⁵ Clearly, both Johnson and Lincoln believed that only with the liberation of East Tennessee could any real semblance of a Unionist civil government be restored.

In September 1862, after the Union victory at Antietam in Maryland, Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. He was aware that emancipation would be unpopular with the Democrats, in border states, and in states undergoing reconstruction, such as Tennessee. Lincoln's directive left Tennessee Unionists bewildered and dismayed. Thomas A.R. Nelson, formally elected as a Unionist congressman, renounced his Unionist beliefs and issued a pamphlet attacking the Proclamation.⁵⁶ In December,

⁵¹ Abraham Lincoln to Andrew Johnson, July 11, 1862, in CWL 5:313.

⁵² Edwin Stanton to Andrew Johnson, July 12, 1862, in OR 1, XVI, pt. 2, 135.

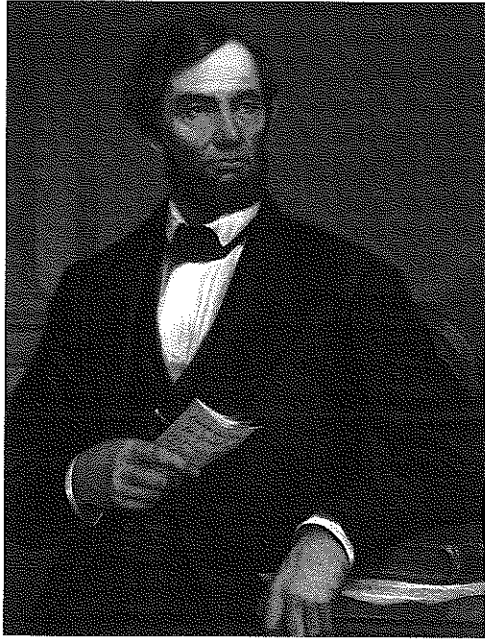
⁵³ *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 5:418n, 577n.

⁵⁴ Abraham Lincoln to Andrew Johnson, July 3, 1862, in CWL, 5:303.

⁵⁵ Andrew Johnson to Abraham Lincoln, July 10, 1862, in *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 5:550.

⁵⁶ Thomas A.R. Nelson, "Address of Hon. T.A.R. Nelson to the People of East Tennessee," October 3, 1862, in OR 1, XVI, pt. 2, 909-911.

Andrew Johnson and other Unionists issued a petition to Lincoln, asking that Tennessee not be included in the final Proclamation, arguing that "the whole of East Tennessee portions of West Tennessee and all of Middle Tennessee excepting a few miles around our Capital are in possession of the rebel army and where it is not in possession, the Union army is in occupation."⁵⁷ Representative Horace Maynard wrote a scathing letter to Lincoln, accusing him of supporting the radical ideology of emancipation at the expense of his loyal citizens in Tennessee.⁵⁸ Fearing the loss of Unionist support throughout the state, Lincoln exempted Tennessee from the final Emancipation Proclamation issued on January 1, 1863.



Many Unionists in East Tennessee opposed the idea of emancipation of slaves. In the final version of the Emancipation Proclamation, President Abraham Lincoln exempted Tennessee and some other states. From Evert A. Duyckinck, *Portrait Gallery of Eminent Men and Women of Europe and America* (New York, 1873), vol. 2.

In compliance with Lincoln's call for elections, Governor Johnson authorized congressional elections in West Tennessee, in the areas around Memphis under Union control. A raid by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest disrupted the initial voting in December 1862, with only a few counties opening their polls. The following month, free of Confederate raids, a more successful vote took place in the ninth district, with about one-tenth of the voters taking to their polling places. Alvin Hawkins, a strong Unionist, won the election but left the state before Johnson could certify his election and Congress refused to seat him, claiming that too small of a portion of the ninth district had elected him.⁵⁹

The Union victory at the Battle of Murfreesboro in early January 1863 brought multiple requests from Lincoln asking Johnson his "opinion on the effects of the late battles about Murfreesboro, upon the prospects of Tennessee."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Andrew Johnson, "Petition to the President," December 4, 1862, in *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 6:85-86.

⁵⁸ Horace Maynard to Abraham Lincoln, October 1, 1862, in Harris, *Charity*, 55.

⁵⁹ Harris, *Charity*, 50.

⁶⁰ Abraham Lincoln to Andrew Johnson, January 10, 1863, in *CWL*, 6:53.

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sued a petition to Lincoln, asking for a Proclamation, arguing that "the West Tennessee and all of Middle Tennessee and our Capital are in possession of the Union army is in possession, the Union army is in possession."⁵⁸ Fearing the loss of Unionist support, Governor Johnson emptied Tennessee from the final gubernatorial election on January 1, 1863.

For gubernatorial elections, Governor Johnson authorized congressional elections in the West Tennessee, in the areas around Memphis under Union control. A raid by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest disrupted the initial voting in December 1862, with only a few counties opening their polls. The following month, free of Confederate raids, a more successful election took place in the ninth district, in which about one-tenth of the voters went to their polling places. Alvin Watkins, a strong Unionist, won the election but left the state before Johnson could certify his election. Congress refused to seat him, claiming that too small of a portion of the ninth district had elected him.⁵⁹

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⁵⁸ December 4, 1862, in *Papers of Andrew*

⁵⁹ 1862, in Harris, *Charity*, 55.

⁶⁰ 1863, in *CWL*, 6:53.

Johnson reminded Lincoln that the "Eastern portion of the State must be redeemed before confidence can be inspired with the mass of the people that the Govt has the power to assert & maintain its authority in Tennessee."⁶¹ Throughout the summer of 1863, General William Rosecrans, who succeeded Buell as commander of Union forces in Tennessee, cleared Middle and West Tennessee of the Confederate military.

Military success led Unionists from throughout Tennessee to organize a convention to discuss the future of the state. The convention, meeting in Nashville on July 1, broke down along pre-war political lines, with the Unionists from the Middle and West wanting to hold an election for governor, in order to bypass their old political foe Johnson, while those from the East expressed their support for Johnson. Eventually, the convention agreed to support Johnson and ask his permission to hold elections for state legislators. However, following the convention a number of conservatives from the Middle and West took different steps. Conservative Unionists, led by Emerson Etheridge, a former congressman and friend of Lincoln, held an election without Johnson's approval, which elected former Whig governor and Mexican War hero William Campbell governor. Etheridge then asked Lincoln to approve the election of Campbell. Lincoln, aware Campbell's approval would repudiate Johnson, denied the request thus foiling the plans of the conservative Unionists.⁶²

In September 1863, General Ambrose Burnside led Union troops south from Kentucky into East Tennessee, occupying Knoxville. Later in the month, Rosecrans pushed the Confederates under General Braxton Bragg from Chattanooga into northern Georgia, which seemingly secured Union control of East Tennessee. "All Tennessee is now clear of armed insurrectionists," an elated Lincoln wrote to Johnson in early September. "You need not be reminded that it is the nick of time for re-inaugurating a loyal State government. Not a moment should be lost." In typical Lincoln fashion, however, he would not dictate the manner in which reconstruction should take place, just that it should "be the work of such men only as can be trusted for the Union. Exclude all others, and trust that your government, so organized, will be recognized here, as being the one of republican form."⁶³ Unfortunately, Lincoln's elation proved premature.

In late September 1863, Bragg rallied against Rosecrans and besieged Chattanooga. Meanwhile, Confederate forces under the command of General James Longstreet threatened to take back Knoxville. Lincoln removed Rosecrans and replaced him with Ulysses S. Grant. By the end of December, Grant had defeated Bragg and driven the Confederates back

⁶¹ Andrew Johnson to Abraham Lincoln, January 11, 1863, in *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 6:114.

⁶² Harris, *Charity*, 107-109.

⁶³ Abraham Lincoln to Andrew Johnson, September 11, 1863, in *CWL*, 5:440.

into Georgia. Further north, Union troops secured Knoxville and repelled Longstreet's forces.⁶⁴

The tone of reconstruction in Tennessee changed dramatically in 1864. With the virtual elimination of Confederate threats, and the complete liberation of East Tennessee in May, Lincoln and his administration were able to leave the mechanics of reconstruction in the hands of Johnson. However, the assembly of a loyal government proved difficult for the military governor. Pre-war political and sectional strife, which had been simmering while Tennessee had been under Confederate control, began taking precedence over Unionism. Johnson feared that returning Confederates would derail his attempts at reconstruction, and he strongly distrusted his old political foes from West and Middle Tennessee. Indeed, reconstruction policy in 1864 and 1865 was characterized by rapidly growing animosity between Johnson, his new allies, and his old political foes.

One of the most polarizing issues was Lincoln's plan for reconstruction, which he delivered to Congress in December 1863. Lincoln's Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction set a loose policy for seceded states to be admitted back into the Union. This simple and concise plan appealed to many constituencies. It required an oath of future loyalty of all men wishing to participate in voting and civil government, while also requiring their acceptance of the laws of Congress and the proclamations of the president during the war dealing with emancipation. It also required that a set number of citizens, at least equal to ten percent of the voting population from the 1860 presidential election, must take the oath in order for the new state government to be "recognized as the true government of the State." Only high ranking Confederates, individuals who had resigned from the U.S. military to join the Confederacy, or those who treated black soldiers and their white officers as anything other than prisoners of war were excluded.⁶⁵ Lincoln hoped his plan would gain acceptance throughout the nation. In Tennessee, though, the insistence upon emancipation, along with Johnson's fears of conservative state governments almost derailed Lincoln's reconstruction plan.

Following Lincoln's proclamation, mass meetings occurred across the state, in cities such as Nashville and Memphis. Organizers of these gatherings called for elections and reconstruction under Lincoln's plan. Johnson issued a proclamation ordering elections for county officials on March 5, 1864. But, fearing the effect of Confederate sympathizers, Johnson mandated a much more stringent oath than that published by Lincoln. Johnson's oath required that the individual "ardently desire the suppression of the present

⁶⁴ Harris, *Charity*, 112, 217.

⁶⁵ Abraham Lincoln, "Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction," December 8, 1863, in *CWL*, 7:53-56.



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on troops secured Knoxville and repelled

Tennessee changed dramatically in 1864.

Confederate threats, and the complete

, Lincoln and his administration were able

uction in the hands of Johnson. However,

proved difficult for the military governor.

trife, which had been simmering while

derate control, began taking precedence

at returning Confederates would derail his

strongly distrusted his old political foes

Indeed, reconstruction policy in 1864 and

growing animosity between Johnson, his

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ues was Lincoln's plan for reconstruction,

December 1863. Lincoln's Proclamation

et a loose policy for seceded states to be

his simple and concise plan appealed to

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er than prisoners of war were excluded.⁶⁵

in acceptance throughout the nation.

ence upon emancipation, along with

governments almost derailed Lincoln's

ion, mass meetings occurred across the

Memphis. Organizers of these gatherings

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for county officials on March 5, 1864.

ate sympathizers, Johnson mandated a

t published by Lincoln. Johnson's oath

ly desire the suppression of the present

esty and Reconstruction," December 8, 1863, in

insurrection and rebellion."⁶⁶

The public outcry against

Johnson's oath was immediate.

Conservative Unionists and

former rebels who had already

taken Lincoln's oath believed

that Johnson was merely being

vindictive, and that his oath

was an attempt to push forward

an even more radical plan of

reconstruction.

By the end of February

1864, Lincoln received the

first direct complaints. In a

cursory response to a concerned

Tennessean, Lincoln wrote:

"In county elections you had

better stand by Gov. Johnson's

plan, otherwise you will have

conflict and confusion."⁶⁷ A

week later, Lincoln responded

to another concerned Unionist

in Tennessee, this time at more

length. Lincoln wrote that "the

proclamation of Governor

Johnson . . . is entirely satisfactory

to me as a test of loyalty . . . and

coming from him would better

be observed and followed."

Lincoln then contended that no

conflict existed between his and

Johnson's oaths, and that anyone

who took his oath "should not

have any objection to taking that

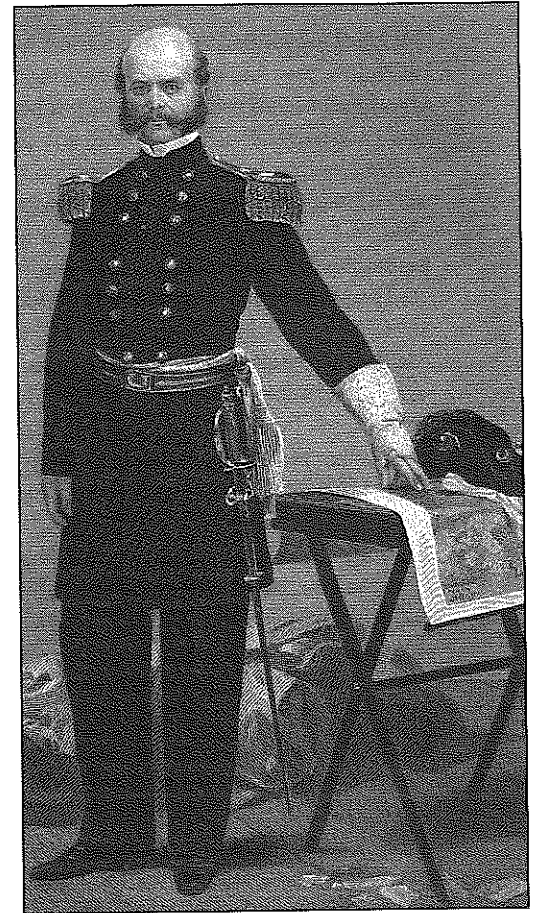
prescribed by Governor Johnson

as a test of loyalty." Lincoln finished, saying that he had "seen and examined

Governor Johnson's proclamation, am entirely satisfied with his plan, which

is to restore the State government and place it under the control of citizens

truly loyal to the Government of the United States."⁶⁸ Voter turnout for the



In the fall of 1863, Union General Ambrose Burnside led Union troops into East Tennessee and occupied Knoxville. With help from General William T. Sherman, Union forces pushed the Confederates, led by General James Longstreet, out of East Tennessee. From Evert A. Duyckinck, National Portrait Gallery of Eminent Americans (New York, 1862), vol. 2.

⁶⁶ Abraham Lincoln, "Proclamation Ordering Elections," January 26, 1864, in *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 6:594-95.

⁶⁷ Abraham Lincoln to Warren Jordan, February 21, 1864, in *CWL*, 7:196.

⁶⁸ Abraham Lincoln to Edward H. East, February 27, 1864, in *CWL*, 7:209.

March 5 election was mixed at best, with heavy turnout in Unionist regions including East Tennessee where Longstreet was still present. Over 40,000 Tennesseans cast votes, with officials being elected in over two-thirds of the state's counties.⁶⁹

Conventions and mass meetings continued throughout 1864. Most meetings were organized either by conservative Unionists, including Thomas A.R. Nelson, or by Johnson's more radical allies. Political discourse became even more divisive after the June nomination of Johnson for vice president, as Lincoln's running mate. The selection of Johnson was designed to draw northern Democrats to Lincoln. The addition of Johnson, a pre-war Democrat, to the Lincoln ticket signified a unity between the two parties, and symbolized a common desire to protect the nation. In Tennessee, conservatives supported Democrat challenger George McClellan while Johnson's supporters favored the re-election of Lincoln. Many conservatives believed that Johnson was carrying on a vendetta against his pre-war adversaries, as evidenced by Johnson's oath and inflexibility towards conservative aims. Critics also contended that Johnson had little faith in either the ability or desire of the conservatives to create a state civil government agreeable to Lincoln and Congress. About 35,000 Tennesseans voted in the November 1864 national elections, with 30,000 supporting Lincoln. However, Congress rejected the state's electoral votes, arguing against their legitimacy.

After the victory of the Lincoln-Johnson ticket in the national elections in November, radicals in East Tennessee called for a December meeting in Nashville to initiate a complete reorganization of civil government. John Bell Hood's brief invasion and the subsequent Battle of Nashville in late December 1864 delayed the meeting until January 9, 1865. Debate began immediately as to the nature of the meeting, whether it was a constitutional convention or just a meeting to nominate individuals for a constitutional convention. After three days of deadlock, Johnson gave a long speech urging the members to draft amendments to the Tennessee state constitution, specifically one that abolished slavery. Thereafter, leaders drafted a constitutional amendment that eradicated slavery, established voting requirements, ordered elections for state government officials, and nominated William G. Brownlow, a prominent East Tennessee newspaper editor and ardent anti-secessionist, for governor.⁷⁰ Johnson immediately sent a telegram to Lincoln, informing him that the convention had "unanimously adopted an amendment to the Constitution forever abolishing Slavery in the State and denying the power of the Legislature passing any law creating property in man."⁷¹ Lincoln was thrilled, even if his message was exceedingly short. "Yours announcing

⁶⁹ Alvan C. Gillem to Andrew Johnson, March 15, 1864, *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 6:645-46.

⁷⁰ Alexander, "Reconstruction," 43-46; Andrew Johnson to Abraham Lincoln, January 13, 1865, *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 7:404.

⁷¹ Johnson to Lincoln, January 13, 1865, *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 7:404.

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⁷¹ 1864, *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 6:645-46.
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Andrew Johnson, 7:404.

ordinance of emancipation received," he wrote. "Thanks to the Convention
and to you."⁷²

Conservative Unionists in Tennessee denounced the convention and its
accomplishments, arguing that it had no authority as a constituent assembly
and thus could not make constitutional changes. Against the wishes of the
conservatives, however, Tennessee voters went to the polls to consider the
proposed amendments. In February 1865, the constitutional amendments
were ratified, by a vote of 25,293 to 48. Clearly only a handful of conservatives
voted, believing the election to be illegal. The following month Brownlow
was elected governor, and on April 5, 1865, he was sworn in by the new
legislature. The radical Unionist state government had replaced the military
governorship, thus restoring loyal government to a seceded state.⁷³

Conclusion

Wartime reconstruction in Tennessee influenced the process of
reconstruction in other seceded states after the war. Andrew Johnson, a pre-
war Democrat, but a staunch Unionist, worked hard to punish his pre-war
enemies, many of whom had been from the planter-elite class, had favored
secession and became Confederates. He believed that the best method to
attack these people was to embrace and espouse a radical agenda. As one
example, Johnson initially rejected the emancipation of slaves and asked
for an exemption for Tennessee, but he later realized that the directive was
a weapon against his foes. In October 1864, he told a gathering of blacks
in Nashville that: "I will indeed be your Moses, and lead you through the
Red Sea of war and bondage, to a fairer future of liberty and peace."⁷⁴ As
his later policies as president illustrated, Johnson was no Moses to the freed
slaves. Rather, he was an opportunist who viewed a radical policy on race
as political power over the landed aristocracy, who had sown the seeds of
secession. Because of his tough and controversial stance as military governor,
the radical Unionists gained a firm grip on the state civil government, which
led to the abolition of slavery in Tennessee and later black enfranchisement.

Wartime reconstruction occurred differently in West Virginia. When
confronted with the opportunity to split from Virginia early in the war, the
Republican leaders who advocated such a policy gained great popularity and
support, as did their agenda. However, once statehood came to fruition,
leaders in the new state embraced conservative-to-moderate policies. The
swing of the pendulum from Republican policies to Democratic conservatism
was a reaction to the radical policies of the Lincoln administration and the
Republican-led Congress. As the new state never officially left the Union, no

⁷² Abraham Lincoln to Andrew Johnson, January 14, 1865, in *CWL*, 8:216.

⁷³ Alexander, "Reconstruction," 47-51.

⁷⁴ *Nashville Times and True Union*, October 25, 1864, in *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 7:252-53.

military governor was necessary, and thus there was no central administration figure in West Virginia to coordinate Republican policy. Accordingly, the voters determined the new state's political future.

In both West Virginia and East Tennessee, Union military occupation was a crucial part of wartime reconstruction. At the outset of the war, in early 1861, Union troops quickly and decisively occupied the mountains of western Virginia and effectively held the region for the entire war. McClellan's occupation of western Virginia was a matter of military and strategic expediency. The Unionists in this region held a decided majority and they actively vocalized their adherence to the Union as well as their distaste for secession. In light of this strong Unionist sentiment, plus the military necessity of securing the Ohio River, McClellan had no choice but to occupy western Virginia. After 1861, no major campaign took place in what became West Virginia, and the Confederates basically conceded the region to the Union. With the exception of internecine conflicts, the Civil War, militarily, left West Virginia alone after the first year. This peace gave the leaders of the restored government of Virginia the perfect opportunity, for which they had been waiting for decades, to form West Virginia.

Wartime reconstruction in Tennessee differed from the experience in West Virginia. Like West Virginia, East Tennessee was a hotbed of strong Unionist sentiment and held a long-standing desire to split with the rest of the state. In the early years of the war, Confederate troops occupied East Tennessee, but Union forces were slow to respond. Lincoln repeatedly called for the liberation of East Tennessee, hoping to gain the support of the Unionists there, but his generals repeatedly argued against these orders or flatly ignored them. From the perspective of the Union generals, the war was in West and Middle Tennessee, where the Confederate armies lay; the generals who fought the war failed to see the liberation of the Unionists in East Tennessee as a priority.

Lincoln's goal for his wartime reconstruction policies was twofold: to militarily aid in winning the war and to politically ease the transition back into the Union after the war ended. The Union won the war, but the importance of Lincoln's reconstruction policies in Tennessee and West Virginia on the final military victory is debatable. However, Lincoln's wartime reconstruction policies created significant political rifts. While the creation of West Virginia may have been a moral and political victory for Lincoln, it was a failure for reconstruction; it broke the state in two. Clearly, a lack of substantial Confederate activity in western Virginia, combined with a lack of military oversight, allowed the separate statehood movement to move along unmolested. In Tennessee, conversely, wartime reconstruction demonstrated the important connection between military intervention and reconstruction. The separate statehood movement ended quickly and decisively in East Tennessee, preventing another embarrassing situation for



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the Lincoln administration. The continued military activity in the state, however, required greater federal oversight of the entire reconstruction process, leading to a much more successful outcome, even if it did require almost the entire war to achieve that success.

During the Civil War, Tennessee and Virginia served as the first test-cases for how to restore seceded states to the Union. Both had mountainous regions with few slaveholders that became pro-Union strongholds in the 1860s. Yet, despite these similarities, each state had a different experience with wartime reconstruction. Lincoln had hoped that Unionists in western Virginia would create a loyal state government that would be the model for other seceded states undergoing wartime reconstruction. Instead, western Virginia opted to separate from the rest of Virginia during the war and form their own state, escaping wartime and postwar reconstruction. Because East Tennessee Unionists did not separate their region from the rest of Tennessee during the war, Tennessee became a model of Lincoln's reconstruction policy. Since Tennessee underwent the reconstruction process during the war, it became the first seceded state readmitted to the Union, thereby escaping postwar reconstruction. Thus, each state had unique experiences in the difficult path back from secession, political division, and the realities of military occupation.