

**The Resurrection of Andrew Johnson:
His Return to Tennessee Politics**

Aaron Scott Crawford

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Department of History

Master of Arts

William C Davis
James I. Robertson
Ronald Nurse

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Aaron Crawford

Resurrection of Andrew Johnson

Abstract

Andrew Johnson returned from the Presidency to a harsh political environment in Tennessee. Immediately upon his return, he set out to win a Senate seat in his state. Although unsuccessful, he ran for office two more times, finally achieving success in 1874. His motivation lay in vindication over his impeachment, which destroyed and ruined his Presidency. However, other issues emerged as well, particularly that of the ex-Confederate military leaders who dominated the state's political scene during the 1870s. Johnson successfully subverted them twice. As a spoiler in 1872, he stopped Confederate General Cheatham from winning the congressional at-large seat and when he won the Senate seat in 1875. Johnson died after only one appearance in the Senate in 1875.

For my Father
William B. Crawford
(1938-1999)
and Lisa Paige

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Introduction

An impeached president desperately arguing that his tenure mattered. Describing that president, the periodical remarks that he is “bitter and hopeful; the spleen and the heart there must always be a sequel, some testament to his boundless resiliency.” The president to whom they are referring is William Jefferson Clinton and the year is 2002. The editors of *Newsweek* are perplexed at what Clinton will do. Nearly all of his predecessors within memory have been too old, too politically spent, or too ill to reemerge as boundless political figures. Many may have trouble wondering what this president will do with his power, but Clinton’s situation is not unique.¹

One hundred and thirty-three years ago, another president emerged from office carrying the scars of a thousand political fights and the stigma of impeachment. When Andrew Johnson stepped down from office in 1868 he left a nation divided by his tenure as president. But most of his career had been lived in the most divisive circumstances. Since the beginning of his career, he had constantly been in the maelstrom of American politics. Coming of age in the Jacksonian era shaped his ideals of what democracy should be. He stood steadfast for principles that amounted to a strict interpretation of the Constitution. Beginning in the 1830s and 1840s he believed it to be his mission to protect that document and Jacksonian Democracy.

These principles, more than anything, explain Johnson's decision to stick with the Union during the dark days when his home state of Tennessee broke its constitutional contract. He found fame for following his principles and that led to a position of trust from President Abraham Lincoln. Trust was not the only thing that attracted Lincoln to Johnson, there was a geopolitical advantage he could gain by the association. Having a Democrat from a seceded state on his ticket in 1864 when he sought reelection could do much to bring people together. Lincoln made the fateful decision of choosing Johnson as his running mate. When assassination in 1864 made Johnson himself the new president, he remained dedicated to his principles of democracy and Constitution.

As president he never defended them very well. In fact he routinely hurt his own cause by practicing bad politics. While battling a Congress that was usurping power, Johnson tried to depend solely on his own political abilities to fight them. Not only did he have no political tact, he made no effort at real compromise and had no real persuasive style at speaking that might bring people to his side. This more than anything damaged his reputation on the ill-fated, "Swing Around the Circle" 1866 tour. During that campaign across the northern states to solidify popular political support and to influence congress, Johnson made a fool of himself by taking every opportunity to answer hecklers who he allowed to rattle him.

The loss of reputation equaled the loss of power. Soon congress was looking for Johnson's ouster. He gave it plenty of help, as when he fired Edwin Stanton from his cabinet, an alleged violation of the Tenure of Office Act. As a result in the last year of his presidency, Johnson suffered the humiliation of impeachment and trial. Although

¹ Jonathan Alter, "Citizen Clinton Close Up," *Newsweek* April 8, 2002, 37.

acquitted, it ruined his reputation and his chances of a second term. He returned to Tennessee dejected and scorned.

That is where this thesis begins. Because Johnson did not believe that the end of his presidency meant the end of his career, he set out on a six-year quest to be elected to public office again. His main objective was to win a seat in the Senate, where he had been tried. Although he never gave a reason for the infatuation with the Senate seat, one can conclude that it was the greatest seat of power obtainable to him. Although Johnson wanted to preserve the principles of democracy and the Constitution, they were not his primary reasons for running for office. He returned to Tennessee with an extremely vengeful thirst for personal redemption.

Vindication was his guiding principle during most of this period with the exception of one brief moment. That was the campaign for the congressional at-large seat during the 1872 political season. In this instance, vindication was overcome by concern for his state. That concern stemmed from the fact that men who had lost the Civil War had used the apparatus of the state's constitution to hijack the state's political sphere.

Johnson achieved his dream of returning to the Senate, but he appeared to have no guiding principle carrying him there. For years he had talked of the ideals, but in 1875 they had been stripped away to reveal a naked thirst for personal vindication. Even as he gave his only speech from the floor of the Senate he was preoccupied with his old hatred of his successor, U.S. Grant, one of the many whom he blamed for his situation.

It is difficult to discern why people make the decisions that they do. With Johnson it has been even more difficult. Never a man known for his literary talents or speaking ability, he has left behind a scanty record. He never wrote many letters, and many of

them have not survived. In the final volume of the Andrew Johnson Papers project, which covers the years 1869-1875, only forty-five Johnson letters are published. Many of his speeches survived thanks to newspaper accounts, and not his personal copies. This makes it difficult to discern what motivated Johnson. However, the letters of his associates make it possible to get a glimpse the decisions that he made. These include letters from associates, some family members, and admirers. Together they help give an understanding to his life. If there is a spark of Johnson's humanity in the record, it comes from two sources: the several interviews that he gave to newspapers across the country, and the recollection of his closest advisor, E.C. Reeves. During interviews, Johnson was at his most unguarded even while in the midst of many of his vicious attacks. The small recollection by Reeves allows us some understanding of experiences serving this complicated man.

Andrew Johnson was a complex human being. It is personal crisis that tempts men to do things that would not always be rational. During the Civil War, Johnson showed immense courage facing an enemy in his own home, even at the risk of his life. During his presidency, he stood for his principles steadfastly, fighting for what he thought was right. Yet it was during the post presidential years that Johnson allowed his personal animosities get to the best of his judgment. It is Johnson the petty that emerges, content only with what was best for him.

Chapter One

The large silver casket was the mark of simplicity. The plainness both explained and betrayed the character of its occupant. The face of the coffin bore a simple inscription: “Andrew Johnson, Aged 67 years.” The simplicity of his final resting place fit the simple tailor who never spent a day to school. Yet by its unpretentious nature it would be difficult to guess that inside lay a complex and complicated man, a political stalwart who sacrificed his own political future for his idea of constitution and union. Johnson’s complex political career did not end after his presidency. Indeed, it grew more tangled as he searched for vindication for himself and his policies. Absolution could only be achieved by returning to Congress, the body that had publicly humiliated him in an extensive and overblown impeachment trial. Determined to return to Washington politics, Johnson lived, breathed, and campaigned on preserving the Constitution, which he believed the radical Republicans trampled during his presidency. In 1869, Johnson returned to Tennessee and stumped nonstop for his return to politics and for protecting liberty. Upon his death in July, 1875, his last wishes were honored and his lifeless hand

clutched his own battered, dog-eared copy of the Constitution with his notations from the beginning of his career. Johnson's basis for his political resurrection had become part of his immortal comfort.²

Six years before his demise Johnson left the most powerful station in the land after a cruel and humiliating term. He faced an uncertain future after the presidency. His enemies believed his departure a blessing for the cause of Radical Reconstruction and the newly freed slaves.³ He left the national political arena involuntarily after the Democratic party (Johnson's pre-Civil War party) refused to nominate him. The slight came not only from bitterness at Johnson's Unionist stand during the war but because he was simply unelectable. Thus, after eight years of battling Confederate Democrats and Radical Republicans, Johnson faced a post presidential career without a party.

Johnson was a political animal always ready to defend his beliefs and the Constitution that he cherished. Even as he hoped to be nominated by the Democrats in 1868, close political friends advised Johnson to face reality, leave political life, and opt instead for martyrdom associated with his impeachment. The suggestion was much too passive for Johnson, who had not been out of political life since Andrew Jackson was President. Instead, the outgoing chief executive had other plans for his future. Passive martyrdom did not fit into them.⁴

The first week of March, 1869, was a bittersweet time for Johnson. His despised enemy, Ulysses Grant, would soon assume the presidency. The former Union commander

² Greeneville *Intelligencer*, August 6, 1875. All biographical information on Johnson prior to March, 1869, is taken from Hans Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography* (New York, 1989)(unless otherwise noted.)

³ William Lloyd Garrison, *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, edited by Walter M. Merrill (Cambridge, 1981) 3: 96.

⁴ Glenna R. Schrieder-Lein and Richard Zuczek, *Andrew Johnson: A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara, 2001), 208; Thomas B. Alexander "Strange Bedfellows: The Interlocking Careers of T.A.P. Nelson, Andrew Johnson, W.G. Brownlow" *East Tennessee Historical Society* 51 (1979): 74.

had earned Johnson's hatred by abandoning him during the Tenure of Office controversy. That episode occurred when Johnson fired Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and looked to Grant to assume the Secretary's office. Grant's refusal helped turn much of Washington against Johnson and led to the impeachment ordeal.

During the presidential transition, Johnson and his family made plans to return to his home in Greenville, which had suffered looting and vandalism during Gen. James Longstreet's 1863 raid. There were bright prospects, however. Johnson's popularity among conservative critics of radical Republicans had risen considerably since his acquittal. This growing support manifested itself in Johnson's last public reception in the White House on March 2, 1869, which drew a larger crowd than any since he had been in office. In addition, the letters of many friends inquired and supported the President's future political prospects.⁵

Johnson feigned that he would soon retire to Greenville for a simple life but it became clear that his future plans included a return to politics and Washington.⁶ These intentions may have worked for only one of his predecessors but Johnson left the White House with more political baggage than anyone before him. The residue of impeachment was not his only problem. The dominance of the legislative branch during his incumbency, his own uncompromising political stance, and his being ignored by the Democratic convention in 1868 gave the appearance of a weak leader.

A return to Congress for a president, although rare, was not without precedent. The chief executive that Johnson had the most in common was John Quincy Adams. Both

⁵ William McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (New York, 1981), 276. Albert Castel, *Presidency of Andrew Johnson* (Lawrence, KS, 1979), 213; Andrew Johnson to William Lowrey, June 22, 1869 *Papers of Andrew Johnson* (Knoxville, 2000) 15:36 The papers of Andrew Johnson are known as *PAJ*. Johnson to James Longstreet, June 23, 1869 *PAJ* 15:37; Knoxville *Daily Press* March 5, 1869.

men had stubborn styles that proved self-defeating with both friends and foes. Although Adams did receive the honor of renomination for the presidency in 1828, his lackluster incumbency and subsequent loss made him damaged political goods. Johnson, a follower of Andrew Jackson, ought to have thought deeply about Adams' career revival when he returned to Congress in the 1830s. Then Adams had retained significant support from his home state of Massachusetts, but Johnson's turbulent history with his own home state questioned whatever support he might have. That would be the factor that decided his future.

Johnson's last days in office symbolized his stubbornness. A source of irritation for him came from Grant's impending inauguration. Republicans planned a jubilee to signify the newly freed slaves. A part of this celebration included a black regiment in the festivities. When a request authorizing the use of live ammunition for salutes came across his desk, Johnson refused. In part, Johnson's frugal nature, racism, and bitterness probably contributed to this decision. Most of all, the decision seems to have been made to undercut Grant's day in the spotlight. The issue demonstrated that Johnson's stubbornness and thirst for vindication was stronger than ever.⁷

Johnson's final opportunity to address the American people on a national scale came with his farewell address. Although in a weak political position, he grasped the opportunity to propose a bold future for the nation. The crux of the address lay with defending the Constitution and empowering all the people. Johnson had spent his career calling for more power for poor whites through free land and economic independence from the aristocracy. Now he wanted them to have greater control over the political

⁶ "Interview with New York *World* Correspondent", *PAJ* February 28, 1869 15:490-495.

⁷ Gideon Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles* (New York, 1911) 3:544-6

direction of the country. Undoubtedly he had his own struggle in mind when he advocated abolition of the Electoral College and the direct election of the president, vice president, senators and judges. In a nod to the dead Confederate government, Johnson called for the president to be elected to a single six-year term. The address was consumed, however, with constitutional defense. Johnson stressed his own protection of the Constitution and called for the people to help preserve the document against the radical usurpers. Of course, Congress was the enemy, a line that became standard Johnson political talk in a matter of weeks.⁸

The address received accolades from across the nation, yet critics recognized the weakness of the address.⁹ The force and strength of the statement did not reflect Johnson's own actions during his tenure. His inability to steer the country toward his more lenient vision of Reconstruction was a prime example. Johnson had fought hard for his vision of a moderate reconstruction but was clearly dominated by the Radical Republican Congress. To most people, the address really reflected a way for Johnson to state his case against the adversaries whom he saw as responsible for his own failures. In fact, a careful study of Johnson's political speeches from the spring of 1869 reveals that his farewell address was really a template for his own political future.

The final day of his presidency arrived. The fourth of March, a day typically set aside for pomp and ceremony, found Johnson hard at work at his White House desk. Johnson's cabinet arrived at the White House, expecting to depart for the Capitol, but found him with no plans to attend the ceremony. Finally, when senior cabinet members

⁸ Andrew Johnson, "Farewell Address" *PAJ* 15:505-15

⁹ Washington *Daily Intelligencer*, March 8, 1869.

William Seward and Gideon Welles arrived Johnson instructed them:” I think we will finish our work here without going to the capitol.”

Grant had let it be known that he would neither go the White House before the ceremony nor ride to the Capitol with Johnson. If Grant believed that Johnson would appear alone at a Radical Republican ceremony he was sorely disappointed. Like Adams before him, Johnson skipped his despised successor’s moment of glory. Unlike Adams, Johnson savored the final moments of his presidential term.¹⁰

In fact, Johnson was determined to enjoy Washington as much as he could. After leaving the White House, Johnson moved to the Vermont Avenue boarding house of John Coyle, owner of the *Washington National Intelligencer*. While at the Coyle house, Johnson received a steady flow of visitors and well-wishers. The attention paid by these admirers could only make the transition easier for Johnson. The height of the accolades came when the Baltimore city council called on him to extend an invitation to a reception in his honor, Johnson gladly accepted.¹¹

A week later the former president journeyed to Baltimore. After years of turmoil and trial, he could not have been prepared for what awaited him at the Carole Street Depot. Stepping down from his own special car supplied by the B& O Railroad, Johnson was greeted by a large thunderous crowd as if he had returned from war. He addressed the crowd with a stock political speech touting his defense of the Constitution and declaring that protecting the document was the most important responsibility in America. His call for the new leadership to have the character to do the same was a clear slap at Grant. Then he weakened his case with comments bordering on the ludicrous. In an

¹⁰ Welles, *Diary* 3:540,542.

¹¹ *Washington Daily Intelligencer*, March 5, 1869.

attempt either to gain sympathy or inject humor, Johnson compared his presidential term to slavery. The comment was an indication of Johnson's lack of sympathy for the new freedmen.¹²

The Baltimore reception marked an important event for Johnson. Aside from feeding his vanity, it proved that he still had a considerable popularity in some circles. Of course, all presidents enjoyed some period of adulation, but he belonged to a different category of chief executives. He had withstood political and personal assaults like no one before him. In addition to the ordeal Johnson had suffered, he now stood associated with the lionized Lincoln. But could Johnson take the good will of his admirers and turn it into political capital? Only Tennessee voters could decide for sure, and it was to them he would now turn.

Two weeks after leaving the presidency, Johnson finally departed for Tennessee. The journey was a relatively fast one, reversing the route that he took to Washington four years earlier. Burning effigies and declarations of 'TRAITOR' had marked that earlier journey. Things had changed now, a fact apparent at the first stop from Washington. Charlottesville, Virginia was the site an 1865 anti-Johnson rally. Now citizens met him with a thunderous reception. After another "non-political" speech centered on constitutional defense, he continued his journey. The stop in Lynchburg, the site of another 1865 anti-Johnson rally, mirrored that in Charlottesville. Once again he gave his stock speech, but his political nerve was stiffening. "I have great hope for redemption," he bellowed but that depended on Tennessee.

¹² Washington *Daily Intelligencer*, March 10, 1869; Washington *Daily Intelligencer* March 12, 1869; "Speech in Baltimore", *PAJ*, 15: 527.

At Bristol, Johnson caught his first glimpse of his state. Four years earlier, Bristol had been the scene of one of the worst demonstrations. Now a different political climate reigned. The people there met him enthusiastically for a long constant procession back to his home in Greeneville. Yet a different Tennessee existed. While Johnson was away trying to run the nation, Tennessee had undergone drastic changes. The state had been wracked by nearly ten years of war and political strife. Since he had left for Washington in 1865, it had suffered intense political shifts in response to the Reconstruction efforts. It may have been a long way from Washington, but the situation in Tennessee had been as volatile as anything that happened at the national level.¹³

Ten years earlier, Johnson had been the junior senator from Tennessee. The reputation that Johnson had acquired in his previous fourteen years in congress had been simple. The Homestead Act had been the main project of Johnson's career. That act, which provided free land to poor white families, made the senator the best friend of that demographic group. It supported the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal of America's nature that Johnson held sacred. Yet true to his own contradictory nature, he also supported strict frugality in public spending. His opposition to such things as lavish furnishing for the capitol and funding of West Point earned him many enemies. The adversaries, particularly those from the South, took offense at his stances. Special ire came from Southerners who feared many of these populist stances. This became evident during several sharp exchanges in the 1850s with Jefferson Davis, who had taken particular offense at Johnson's attacks on West Point.

Although he butted heads with his fellow Southerners, Johnson still supported slavery. Yet his support for the "peculiar institution" did not approach the level of his

¹³ "Speech at Charlottesville" *PAJ*, 15: 524, "Speech at Lynchburg" *PAJ*, 15: 531-2

support for the Union and the Constitution. When the South seceded, Johnson refused to be part of what he believed to be traitorous action. True to his Jacksonian nature, Johnson refused to budge. He became the only senator from a seceded state to remain in Congress. The stance that he made was not unique within Tennessee. However its people had never been fully for secession. Even after the state seceded, a large portion of Johnson's native East Tennessee remained loyal to the Union. Thus, his influence in the state and the nation would increase greatly over the next several years, but it would require alliances that did not seem possible before 1860.

The strangest of all was the alliance of Andrew Johnson and William G. "Parson" Brownlow. Before the crisis, Johnson had no stronger critic than William Brownlow. As a newspaper editor, Brownlow had christened Johnson "Toady" for his alleged changing of political positions. When the crisis worsened and war came, however, a truce ensued and the Union binded them. Johnson became the most powerful Union Democrat in the state and Brownlow was his Whig counterpart. Although their personal relations were never overly cordial, a mutual respect developed between them. The few surviving letters between them demonstrate mutual concern for life and livelihood and a reciprocal respect for the dangerous positions each had taken.¹⁴

The position of military governor of Tennessee became extremely important when the state became a major battlefield of the war, since it determined the fate of the conquered portions and its inhabitants. President Lincoln chose him for the gubernatorial position most likely because of the political wisdom behind rewarding such an outspoken Union Democrat. This candor became apparent when Johnson's requirement for loyalty oaths reached high into Tennessee political and social circles. More infuriating to

Confederate opponents was Johnson's newfound support of emancipation in Tennessee.¹⁵

Despite his earlier support for the institution, Johnson forced emancipation on the state, since it had been exempt from President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

Johnson's independence from the Democrats while remaining one of them led to him joining Lincoln on the victorious new Union ticket in 1864. Once elected vice president, Johnson left a difficult place that would have tried any man, but he probably never imagined that Washington would be far worse than Tennessee.

When Johnson assumed his new role in history as Lincoln's successor, Brownlow became governor of Tennessee. Any hope that Brownlow would continue the conciliatory relationship enjoyed during the war soon ended. Johnson's and Brownlow's ability to bring the state back into the Union early helped it to escape the fates of other Southern states. Instead of a military force to bring about reconstruction, Brownlow and his Radical Republicans colleagues were left alone to bring Tennessee through a difficult period.

Some would say that Brownlow made a difficult time even worse. As governor, Brownlow accrued great power which assured that Tennessee would live by his creed. The hallmark of his regime was the passage of far-reaching voter restrictions. The legislation denied any ex-Confederate the right to vote for five years. Any former leader of the Confederacy could not vote for fifteen years. Designed to solidify Brownlow's power, it marked a breaking point in Tennessee politics.¹⁶

¹⁴ Brownlow to Johnson *PAJ* 5: 357, 558

¹⁵ "Remarks at Nashville" *PAJ* 5:427

¹⁶ E. Merton Coulter, *William G. Brownlow* (Chapel Hill, 1937), 263-93; Paul Bergeron, Stephen Ash, and Jeanette Keith *Tennesseans and their History* (Knoxville, 1999), 161-162

Conservative opposition grew in response to the legislation. In 1866, those conservative forces swept congressional elections and dented Brownlow's radical majority of the state legislature. Brownlow's response was to deny the right to vote to ex-Confederates altogether. In addition, Brownlow pushed Tennessee to become the first state in the South to enfranchise black voters. This move toward radicalism had considerable fallout.¹⁷

Violence erupted when the Ku Klux Klan began a reign of violence against black families across the state. As Brownlow made moves to consolidate his own military power, it appeared that Tennessee would be consumed in a race war, a prediction that Johnson had made. The situation finally abated in part because many feared the prospect of an all-out war, and also because of the changing political situation. In 1868 the Republicans swept the national election, Brownlow wanted to be a part of the new political regime in Washington. He got himself elected to the Senate, but it remained unclear how tight a grip he would retain on Tennessee's political fortunes. In fact, Brownlow's departure for national glory would spell the end of Reconstruction in Tennessee.¹⁸

Physically and demographically the state had undergone even deeper changes. Urban centers in the state were exploding. In 1860 Memphis had a slave population of 3,684; by 1870 the black population of Memphis had grown to 15,471 people. Nashville also experienced a tripling of the freedmen. This demographic shift obviously brought a change to the agrarian face of Tennessee. The loss of slave laborers had a negative effect

¹⁷ Coulter, *Brownlow*, 294-324; Bergeron, et al, *Tennesseans*, 162-165.

¹⁸ Bergeron, et al, *Tennesseans*, 171-174; Allen Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, 1994), 268-69; Schroeder-Lein, *Biographical Companion* 27; Coulter, *Brownlow*, 386-7.

on agriculture of Tennessee. Urban areas offered new opportunity to blacks, with the result that urban blacks and poor whites became distinct political entities.¹⁹

Tennessee's story may not have been fully evident to Johnson as he gazed at the lush Smoky Mountains on his homecoming in 1869. Any harsh feelings about his state he may have suffered while in Washington would soon dissipate. Any misgiving that his hometown felt toward him four years before had since disappeared as became evident upon his return when he met another roaring audience intent on honoring him. As before, Johnson gave the same essential address but with a hint of humility. As in the addresses that he had given since he left office, he stated that he could only see retirement in his future. The only problem was that he was already planning his return to politics already. It had been only four years before that he had been greeted in his hometown with a sign that read "traitor". If the Union had been the most important thing to him then, politics governed him completely. He let the people know that his public life was far from over,

There is a good deal of life in me yet. If the people of Tennessee should require my services, I would not feel justified in refusing them in behalf of the public good.

Johnson seemed to confirm that he hoped a new Tennessee political adventure would be his next great enterprise.²⁰

The euphoria from such a grand welcome could surely not last. Still, Johnson likely suffered a sharp letdown when he reached home. The unimposing Georgian home on Main Street had been through an ordeal of its own. While Johnson served in the Senate, Confederate troops occupied the home and turned it into a hospital. With his

¹⁹ *Eighth Census of the United States* (Washington D.C., 1864), 459-460; *Ninth Census of the United States* (Washington D.C., 1874), 262-68; Bergeron, et al, *Tennesseans*, 160.

family gone to his daughter's farm in nearby Carter County, the Confederacy officially confiscated the property. Longstreet's occupation of the town late in the war caused even more damage as soldiers looted and vandalized the home and contents. Before he left Washington, Johnson sent his daughter Mary Stover home to try and ready the house for their occupancy. When he arrived, Johnson found that the loss had been extensive. Books that he had accumulated during his whole life had vanished. Personal and business papers had been removed. Johnson tried to locate many of the missing items to no avail. The Confederate punishment had been effective.²¹

Two days later, a reporter from Cincinnati held an interview with the former President. He seemed ecstatic, probably a lingering feeling from his reception. Yet it caused him to touch upon every topic imaginable. Johnson's remarks were contradictory. He mused that greatness loomed around the corner for America if it could only give up the past. Yet he then wandered to defending his own slaveholding and, of course, his administration. His call for equality for all echoed his earlier battle for the Homestead Act while he stated his faith that East Tennessee would soon be an attractive for investors. His harsh feeling toward President Grant manifested itself in the sharpest criticism to date. He believed Grant to be a deceitful opportunist about whom the public had yet to learn the truth. His animosity toward Grant had probably grown worse since he learned that Grant had tried to revoke the pardons granted by Johnson in his final days.²²

The interview offered a portrait of a man settling into retirement with no talk of holding office or returning to public service. Yet Johnson began receiving

²⁰ Knoxville *Daily Press and Herald*, March 5, 1869; "Speech at Greeneville" *PAJ*, 16:535-36.

²¹ Michael Patterson to Johnson *PAJ*, 5:113, "Application to Amend Sequestration Petition," 105; Mary Howard to Johnson *PAJ*, 6: 661, William Lowry to Johnson *PAJ* 16: 36, Johnson to Longstreet *PAJ* 37; Castel, 213.

correspondence urging him back into public life. Although some expected him to make a tour of Europe, most believed that he belonged in the Senate. Support came from Northerners as well as ex-Confederates who believed that he offered the best chance to avert further domination at the hands of the Radical Republicans. One letter that Johnson received best stated why he should forgo presidential precedent and return to the Senate:

I know it is unprecedented for a President again to enter the political arena
But, we are past the day of honored Presidents, the Country needs your services
again in the Senate. I had long ago predicted that you would eschew precedents, +
again return to the Senate, when you could battle hand in hand with those who
sought to cripple + fail you in your honest efforts.

Springfield summed up precisely the state of presidential stature and his own search for vindication. Despite the support that he received, however, a problem existed. Exactly who would elect Johnson? Surely the radical Brownlow machine would never send him to the Senate following Brownlow's own elevation to that body. But the state of politics in Tennessee was changing with Brownlow in Washington, and Johnson stood to gain from his absence.²³

The Brownlow's policy of disfranchisement of ex-rebels became the great impetus to continuing Radicalism. Disfranchising ex-Confederates and enfranchising newly freed slaves unified conservatives of both parties. The disfranchisement had been a major factor in bringing about the violence of the Ku Klux Klan that had flared again in early 1869. While Brownlow had responded that Tennessee might need federal

²² "Interview with *Cincinnati Commercial* Correspondent," *PAJ*, 16:537-541; Welles, *Diary* 3:547.

²³ George Dean to Johnson *PAJ*, 15:521; Louis B. Weymouth to Johnson *PAJ* 15:527-8; Augustus H. Garland to Johnson *PAJ* 15:533; Benjamin Rush to Johnson *PAJ* 15:518; George H. Locey to Johnson *PAJ* 15: 553.

reconstruction such as the other states had received, many Tennesseans felt differently. As Brownlow left for Washington on a journey where the reception along the way proved him as unpopular as Johnson's had proved him popular, his policies began to fall apart. Politicians of all stripes, even Brownlow's closest advisors, abandoned the black enfranchisement policy.²⁴

The gubernatorial successor of Brownlow, David Senter, held different ideas about politics and Brownlow's policies. Despite being a supporter of his predecessor and a Republican, Senter reversed many of the policies of the previous administration. Immediately Senter abandoned laws ending segregation, funded public schools, and cut taxes that had risen drastically under Brownlow. These changes may have been based on ideological differences, but Senter also hoped to build a broader conservative base. The fastest way to bring this about would be to strip away the disfranchisement laws that Brownlow had set in place. The ex-Confederate votes would be needed immediately since a governor's race loomed for the summer. The first blow for enfranchising all white male Tennesseans came when Senter fired commissioners of registration that Brownlow had appointed to supervise voting restrictions. The replacements followed Senter's policy of allowing all white males to vote.²⁵

The policy of enfranchising all Tennesseans would greatly effect not only the upcoming election of the governor but also that of the legislature. For Johnson, any hope of returning to the Senate relied on the outcome of both. Although the legislature had many conservatives, a majority would be needed to send anyone but a Radical to

²⁴ Trelease, *White Terror*, 279; Thomas B. Alexander *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee* (New York, 1950), 204.

²⁵ Bergeron, et al, *Tennesseans*, 177-78; Alexander, *Political Reconstruction* 20; *Bristol News*, July 16, 1869.

Congress. Johnson's hopes rested with this legislative victory. "I think the state can be redeemed if there is a reasonable effort made in the approaching elections," he declared, and almost immediately he began his own modest effort to influence the voting.²⁶

Johnson's efforts were hampered almost immediately by illness. In late March a severe attack of kidney stones hit the former president. Although the debilitating sickness soon came under control, rumors spread throughout the nation that Johnson had died. Such a story could be extremely harmful to a political career in the nineteenth century. Hence he embarked on a speaking tour to prove that he was alive and well. The trip began in early April and took him across the state into every major metropolitan area. Of course, the speeches mirrored the viewpoint given by Johnson to the journalist during March; but as the tour progressed, he found himself espousing many different topics. In Knoxville, he worked his way from attacking Congress to assailing those he believed were harming the poor in Tennessee and America. Bondholders who had funded the railroads and the state's war machine provided a delicious target. Johnson portrayed them as ghoulish opportunists making money off the war and enslaving poor whites and blacks for profit. These comments marked Johnson's first attempt of the campaign to insert a wedge between the rich and the poor.²⁷ As for his own ambitious, he revealed them in a statement in Knoxville, "My ambition is filled, and I have no more to ask for...I intend to devote the remainder of my life as a private citizen, to the vindication of my official life, and my native State of the foul obloquy that has been heaped upon us."

Johnson made his future seem somewhat clear. Vindication was his highest priority, and he made an effort to use his state's cause as a part of his offenses. In

²⁶ Johnson to George W. Jones, *PAJ*, 16:38.

Knoxville his tone revealed a steady defiance by a man proud of the stances that he had taken during his life.²⁸

That would soon change with the venue. Three hundred miles away in Memphis, a different political situation existed. Thus his tone changed. Here the proud defense of Unionist actions never reached the audience's ears. In its place was a calm and humble explanation that downgraded the matter to a mere disagreement. He also defended his raising of taxes while military governor, an onerous measure in West Tennessee by arguing that it had been for the needy and poor. His appearance in West Tennessee amounted, in fact, to a tour dedicated to make amends with locals for his actions during the war.²⁹

Aside from his campaign appearances, Johnson's life in Greeneville took on a dull cast relieved only by his political excursions. It was doubtful that anyone in his family would miss the excitement and turmoil of Washington. Johnson's life soon turned to tragedy. On April 22 while he was visiting Alabama for a speaking engagement, Johnson received a telegram. His son Robert, his political protégé, had apparently committed suicide after a long struggle with alcoholism. Johnson left no record of his grief. His revival continued.³⁰

Despite the tragedy, the political situation in Tennessee remained in Johnson's thoughts. The Republican convention had been anticipated in hopes it would end some of the party's deep divisions. Democrats had much to gain from the outcome, since it would

²⁷ Schroeder-Lein, *Biographical Companion*, 136-9; George H. Locey to Johnson *PAJ*, 15:553, John Smith to Johnson *PAJ* 15:547-9; "Speech at Knoxville," 566-573.

²⁸ "Speech at Knoxville" *PAJ* 15:566.

²⁹ "Speech in Memphis" *PAJ* 15:594, 608.

³⁰ Johnson to Andrew Johnson Jr. *PAJ*, 16: 6; Schroeder-Lein, *Biographical Companion*, 169; Trefousse, *Johnson*, 356.

prove to be a battle between radical and conservative forces. Senter's opponent, William Stokes, had substantial support going into the convention. He supported the radical policies of Brownlow such as disfranchisement. Johnson, who had been approached about accepting a third party nomination, chose to sit on the sidelines anxiously awaiting the outcome and hoping for the senate seat from the legislature. Although he supported no one, he adamantly opposed Stokes. However, The convention was disastrous. As Stokes came close to grabbing the nomination, Senter forces disrupted the convention. When it dissolved, no one knew for sure who had been nominated. Regardless of this uncertain outcome, Johnson felt considerable enthusiasm, since he expected the Conservatives of both parties to carry the legislature.³¹

During this intense period, it became known that Johnson would soon be going to Washington for his son Andrew's graduation from Georgetown College. Since Johnson had left, dissatisfaction with Grant had increased. The image of the great general had diminished considerably from inaction, an inevitable occurrence since Grant now presided over an overtly political station. His search for vindication had gone well since he left Washington. In early June, he began to receive solid support for the senate seat as candidates for the Tennessee legislature began to commit to his election. It appeared that this trip might be a precursor to his permanent return to Washington.³²

Summer is always hot in Washington and June, 1869, was no different. Johnson had returned maybe not a vindicated man but one moving closer to his dream of

³¹ Bergeron, et al, *Tennesseans*, 178; Alexander, *Political Reconstruction*, 215; Knoxville Daily Press Herald, June 8, 1869; Joseph M. Campbell to Johnson *PAJ* 16: 35; Benjamin F.C. Brooks to Johnson *PAJ* 16: 34; John William Jr. to Johnson *PAJ* 16: 6-7; Knoxville *Daily Press Herald*, May 22, 1869; Johnson to William Lowry *PAJ* 16: 36.

³² John Williams Jr. to Johnson *PAJ* 16: 7; Johnson to Andrew Johnson Jr. *JAP*, 16: 6; Caroline Livingston Edmonston *PAJ* 15:534; William J. Hilton to Johnson 16: 32; Robert Bennett to Andrew Johnson *PAJ* 16: 28; Thomas R. Barry to Andrew Johnson *PAJ* 16:29; William J. Hilton to Johnson *PAJ* 16:32.

absolution. While in Washington, he gave his now standard “non-speech.” His call for defending the Constitution became mingled with a commentary on the apathy of the people. The only way to save constitutional government, Johnson bellowed, would be through the people. If they did not rise from their apathetic state in the coming elections across the nation, then it would be the end of the Democracy. Johnson believed that the election would be important, but probably its importance to him lay chiefly in the fact that it could return him to office.³³

The same day as his speech, Johnson gave an interview to a correspondent from the *New York World*. Being in Washington must have thrilled him again, because his comments became forthright and unguarded. He affirmed his faith in the common man and the ability of the people of Tennessee, to do the right thing, which he believed would be to elect Senter as governor. He spent much of the interview on the attack. Of course, the bondholders, or “credit aristocracy” as Johnson called them, especially brought out the venom. But Johnson for the first time he made his most pointed and acidic attacks against the current president, “I know Grant thoroughly. I had ample opportunity to study him when I was President, and I am convinced he is the greatest farce that was ever thrust upon the people.”

Clearly Johnson’s resentment toward Grant had only grown. Aside from these biting comments, he ridiculed Grant on everything from his size to his intellect, all the while stating: “I have no spite against him.”³⁴

Johnson felt that Grant had been the main beneficiary of his own troubles in office. After betraying Johnson while in his cabinet Grant had worked to disgrace and

³³“Speech in Washington” *PAJ* 16:52-62.

³⁴ “Interview with *New York World* Correspondent” *PAJ* 16:42-44.

replace him charged Johnson. Now he hoped to return to the Senate where he would undoubtedly be Grant's strongest critic.³⁵

After three months of hope, acclamation, and heartbreak Andrew Johnson had returned to the place of his fondest desire. Washington offered the excitement and opportunity that Johnson could never enjoy in Greeneville. There would be no retirement for him. Returning to Washington in elective office would be the only form of retirement that he would truly accept. Defending the Constitution and vindicating his past had become obsessions that no other consideration rivaled. They stayed with him constantly, and the only way to satisfy him would be to return him to the chamber where he had been impeached a year earlier. The only people that could make his vision a reality were the legislature of Tennessee. Now he headed back to Tennessee to help them in their decision

³⁵ Ibid, 42-44.

Chapter Two

The pure political atmosphere of Washington could not rival Tennessee in the summer and fall of 1869. Post-war political life was starting to unravel. The state approached a crossroads, where Brownlow's Radical Reconstruction policies and an emerging dissatisfaction with the status of ex-Confederates would soon collide. At stake was the domination of the state's political future by a single party. Johnson soon put himself at the epicenter of the struggle. He represented the average Tennessean, caught between the turbulent past and a hope for a different future. Soon he would be fully engrossed in Tennessee politics as a candidate.

In early 1869, Brownlow left the governor's chair to David Senter, the speaker of the state senate. Undoubtedly, many believed that Senter, who had been a Union man and even a Confederate prisoner, would supply Tennessee with Brownlow style political direction. But Senter surprised most by his stance on ex-Confederate enfranchisement, which was politically courageous. Without the reform, he could have held onto his seat

by the safe majority of Republican voters. With former confederates voting, he was sure to lose his office. He had lost the safety of a system that ensured his election.³⁶

Senter's stance made up only a part of a larger political approach in several other Southern states. The "new movement" that had begun to take place called for ex-Confederates and their sympathizers to approach the Republicans with a sympathetic attitude in hope of dividing their voting patterns. Although some believed that Senter had genuine sympathy with disenfranchised ex-Confederates, it is more likely that Senter was a player in the "new movement," since it succeeded in splitting the Republicans in the 1869 election. Some Republicans supported Senter because they believed him to be less radical and therefore less dangerous than his opponent, William Stokes. In the end, however, Senter won a term to the governor's chair in his own right with the support of ex-Confederates and Democrats.³⁷

Johnson's political situation resembled Senter's. No one knew for sure exactly where he stood in the spectrum of the parties. The Democratic Party had ceased to be a safe place for dissenters with Radicalism because of the association with the ex-Confederates. In the Republican Party, conservatives stood in fear of being labeled Radical. This realization led to a movement to begin a centrist organization where the disaffected members of both parties could find shelter. Johnson was a prime candidate for such a movement. The only certainty was that he was opposed to Radicalism, the Confederates, the overreaching power of the legislative branch, and he had a strong belief

³⁶ Margaret I. Phillips, *Governors of Tennessee* (Gretna: Pelican Publishing, 1978), 88

³⁷ Thomas B. Alexander *Thomas A.R. Nelson of East Tennessee* (Nashville, 1956), 146; Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869-1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1984), 10; W.A. Stillwell to John Eaton June 25, 1869, John Eaton Papers, University of Tennessee Special Collection, Knoxville.

in the Constitution. For a time, he and many others considered themselves conservatives who participated in Democratic politics.³⁸

Johnson would no longer be an observer in the political season. Upon his return from Washington, political gossip became a strong conduit of Johnson's hope to be elected to the U. S. Senate. Conservatives throughout the state believed Johnson to be their best hope in securing a conservative or Democratic legislature. For Johnson, it was a golden opportunity to help elect a legislature that would send him to the Senate. For this reason, many outside Tennessee also hoped for his election.³⁹

In July, Johnson began to travel the state, giving speeches for legislative candidates who were responsible for choosing the senator. Naturally he began his campaign stops in East Tennessee, where he tried to set a tone for the campaign. As expected, he took on the encroaching powers of Congress and its disregard for the Constitution. Yet he began a real assault on an ensuing crisis in Tennessee: the state debt.⁴⁰

The state debt had grown uncontrollably during the years of Brownlow's administration, since Democrats had been absent from state politics. The debt had started before the war, when the state was anxious to help railroad corporations gain a foothold in the state. The railroad was believed to be the key to Tennessee's economic future. The war had brought destruction to the land, which caused trouble for the railroad. This problem eventually manifested itself in defaulted loans for which the state became

³⁸ Edward Golladay to Johnson July 8, 1869, *PAJ* 16: 67-9.

³⁹ Alfred H. Jackson to Johnson August 8, 1869, *PAJ* 16: 93

⁴⁰ "Speech at Knoxville" *PAJ* 16: 104

responsible. When the war began, the state's debt for the previous twenty- five years stood at \$20,898,606. In 1869, the debt had accumulated to \$34,441,873.⁴¹

For Johnson, the unbearable aspect of Tennessee's growing debt had been the Republican's response to it. Immediately the government issued new bonds and raised taxes to a new high. Aggravating the situation was the state's declining taxable property caused by the devastation of the war. For Johnson, the issue became one of the bondholders opportunism and the threat of such a huge debt to democratic institutions.⁴²

Johnson began the political tour of the state in 1869 to repair the breach between himself and various constituencies that had been in conflict. His support of Governor Senter helped solidify his support with moderates in Tennessee. Others that he wanted to make amends were secessionists whom had been his adamant opponents years before, as well as many in the Republican camp. By the autumn, his policy of reconciliation to these groups had generally worked with ex-secessionist Democrats.

Among Republicans he was less successful, a point articulated by Emerson Etheridge who commented that he would rather see a black elected to the Senate than Johnson. Yet overall, Johnson supported conservative candidates who opposed the policies of the radicals. It paid off nicely for the conservative party in the end.⁴³

Because of his support for Senter, Johnson became an issue in the gubernatorial struggle. Senter's opponent, William Stokes, routinely attacked Johnson and his presidential administration for its lax support of Reconstruction. Nothing could save

⁴¹ Robert B. Jones, "State Debt Controversy in Tennessee, 1865-1883", PhD. Dissertation Vanderbilt University 1972 6-8, 20-1.

⁴² Jones, "State Debt Controversy" 18-20,17, 13-4; "Speech at Knoxville". *PAJ* 16: 104

⁴³ George F. Milton, *Age of Hate: Andrew Johnson and the Radicals* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1930), 656; Albert H. Grisham to Johnson Oct. 7, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 126-7; James P. Hambleton to Johnson Oct. 18, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 133; Milton, *Age of Hate*, 660.

Stokes from electoral humiliation. The onslaught of ex-Confederate voters who had enrolled in the aftermath of Senter's change in enfranchisement policy made a tremendous difference. On August 5, 1869, Senter trounced Stokes, 120, 333 votes to 55,036. More importantly for Johnson, conservatives and Democrats swept the legislature. For all intents and purposes, Reconstruction in Tennessee died that day.⁴⁴

The ramifications of such a drastic transfer in government were immediate. Radicals in the congressional delegation demonstrated their shock at the results by asking the federal government to overturn them. Yet the real jolt for many on the national level became the realization that Andrew Johnson would be elected to the Senate.

Officials in Washington began lobbying against his selection by the legislature. Secretary of the Treasury George Boutwell stated that Johnson's rhetoric on Tennessee and the nation's debt policy could endanger the safety of the national economy. President Grant commented that he would consider Johnson's election a personal insult a reasonable response, considering Johnson's persistent attacks on him and his administration. More serious rumblings included talk in the Senate that it might refuse to seat him if he won election. The prospect of him returning to the Senate disturbed many in Washington, since the decision was not theirs to make.⁴⁵

For weeks it appeared that Johnson would likely sail to a victory in the legislature. Even the widespread support that Johnson received on the national level pointed to victory. A diverse group, ranging from John Quincy Adams (grandson of the former

⁴⁴ Edward I Golladay to Johnson July 7, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 67-9; John William Jr. to Johnson July 6, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 66-7; Jones, "State Debt Controversy," 29; Mary Ozelle Bible, "The Post Presidential Career of Andrew Johnson" Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1936, 18.

⁴⁵ Roger L. Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists 1870-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 2; Bible, "Post-Presidential," 19-20; James P. Hambleton to Johnson Oct. 18, 1869 *PAJ* 16:133, 134.

president) and Robert Toombs, supported Johnson's return to the Senate. Even Johnson's arch nemesis *The New York Times* believed that he was assured election despite its uncompromising opposition. The election consumed the nation's political circles. As a friend informed Johnson: "this matter of the Tennessee Senatorship seems to be greatly exercising the minds of the people of all states."⁴⁶

In September, 1869, the campaign slipped into high gear as Johnson's supporters urged him to move his campaign from Greenville to Nashville. The move was urged for one reason: to keep all political supporters under a close and watchful eye. Despite the volume of national support, many of Johnson's supporters began to sense trouble in the midst of Johnson's campaign. The campaign had largely been built upon Johnson's personal contacts, most specifically his former secretary, Edmund Cooper now professed to head his campaign in the legislature. Although it appears that Johnson never questioned Cooper's loyalty, there were some indication that he should have. The previous summer, the Davidson County convention had put forth Cooper's brother Henry as a candidate for the Senate seat. As late as September, the Nashville *Republican Banner* had endorsed Henry, stating that he was better equipped to carry on Johnson's ideas than Johnson himself. Although it seemed that the Coopers put their ambitions aside for Edmund's old boss, friends warned Johnson that they were not to be trusted. A further sign that all was not what it seemed to be came when rumors spread that Governor

⁴⁶ Horace W. King to Johnson September 21, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 118, Samuel D. Morgan to Johnson August 21, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 106.

Senter, whom Johnson had supported for reelection, no longer supported him for the Senate seat. These were only indications of the trouble ahead.⁴⁷

The Maxwell House Hotel was the seat of luxury in Nashville. Johnson always preferred its hospitality when in the state's capital. In October, 1869 Johnson was in an intense political situation, but whether he understood the extent of the tension in the state legislature is unknown. He firmly believed that the legislative elections had been a referendum on the question of who would serve in the U. S. Senate. By his calculations, he went to Nashville with a fifteen-vote majority.⁴⁸

However, the halls of the state capitol things were moving briskly against Johnson. His opponents in both parties worked hard to alter his advantage. Many began a whispering campaign that having Johnson and Brownlow in the Senate would lead to misrepresentation by giving both seats to East Tennesseans. Still October 20 Edmund Cooper officially nominated Johnson for the Senate seat, an indication that everything seemed to be going as planned. The only excitement in what appeared a dull race came the next day, when a savage man broke into Johnson's hotel room with a knife and threatened to cut the former president's throat. It appeared that the man was simply deranged and had no political agenda. If Johnson knew the trouble brewing in the legislature, he might have thought his opponents sent the man to permanently end his

⁴⁷ John C. Gaut to Johnson Sept. 27, 1869 *PAJ* 16:121; John C. Burch to Johnson August 2, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 86; Nashville *Republican Banner* Sept. 19, 1869; George W. White to Johnson Oct. 13, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 132; James P. Ambleton to Johnson Oct. 18, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 133-4.

⁴⁸ Ophelia Paine "Maxwell House Hotel" *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, Rutledge Hill Press), 579; Johnson to Gideon Welles Dec. 8, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 146

campaign, but even as late as the 21st, Johnson seemed ignorant of many of the currents running against him.⁴⁹

The clear obstacle for his opponents was the maverick support of Edmund Cooper. Hoping to sway him away from Johnson, opponents nominated Edmund's brother, Henry. Edmund Cooper faced a dilemma that few would ever have to confront: choosing between his political benefactor, a former U. S. President, and his own brother. Edmund Cooper was towing the Johnson line, keeping the votes in place to ensure victory. If Edmund switched from Johnson to his brother, it would undoubtedly lead to enough defections to decide the election against Johnson.⁵⁰

The matter already hung on a small number of votes. On the 21st unnamed men came to Johnson's room and informed him that he would be elected as soon as he provided \$2,000 to pay for two votes. Immediately Johnson forced the men from his room, threatening to expose the entire scandal even if he did get elected.

Meanwhile, Edmund Cooper pondered a tough decision. The legislature had been won with the intense campaigning of Johnson and it would seem disloyal to voters if their wishes were not followed. Yet in the end, the adage about blood being thicker than water proved true. On October 22, 1869, Edmund Cooper changed his support to his brother Henry and succeeded in electing to the Senate.⁵¹ There is no indication that Edmund Cooper had any knowledge of this turn of events before October 21. Yet even if there were no diabolical conspiracy between brothers, then one would soon be imagined by the man they had succeeded in defeating.

⁴⁹ Richard P. Llewellyn Baber to Johnson Oct.26, 1869 *PAJ* 16:137; Milton, *Age of Hate*, 659-660; Nashville *Union and American* Oct. 20, 1869.

⁵⁰Bible, "Post Presidential," 21-22.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 22

Johnson's loss signaled another public humiliation, which added to his bitterness over impeachment. He and many of his supporters saw the Coopers' actions as a clear betrayal. If Johnson could not win, then other viable candidates aside from Henry Cooper stood by ready to step in to take over the race. To Johnson, the Coopers' had committed personal treason that he would never forget. Until the end of his life, he would refer to them as Judases. Yet the election was over. If the political situation remained stable, then another Senate seat would not come open again until 1875. Johnson would be forced to wait. On the night of his defeat, he turned a catered, would-be victory dinner into a sumptuous party at the Stacey House, and his supporters gathered around him to celebrate their hard work in the campaign. If Johnson believed that he would be absent from the political scene for the next six years, Tennessee politics pulled him in sooner than he thought.⁵²

⁵² John C Vaughn to Johnson Sept. 24, 1869 *PAJ* 16:119, Bible "Post Presidential," 12

Chapter Three

Losing an election may be tough, but losing a close election is tougher. After the debacle in Nashville, Andrew Johnson found himself with no immediate prospects for the first time since the 1830s. For a man who thrived in the political arena, the idea of retirement must have been like facing a prison sentence. At sixty-two, Johnson was no longer a young man. Now he faced life in Greeneville, a town that utterly bored him, caring for an invalid wife. Yet Johnson's personal desires and angst would soon be put into perspective when his state began to face a situation that was unpalatable to those who had fought to preserve the Union.

Immediately following the senatorial election, a scramble began in Nashville to capitalize on the conservative and Democratic gains in the state legislature. Almost immediately, conservative cries for a new state constitution reached fever pitch. The voters had made it clear that they wanted a change in the state's laws. The governor so on called for a convention that would convene in early 1870. Since conservatives had won such an overwhelming victory throughout the state, it became obvious they would

dominate the convention. It would only be logical that Tennessee's most famous son would take part in the proceedings.⁵³

Any hope that Johnson would reemerge immediately after his defeat and join this crucial event in the state's future were soon dashed. Johnson refused Greenville's nomination to represent it in the coming convention. Pleas from all corners of the state converged on Johnson in hopes that he would reenter the political arena. These ranged from local Democratic politics to the effort of many to begin a white man's party.⁵⁴ It appeared that Johnson could be retiring from public service after the defeat in the legislature.

In late 1869-early 1870, Andrew Johnson discovered a new level to his bitterness. For him a return to the Senate would have been the ultimate vindication for the impeachment debacle. Instead of tasting redemption, he faced the perceived insult of a stolen election. Regardless of the details of the events surrounding the election Johnson's mind was made up. "Henry Cooper, the Senator Elect, takes the office at the sacrifice of his brother's personal honor, his public obligations, and the basest ingratitude," Johnson declared. Attacking the Coopers would become a standard part of Johnson's political speeches, along with his defense of the Constitution and his incessant attacks upon President Grant.⁵⁵

Johnson's bitterness did not bring about his retirement from public office, however. Early in 1870, Johnson concentrated his political efforts in the newspaper publishing business. His efforts to expand his influence included trying to buy a

⁵³ Jones, "State Debt," 30-1; E.W. Hidrick to Johnson Nov. 1, 1869 *PAJ* 16:139.

⁵⁴ E.W. Hidrick to Johnson Nov. 11, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 139; Phineas T. Scruggs to Johnson Nov. 24, 1869 *PAJ* 16:143.

⁵⁵ Johnson to Gideon Welles Dec. 8, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 146.

controlling share in political newspapers across the state. When agents spent several months trying to gain an interest in the *Memphis Appeal*, it appeared Johnson would gain a political vehicle in the western part of the state where his political support remained the weakest.⁵⁶

Johnson's efforts clearly demonstrated that he wanted to remain a part of politics. It was just unclear in what capacity he would do so. The state would surely need him for the new Democratic movement demonstrated that a large concerted effort would be made to transform the state to its pre-war lifestyle. Klan violence, which many radical and conservative leaders had tried to curb with legislation, still went unpunished. Now, with the coming convention a concerted legitimate effort to return Tennessee to antebellum conditions would be made.⁵⁷

On January 10, 1870, delegates from all corners of Tennessee convened to write a new state constitution. The delegates soon revealed their political disposition when they elected former Confederate Gen. John C. Brown as president of the convention. Only four Republicans participated. For many, the struggle had one purpose: to fully disenfranchise black voters. This feat could not be achieved outright because of the recent amendments. The convention would instead be one of the first of the southern states to attempt to get around the Constitution. The delegates muted black voting rights through the inclusion of the poll tax. In a state where blacks generally remained economically depressed, this would all but kill any rights that may have survived Klan violence. The poll tax would soon become the focus of debate over the constitution.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Rolfe S. Saunders to Johnson Dec. 13, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 148; John C. Burch to Johnson Dec. 13, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 149.

⁵⁷ Trelease, *White Terror*, 278.

⁵⁸ Hart, *Bourbons* 1, 3; Bergeron, *Tennesseans* 178-9.

Beyond the movement against black voters, the convention moved to reinstate fully the voting rights of the ex-Confederates. They never wanted to experience the domination of the state by another powerful governor such as Parson Brownlow. The delegates believed that curbing that power required ensuring the ex-Confederates their voting rights.⁵⁹

As delegates debated Tennessee's future, many speculated on Johnson's. Some in the media forecast Johnson's eclipse by stating that he was no longer relevant. "He is effectively done for," wrote the *New York Times*. And Johnson gave no reason to the public to doubt this prediction. Instead, many concentrated on what Johnson would do outside the political arena. Some speculated that he would enter the business world. Others believed that commercial property he bought in Greeneville would be used by him to start a bank. Those close to him knew that Johnson continued his efforts to buy a controlling portion of the *Memphis Appeal*, which many believed to be a good investment.⁶⁰

One thing remained clear, however. Johnson did not enjoy his time in Greeneville, complaining:

The town is as lifeless as a graveyard, and business look like they are all attending funeral obsequies. In fact all or nearly all of our best citizens have gone. I feel as though I was among strangers, not to say enemies, and scarcely ever go up into the village."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Trefousse, *Johnson*, 359, Bergeron, *Tennesseans* 179.

⁶⁰ *New York Times* Oct. 25, 1869; Johnson to William Lowry February 13, 1870 *PAJ* 16: 168, *New York Times* May 9, 1870; John C. Burch to Johnson Jan. 26, 1870 1/26/70 *PAJ* 16: 166.

⁶¹ Johnson to William M. Lowry Feb. 13, 1870 *PAJ* 16: 168.

Clearly Greeneville did not socially fulfill Johnson, who still longed for the political life of Washington. This emptiness led to one of Johnson's most unlikely friendships.

A year earlier, Johnson had entered the law office of an unsuspecting ex-Confederate officer name E.C. Reeves. The shocked lawyer soon found a former president dispensing advice on business and offering Reeves money if ever needed. Although the friendship smacked of some political posturing to ex-Confederates, it seems that Johnson struck up the relationship out of genuine need for real intellectual companionship. Soon Reeves found himself at Johnson's home on a frequent basis, reading papers to Johnson and writing letters for him. (Johnson apparently still suffered from an injury to his arm that prevented him from maintaining his correspondence.) Reeves eventually found himself in charge of Johnson's own newspaper in Greenville, *The National Union*.⁶² Not only did he acquire a much-needed friend, but also Johnson could now count a Confederate among his closest advisors. It would become increasingly important as time passed.

Although the poll tax meant a clear renunciation of the voting rights of most of Tennessee's black citizens, it had another affect. Poor whites could not afford to pay a poll tax either. Many felt that even if the registrars practiced uneven enforcement of the law, it would still emasculate countless white male voters. He more than anyone else recognized the dignity that voting could bring to poor white men and feared that this would shut them out of the political process.⁶³

⁶² E. C. Reeves, "The Real Andrew Johnson," appendix to Lloyd Stryker's *Andrew Johnson: A Study in Courage* (New York, 1929). 825-827; Johnson to Gideon Welles Dec.8, 1869 *PAJ* 16: 147.

⁶³ Hart, *Bourbons* 4; Johnson to George H. Nixon March 4, 1870 *PAJ* 16: 172.

Johnson believed that the new constitution signaled a trend in which the legislatures usurped power from the other branches and electorate, since much of the Constitution had been designed to cut the power of the governor and the state supreme court. For Johnson, the legislative branch challenging the power of the other branches was reminiscent of his own struggle while president. For this reason he came out against ratification, arguing that the new measures made it far more dangerous for Tennessee than the previous constitution.⁶⁴

Johnson saw some hope in the new constitution, however. He viewed that reinstating ex-rebels as voters was an inclination toward a more democratic government. Yet he saw language in which it stated that Tennessee voluntarily rejoined the Union as a vindication for secession. The poll tax, however, became his main reason for opposing ratification, as he declared that, “This policy will be to make a large number of voters dependent upon capital and few opulent aristocrats and will lead to corruption, frauds and the degradation of the ballot box.”

Johnson was again out of step with Democratic Party leaders. The party, along with their main mouthpiece in the state, the Nashville *Union and American*, adamantly supported the constitution, particularly the poll tax. It would be the measure that kept the transient and homeless voters at bay, they argued, while at the same time giving more power to the taxpayers. Republicans saw it very differently, as did Johnson. The constitution and the poll tax became a platform to increase the power of ex-Confederates. Regardless, the constitution of Tennessee was approved by voter referendum.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Johnson to George H. Nixon March 4, 1870 *PAJ* 16: 172.

⁶⁵ Johnson to George H. Nixon March 4, 1870 *PAJ* 16: 172; “Speech at Gallatin” Sept. 17, 1870 *PAJ* 16: 213; John C. Burch to Johnson March 9, 1870 *PAJ* 16: 174-5; Frank B. Williams “Poll Tax as a Suffrage

The ratification of the constitution required statewide office holders to stand for election during 1870. This development would demonstrate the real effect of the new constitution. Governor Senter realized that his earlier move toward the Democrats would not be enough to sustain him in office, so he voluntarily stepped aside. Instead, the viable candidates that came forward were not only Democrats but also ex-Confederates, a disturbing trend had begun.

The candidate who would emerge as the front-runner was convention president John C. Brown. He had the perfect credentials for many of the ex-rebels. He himself had enlisted as a private during the war and had risen through the ranks to major general. He stood at the defense of Fort Donelson, was a prisoner of war at Fort Warren and fought at Perryville, Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, and Atlanta. At the battle of Franklin, he was severely wounded. Brown soon returned to Pulaski, Tennessee, where he resumed his old law practice. At the convention he was a moderate ex-Whig who might be able to hold the Radicals down in order to arrive at a sensible constitution.⁶⁶

Despite some rumors in the national press, Johnson did not plan to run for governor. The rumors reached absurd proportions when it was suggested that Johnson wanted the post in order to appoint himself as senator. Instead, Brown emerged as the conservative and Democratic hopeful. Quarles and businessman Arthur Colyar, both of whom, would soon drop out. Brown was left with a wide-open field. The campaign issue that mattered most was the administrations of Brownlow and Senter. With black voters neutralized and rebels fully enfranchised, this issue clearly favored the Democrats and

Requirement in the South, 1870-1901" *Journal of Southern History*, 18 (1952): 473, 476-67, Hart, *Bourbons*, 8.

⁶⁶ Phillips, *Governors* 91; Anne-Leslie Owens, "John Calvin Brown," *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, 94-95; Williams, "Poll Tax," 472.

conservatives. Brown represented the moderate yet very Confederate alternative to the radicalism of Brownlow and the moderate Senter. Brown won the gubernatorial race 78, 979 to 41, 500 votes. His "coattails" would help elect eight ex-Confederates to Congress. The middle and western portion of the state voted overwhelmingly for Brown, while Johnson's East Tennessee voted for Republican candidates.⁶⁷

During the gubernatorial campaign, only two candidates opposed Brown's principles. William H. Wisener was against the poll tax and Klan violence, while Arthur Colyar, an ex-Confederate Whig, stood for a more industrialized Tennessee. Johnson, himself a moderate, supported Colyar, because Wisener resembled previous radicals. Johnson's support of Colyar demonstrated that he could support an ex-Confederate for office as long as he shared his moderate views. Although Colyar dropped out of the race before the election, Johnson appears to have supported no other candidate. Between a radical and an ex-Confederate general, Johnson as a constituent had no place to go.⁶⁸

What effectively occurred with the election and ratification of the state constitution was a coup for Democrats and ex-Confederates. Under Brownlow, ex-Confederates were a rare breed in state politics. The constitution changed that for good, and the electorate responded in their favor. In the years that followed, more and more ex-Confederates stood for election to offices throughout the state. By the middle of the 1870s, over half the Tennessee congressman had fought for the Confederacy. Only two served the Union. Forty percent of the legislature served the Confederacy. For the next dozen years only Confederate officers would be elected to the governor's office. Now it

⁶⁷ Arthur S. Colyar to Johnson August 30, 1870 *PAJ* 16: 230; *New York Times* August 15, 1870; Hart, *Bourbons*, 12; Jones, "State Debt" 42-3.

⁶⁸ Hart, *Bourbons* 9-12.

became an advantage for candidates to carry their Confederate service on their shoulders.⁶⁹

During the campaign, Johnson broke the period of silence stemming from his defeat. He used a speech in Gallatin during the summer of 1870 to comment on his own controversial election and other more important issues. He once again argued for the direct election of senators, but stated that until then candidates standing for election to the legislature should reveal whom they planned to choose for the seat so they could be held accountable. More importantly, Johnson advocated an abandonment of candidates who had anything to do with secession. Although it appears to have had no resonance with the voters during this election cycle, his opposition to candidates wrapped in secession and rebellion would soon take on new importance.⁷⁰

Absent from Johnson's speech and from much of the campaign as a whole were the issues of violence and theft. Early in the campaign for governor and the referendum on the state constitution, tales of violence against blacks began to spread. Reports of outright bribery of black voters and election rigging throughout the state also came to light. Any chance that blacks could rectify their situation soon disappeared when the new constitution took away most of their electoral power. The conservative and Democratic parties were now firmly in control of the state's electoral system.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Robert B. Jones, "Southern Congressman in the Gilded Age" *East Tennessee Historical Society Publications* 47 (1975), 82; Chattanooga, *Daily Commercial* Dec. 15, 1875; Jones, "Southern Congressmen," 82

⁷⁰ "Speech at Gallatin" August 17, 1870 *PAJ* 16: 213.

⁷¹ W.A. Stillwell to William Brownlow, April 18, 1870, April 10, 1870, Brownlow Papers, University of Tennessee Special Collections.

Chapter Four

After suffering impeachment as president, Johnson had been victim of what he thought was a stolen senate seat. Now he watched as his state approved a constitution and elected officials opposed to the values that he had fought for. Specifically, he was appalled at the new poll tax commissioned by the new state constitution. Instead of just disenfranchising blacks, the tax had succeeded in hurting poor whites. The politically scorned Johnson shouted at every chance:” I sprang from the ranks, and I am proud of it.”⁷²

Now, for the first time since the war, ex-Confederates had full voting rights guaranteed by the constitution, and they used them to send other ex-Confederates to represent them in Washington and the statehouse in Nashville. During 1870-71, Johnson kept a low profile, making very few public appearances and few inquiries into holding office. Instead he resumed his life in Greenville. In time those ex-Confederates would be his preoccupation.

⁷² “Speech at Knoxville” May 27, 1871 *PAJ* 16:262.

As Johnson recovered from his defeat and the rapid constitutional changes that Tennessee had undergone, he began appearing in public once again. Although he gave few speeches in 1870-71, they had the characteristic Johnson histrionics. "I am proud that I am one of the people, and I am still prouder that I had an opportunity to defend the constitutional government, and that I never feared mortal man while I was doing it," he bellowed at one stop.⁷³ The theatrics were not the only things that remained the same. Johnson's remained steadfast in the support his beliefs. He stood against an imperial legislative branch, against the corrupt Grant administration, and in favor of repudiating the state's debts. Johnson showed little mobility in those beliefs and defended them thoroughly.⁷⁴

As the election year of 1872 approached, he stood at an odd juncture in his post presidential life. He had wanted the Senate seat badly in 1869 and was privately planning to stand for the next open senate seat in 1875. But 1872 promised to be the most exciting political season in Tennessee since the war. Aside from the upcoming presidential election, the people would soon choose their second congressional delegation under the constitution as well as a new at-large seat that was awarded Tennessee from the census of 1870. It would be a chance to campaign in and represent the entire state, yet not be dependent on the state legislature for the position. In essence it would be a Senate campaign that would result in a House seat.

As would be expected, Johnson began considering a run for the seat. Since his defeat in 1869, his life in Greeneville had become mundane. Greeneville's was a sleepy population whose interest in politics scarcely approached Johnson's. Caring for his

⁷³ *ibid*, 262.

⁷⁴ *ibid*, 254-55

invalid wife, Eliza was the only thing that kept him there. With his children grown and gone from the town, he suffered a striking case of loneliness. Many afternoons would find him wandering the railroad depot alone, talking with strangers from the trains. As the fall and winter of 1871 slowly turned into 1872, Johnson apparently began suffering from depression. He wrote his daughter of his desperate mood: “There is nothing of interest transpiring in Greenville all is dull and flat. I long to see the return of spring when I will be set free from this place forever I hope.”⁷⁵

Whether Johnson anticipated a move somewhere else, or of melancholy caused him to contemplate death, is unknown. Instead of death, it appears that what Johnson most desired another chance at the political life. The at-large seat showed promise.

As the election season drew near, Johnson sounded more and more as if he would run. In addition to his typical take on the issues, he began distancing himself from both parties. He stated to a large audience in Knoxville: “Thank God, I am no Rebel, and I thank God still more, I am no Radical.”

This type of rhetoric signaled Johnson’s continued campaign to push Tennessee into the political mainstream. By not endorsing the ex-Confederates who controlled the state’s government, he made it clear that he opposed allowing the men who made war against the Union to hold office. Although no one would ever confuse Johnson for a Radical Republican, he made sure always to balance his statements against Democrats by equating his non-support for them with his detestation of the Radicals. As the season continued, his language concerning the Democrats grew stronger, “It were infinitely better that Radicalism should still riot in plunder and power, through another four years,

⁷⁵ Andrew Johnson to Martha Patterson June 18, 1871 *PAJ* 16: 268; Interview with Memphis *Appeal* Correspondent August 22, 1871 *PAJ* 16:271-2; Andrew Johnson to Martha Patterson Dec.19, 1871 *PAJ*

than that the Democratic party should triumph by base abandonment of honesty and principle.”⁷⁶

It became clear that Johnson had serious problems with the Democratic Party. As he saw the Democratic takeover of the state government, he had looked back to the original notion of the party. For Johnson, the Democratic Party would always be the party of Andrew Jackson. This meant that should advocate more representation for the common man. Although Johnson never repudiated the right to vote of black men, he never spoke against their disenfranchisement. It seems his idea of a Jacksonian Democratic Party was one as lily white as that of Jackson. When Johnson spoke of this allegiance to Jackson’s party, he advocated the direct election of the president, vice-president and U.S. senators. Particularly Jacksonian was his criticism of the national debt and the subservience of the government to the financial systems of New York. He believed that starting associations across the state devoted to Old Hickory could revive a culture devoted to Jackson’s beliefs.⁷⁷ Johnson truly believed that the Democratic Party that now ruled Tennessee was not the one began by Andrew Jackson.

The prospective Democratic field was small. Although Johnson insisted that he had no interest in returning to the lower house of Congress, many expected him to be the frontrunner. He stated that he supported John Netherland for the seat, but many local Democratic candidates wanted Johnson because they believed that he would help them at election time. Johnson had other personal reasons for not wanting to make the run.

16:282.

⁷⁶ “Speech at Knoxville” May 27, 1871 *PAJ* 16:258; “Interview with Memphis *Appeal* Correspondent” August 22, 1871 *PAJ* 16: 273.

⁷⁷ Andrew Johnson to Malcolm Hay Jan. 31, 1871 *PAJ* 16: 224, 226-7.

Specifically, if he made the run, the Ku Klux Klan threatened violence against him.

Despite his protestations, Johnson's friends urged him to run.⁷⁸

Some of his enemies had gone to great lengths to embarrass him. In the spring of 1872 he was called to Washington to answer questions about General Don C. Buell's lost war records. The issue involved Johnson because he was military Governor at the time. This occurred almost simultaneously with a damaging accusation that Johnson had been involved with a local Greeneville woman named Emily Harold. The rumor was so malicious that Johnson's old nemesis at the *New York Times* declared the affair a real tragedy. Whether the accusation was true or not has not been established, but its venom was so damaging that Harold committed suicide.⁷⁹

He talked of other candidates and it was generally believed that he would wait for the Senate seat that would come open in three years. Yet Johnson began to rethink his reluctance when the full slate of Democratic candidates emerged. Instead of a spectrum of candidates that represented all of Tennessee, the three frontrunners, William Quarles, Benjamin Cheatham, and William Bate, were all ex-Confederate generals. After awhile, Cheatham emerged as the most likely candidate. In response, Johnson allowed his name to be floated as a contender for the first time.⁸⁰

It was the prospect of the ex-Confederate leaders marginalizing the will of people and setting policy that infuriated Johnson the most. He went into the race hoping to change the direction that the state was headed. Early in the campaign, Johnson received

⁷⁸ Andrew Johnson to John Netherland March 3, 1872 *PAJ* 16: 293-4; W.B. Carter to T.A.R. Nelson August 24, 1872 T.A.R. Nelson papers, McClung Collection, Knoxville; Interview with Cincinnati *Commercial Correspondent PAJ* 16: 340.

⁷⁹ Nehemiah G. Ordway to Andrew Johnson May 16, 1872 *PAJ* 16: 301; *New York Times* May 25, 1872; Thomas W. Dickbullock to Andrew Johnson May 24, 1872 *PAJ* 16: 304.

⁸⁰ Jones, "State Debt," 47-8. John C. Burch to Johnson May 22, 1872 *PAJ* 16: 303

the nomination of a new Workingman Party, a group formed almost exclusively of working people.⁸¹

Johnson was finally making amends with many of his fellow Democrats and trying to end the breach that had existed between them. This seemed the case in August, 1872, when he went to Nashville to take part in the Democratic convention. On his way there he expressed little interest in the seat but was acting more and more as a candidate. Indeed, when he took on his old room at the Maxwell House, it had the unmistakable appearance of a campaign headquarters. In fact, he was there as a candidate but not for the congressional at-large seat. When he arrived in Nashville, he floored his confidant, E.C. Reeves, by telling him that he did not want the seat and that Reeves was to withdraw his name from consideration when the convention began. He was there to solidify support for his bid for the Senate seat that would come open in 1875.⁸²

At that moment Johnson explained why he wanted more than anything to wait for the Senate seat: “I was impeached, and while legally vindicated by a minority vote, I would rather have the vindication of my state by electing me to any old seat in the Senate of the United States than to be monarch of the grandest empire on earth, God being my judge for this I live and will never die content without it.”

Reeves withdrew Johnson’s name from consideration on the first day and caught a train back to East Tennessee.⁸³

Johnson probably would have lost in any case since Cheatham’s men from western Tennessee had been working tirelessly for weeks to end Johnson’s chances for

⁸¹ John C. Gout to Johnson June 24, 1872 *PAJ* 16: 316; Benjamin F.C. Brooks to Johnson July 2, 1872 *PAJ* 16: 319; Bible, “Post-Presidential”, 32.

⁸² “Speech at Knoxville” *PAJ* 16: 331; Bible, “Post-Presidential”, 28,30,31.

⁸³ Reeves, “Real Andrew Johnson”, 832.

the nomination. Most of the Democratic papers had already endorsed Cheatham, so it seemed that Johnson saved himself from a brutal convention fight that might have ended his sincere hopes for a Senate seat. Yet as always with Johnson, a surprise loomed large. On the night of August 22, after Cheatham received the Democratic nomination, Johnson was incited by a crowd to give a speech in the public square of Nashville. In the midst of a typical bellicose speech, he announced after all that he would stand as an independent candidate for the at-large seat. Although some believed that the event was planned, many were stunned. Reeves, his main advisor, found out by reading a newspaper on his way back to Greeneville. No explanation for Johnson's change of heart has been found. Some believed that his confusion in the days before and that very night had been the result of too much brandy. Regardless, he was now in the race.⁸⁴

Johnson had everything to lose in this campaign. The Democratic Party would be the only vehicle to get him to Senate, yet he again forced himself outside the party. He believed that it was important to break what he called the "crust" that was forming around the Democratic Party and the entire state. This "crust" consisted of the ex-Confederate officers gaining the positions of power and making the state's elected offices impenetrable by anyone except those whom they chose. Johnson never fully believed that he had a chance to win, especially after the Republicans nominated their strongest candidate, Horace Maynard. Instead Johnson ran as a spoiler, the one who would break the stranglehold of the ex-Confederates.⁸⁵

Johnson had enough support to be taken seriously. The three candidates embarked on a series of joint campaign appearances that began in Bristol, the easternmost town, and

⁸⁴ John League to Johnson August 15, 1872 *PAJ* 16: 338-9; Bible "Post-Presidential", 31, Milton, *Age of Hate*, 664.

continued to Memphis. The positions that Johnson took were not new. He advocated repudiation of the debt, limiting the power of Congress, as well as continuing his attacks upon President Grant. Now he challenged the unfairness of a convention in a push for more democratic control of political institutions. More importantly, Johnson changed the dynamics of the race, when he concentrated his attacks on Cheatham. In Brownsville, Johnson explicitly blamed leaders such as Cheatham for dragging the common people into the late war while he took credit for pulling them out. This type of attack was typical and kept Cheatham constantly on the defensive. Indeed, Maynard had much of a free ride. He watched from the sidelines the political beating that Johnson regularly gave Cheatham. Remaining above the fray while Johnson handled his main opponent gave Maynard a clear shot at victory.⁸⁶

On the campaign trail, Johnson routinely dwarfed Cheatham. Although not a great speaker, Johnson's bombastic style was much more entertaining than Cheatham's practice of reading the same speech at each stop. Cheatham's most effective campaigning tool against Johnson was a speech by Francis Dunnington, who called a Johnson a self-centered man without consideration for the people or the state arguing that this race exemplified his pettiness. Cheatham had the speech printed and distributed. The Democratic candidate found himself using resources to combat Johnson that should have been used against Maynard.⁸⁷

Cheatham had more problems than Johnson. The Democrats in 1872 had no presidential candidate, having to endorse Liberal Republican candidate Horace Greeley. Although most conservatives reluctantly supported Greeley, having no strong Democratic

⁸⁵ *New York Times* August 25, 1872; "Speech at Knoxville" *PAJ* 16:337; Bible, "Post Presidential" 34.

⁸⁶ Milton, *Age of Hate*, 663 "Speech at Brownsville" Oct. 17, 1872 *PAJ* 16: 393.

candidate would surely hurt Cheatham at the polls. Also, many in the national press supported Johnson's effort to keep the ex-Confederate out of Congress. Even the *New York Times*, Johnson's arch-enemy, supported his effort.⁸⁸

Johnson's supporters were optimistic about his chances and fully expected him to win. For many, the thought of losing appeared never to have occurred to them. They saw him as the savior of the non-Confederate conservative Democrats and believed that he could make it to Congress. This attitude explains the alarm they felt when Johnson quit campaigning a few weeks before the vote. This came as luminaries such as Thomas A. R. Nelson went to help him in Middle Tennessee. His supporters became desperate when Johnson turned down an opportunity to appear at one of his own rallies in Nashville close to election date, a very strange occurrence since Johnson usually never turned down a chance to make a speech. Supporters begged him to return to campaigning but Johnson had lost interest.⁸⁹

His lack of interest belied his contention to the voters that he was taking this race seriously. It revealed his real intention of spoiling this race for the Democrats. By purposely singling out the Democrats, he was burning the bridge to the oldest political home that he had ever known. Democratic voters might ultimately forgive him but he would have to reach them without the apparatus of the party. By this action he guaranteed that he would always face both parties to fight for the votes, yet Johnson wanted a coalition of moderate men of all parties and that is what he struggled for in this election.

⁸⁷ *Nashville Union and American* Sept. 7, 1872; Hart, *Bourbons*, 16.

⁸⁸ Interview with *Memphis Appeal* Correspondent August 6, 1872; *New York Times* Oct. 22, 1872.

⁸⁹ Thomas B. Alexander. *Thomas A.R. Nelson of East Tennessee* (Nashville, 1956), 165-6; A.S. Colyar to T.A. R. Nelson Oct. 13, 1872, T.A.R. Nelson papers, McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library System, Knoxville, Tennessee; A.A. Kyle et al to T.A. R. Nelson Oct. 23, 1872, Nelson papers, McClung Collection; A.S. Colyar to T.A. R. Nelson Oct. 24, 1872, Nelson papers, McClung Collection; James B. Bingham to Johnson *PAJ* 16: 375.

In the end however, it made no difference. Johnson did not expect to win and he did not, but he accomplished exactly what he set out to do by denying Cheatham the congressional seat. In the end, Maynard won with 80,250 votes. Cheatham placed second with 66,106 votes. Johnson played his role as spoiler perfectly with 37,903 votes, most of which otherwise would have gone to Cheatham. Johnson lost native Greene County while winning the rest of the vote in the east and a good portion of ex-rebels of the western part of the state.⁹⁰

Johnson had broken the ex-Confederate military ring by electing a Republican in a system stacked against Republicans. He proved to be the most influential player in the state as evidenced in the legislative makeup after the election. In the state senate, six members identified themselves as Johnson supporters as opposed to seven Republicans and twelve Democrats. In the legislature, nineteen Johnson men sat, opposed to 26 Republicans and 36 Democrats. He had created a voting bloc that could affect policy. The course of Tennessee's politics had been changed so that two parties could be viable once again. That was what was important to many people as stated by a Johnson follower: "I congratulate you on having just achieved the greatest victory of your life."⁹¹

⁹⁰ Trefousse, Johnson, 363; Hart *Bourbons*, 17.

⁹¹ Hart, *Bourbons*, 17; *New York Times* Nov. 13, 1872; Clement J. Moody to Johnson Nov. 19, 1872 *PAJ* 16: 403.

Chapter Five

The defeat of 1872 felt like no other. In fact, it may have felt good. For such a defeat, Johnson received an unusual amount of praise and congratulations. It had many in the state trumpeting the death of the military ring. “Johnson has killed the old se ciphers, Cheatham Democracy here,” said W.S. Hill. The long-range problem from the defeat, if any, was impossible to tell but Johnson still had only one goal: getting to the United States Senate.⁹²

For a short time after the defeat, it appeared that Johnson might have his opportunity to get to the Senate sooner than he expected. In the time since Henry Cooper had entered the Senate, he had been beset with tragedy. Not only had he lost his wife, but also two of his children who had died suddenly in the previous year. Some encouraged Johnson to come to Nashville, since it was expected that Cooper would resign at any time. Johnson chose not to go to Nashville on what could only have be on described as a macabre waiting game, but his desire to get to the Senate was encouraged by the

⁹² W. J. Hill to T.A.R. Nelson Feb. 4, 1873 Nelson papers, McClung Collection.

possibility. Cooper proved much stronger than anyone expected. He served out his term without further incident.⁹³

It also appeared that the national Democratic Party held no animus toward Johnson for his actions. After the disastrous defeat of Greeley in the previous national leaders began to take stock of where the party was going. In this effort, they solicited Johnson his opinions on the issues of the day. It seemed that they were forgiving his actions and looked to him as a part of their leadership. Regardless of the party's efforts, Johnson would make no more overtures to the party.⁹⁴

For a while it appeared that Johnson might never live to see another election. In the summer of 1873 a cholera epidemic hit East Tennessee. As many of Greeneville's citizens began to succumb to the dreadful disease, Johnson sent his family away to his daughter's farm in Carter County while he remained behind to lend any assistance that he could. Soon he was dreadfully sick. He was taken to his daughter's farm, where he lay ill for several days. As his illness became worse he fully expected to die. Sometime on June 29 he mustered enough strength to write a final statement: "I have performed my duty to my God, my country and my family. I have nothing to fear. Approaching death to me is the mere shadow of God's protecting wing. beneath it I almost feel sacred. Here I know can no evil come. Here I will rest in quiet and peace beyond the reach of calumny's poison and shaft the influence of envy and jealous enemies, where Treason and Traitors in state, back sliders and hypocrites in church can have no place- where the great fact will be realized that God is Truth and gratitude, the highest attribute of men. Adieu- Siciter a

⁹³ Joseph H. Thompson to Johnson Jan. 17, 1873 *PAJ* 16: 417-8.

⁹⁴ Robert B. Roosevelt to Johnson 04/29/1873 *PAJ* 16: 424-5.

astra. Such is the way to the stars or immortality.⁹⁵

Even as he believed that he was dying, Johnson could not relieve his mind from the works of traitors.

Against all indications otherwise, Johnson recovered. With it the accolades for his election performance continued. The *New York Times* even went so far as to call Johnson a savior against the seizure of power by the ex-Confederates. By the fall he was returning to old form. He gave an interview to the *New York Herald*. His biographers often consider Johnson as the original master of the political interview. This one demonstrated why. As usual, he attacked all his favorite targets, Congress and the bondholders; but with his strength regained, he seemed to acquire a new vigor in his ability to attack. When it came to Grant, he was extremely patronizing. “Why the little fellow is but a puppet in the hands of his advisors,” he said. His attacks were a signal that he was ready to get back to campaigning at all costs.⁹⁶

Late in 1873, Johnson found himself in another politically volatile situation as the issue of the Lincoln assassination conspirators arose. Johnson was accused by the former head of the conspiracy trials, Joseph Holt, of ignoring a plea for Mary Surratt’s life during a cabinet meeting soon before she was executed. Holt charged that Johnson carried through the execution out of a sense of vengeance that knew no bounds. Johnson spent several weeks and even made a trip to Washington to refute the charge. He and his former secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, argued that Holt had waited too many years

⁹⁵ *Nashville Union and American* June 6, 1873; *Knoxville Press and Herald* June 9, 1873; “Note on Death” June 9, 1873 *PAJ* 16: 430-1.

⁹⁶ *Greeneville Intelligencer* August 6, 1873; *New York Times* August 17, 1873; Interview with a *New York Herald* Correspondent Sept. 19, 1873 *PAJ* 16: 444-7.

and after too many principle participants had died for his charge to be credible. The issue was soon dropped with little damage to Johnson's reputation.⁹⁷

As he prepared for the Senate race, Johnson's political situation in Tennessee improved. He was enjoying even more political power as the men he helped win election to the legislature wielded their influence. They held the balance of power and used it not only to reverse legislation that Governor Brown had passed, but also to win the speakerships in both houses. One piece of legislation where Johnson did not use his power was the 1873 funding bill, which would fully fund the state's debt, and which was now at \$30 million. Johnson had preached repudiation for at least part of the debt, but he recognized that this issue could tear apart his coalition of power. He allowed the members to vote their conscience. He remained silent about the bill until a recession hit. Then he finally opposed it. The bill passed with a coalition of Johnson men and members of both parties. Although he was called a demagogue for this precarious stance, Johnson managed to hold together his supporters.⁹⁸

Early in February, Johnson told friends that he would definitely run. He faced a formidable opponent in the current governor of the state, John Brown. Brown was a former Confederate General and therefore fell into Johnson's definition of the despised "military ring." Early in the year, Johnson mused about these generals who dominated the Democratic Party: "They care for neither the people nor the interest of the state further than their own aggrandizement."

⁹⁷ Interview with Washington *Star Herald* Correspondent Oct.13, 1873 *PAJ* 16:457; *New York Times* Oct. 14, 1873; Gideon Welles to Johnson Nov. 05, 1873 *PAJ* 16: 472.

⁹⁸ Hart, *Bourbons*, 17-8, 20; Jones, "State Debt", 70, 86-7,56, 68-9; *New York Times* Dec.8, 1873.

Indeed, Johnson wanted to take this contest to the people and have the legislative elections decided as a referendum on a Senate candidate. With the 1869 fiasco in mind, Johnson wanted to avoid any confusion about whom the people were chose.⁹⁹

As Johnson took to the campaign trail in the fall, he built on the non-partisan effort that he made in 1872. He lamented the divisions of party and longed for the day of the giants, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and John C. Calhoun. Of course, this was a highly idealized sentiment, since the Jacksonian era was as partisan as any other, but he evoked a simpler time in the life of the people. In such a politically charged era, with the memory of war still fresh and Reconstruction not far behind, Johnson's rhetoric was bound to strike a nerve. In the end however Johnson was making this run for very personal reasons explaining himself simply by saying "I feel that I was wronged."¹⁰⁰

Johnson avoided party labels for himself as much as he could and he seemed to find a new freedom in his independence. He found it possible to win Democrats on certain issues while questioning the motives of other Democrats. The same strategy was effective for the Republicans. For this reason members of both parties came together to denounce and defeat him.¹⁰¹ The Democrats met in August, 1874, and, as expected, Brown emerged as the candidate. Johnson attacked him routinely throughout the campaign as an opportunist who only joined the Democratic Party from political necessity. Brown, who had used his term to reduce the debt considerably, portrayed

⁹⁹ Thomas Woodrow Davis, "Arthur S. Colyar and the New South, 1860-1905," PhD dissertation, University of Missouri, 1962 162; Johnson to John P. White Jan. 30, 1874 *PAJ* 16: 511; Interview with Nashville *Republican Banner* Correspondent April 30, 1874 *PAJ* 16:535-6.

¹⁰⁰ "Speech in Memphis" May 16, 1874 *PAJ* 16: 555-7

¹⁰¹ Alfred R. Wayne to Johnson June 02, 1874 *PAJ* 16: 562; "Speech at Shelbyville" Oct. 06, 1874 *PAJ* 16: 594; *New York Times* Oct. 17, 1874.

Johnson as a fiscally irresponsible opportunist whose vindictiveness propelled him into the public arena.¹⁰²

Johnson's support was naturally strong throughout the east while he held some strength in the west. In Middle Tennessee, Johnson appeared to have an even amount of supporters. It was hoped that his candidacy would help Republican candidates who were committing to him, since they had no strong senate hopeful themselves. This coalition went a long way in winning Johnson maximum support.¹⁰³ On the campaign trail, Johnson's position remained unchanged. In addition to calling for the commitment of candidates to a Senate hopeful, he stepped up his call for debt repudiation. Not only was he against the people funding the debt but also he called for the resulting tax burden be cut. By focusing on the debt and taxes, Johnson made the race on Brown's record as governor. Since Brown had been the principal proponent for funding, he naturally suffered, especially when the issue became attached to taxes. Brown's rebuttal was that Johnson may have opposed the bill but he benefited from it by trading bonds under the law. He had no defense for the state's tax problem. This issue had much sharper teeth than any other, even the Federal Civil Rights Bill that Johnson so adamantly opposed.¹⁰⁴

In the final month of the campaign, Johnson's relentless stumping and a new investigation of Brown's gubernatorial service helped Johnson candidates win the legislature. This in fact was not the difficult part. Johnson faced a long fall and winter. The selection of the senator would not occur until January, 1875, a full two months after

¹⁰² Nashville *Republican Banner* May 22, 1874; "Speech at Shelbyville" Oct. 6, 1874 *PAJ* 16:594 "Speech at Knoxville" Oct. 28, 1874 *PAJ* 16:603-10.

¹⁰³ Manson M. Brien Jr. to Johnson Nov. 9, 1874 *PAJ* 16: 615-6; Hart, *Bourbon*, .21.

¹⁰⁴ Jones, "State Debt," 90-6.

the legislative elections. In 1869 it had taken only a few weeks for intrigue to rob Johnson of the seat. Could he hold his support together for two months?

Immediately the parties began to portray the legislative victory in different ways. Both parties believed that Johnson's success signaled a victory for their side. In Johnson's East Tennessee, Democrats believed it to be a repudiation of Brownlow's Republicanism. The Republicans saw Johnson's splintering of the Democratic Party as their opening to dominate the political situation of Tennessee. Yet overall everyone in the eastern section believed that Johnson was the only man to heal the breach.¹⁰⁵ In the western part of the state, it appeared that the majority of the legislative delegates were solidly behind Johnson. Still, many in Middle Tennessee were working for Johnson's defeat, and movement to crowd the field with a dozen candidates to confuse the delegates was afoot. In order to head off any movement, Johnson moved to Nashville to steer his candidacy to victory as smoothly as possible.¹⁰⁶

His desperation to win was revealed when he went to Nashville during the midst of a family crisis. It appeared for several weeks as if Johnson's wife would not live. Years of bad health had taken their toll. For weeks Johnson routinely inquired about her health but never considered coming home, even though he took time to travel to Memphis to shore up support. He was clearly putting everything on the line for this one last chance at redemption. Johnson even spent Christmas away from home and family in

¹⁰⁵ *Greeneville Intelligencer* Nov. 13, 1874, Dec. 04, 1872.

¹⁰⁶ Willoby Haywood to Johnson Dec. 12, 1874 *PAJ* 16: 631; *Memphis Appeal* Nov. 29, 1874; Johnson to Martha Patterson Dec. 22, 1874 *PAJ* 16: 636.

relentless pursuit of a Senate seat and personal vindication. It would be his last Christmas.¹⁰⁷

As Johnson tried to solidify his support, some of it began to erode. When the mayor of Bristol, James M. Barker, demanded the city's legislative delegation cast its vote for Johnson, he was rebuked. This went along with an increasing sentiment that elevating Johnson to the Senate would make the state an accomplice in trying to settle his private scores instead of being concerned about serious representation. It seemed that a replay of 1869 might be on the horizon. Johnson sent Reeves on tour of the legislators to shore up support.¹⁰⁸

As the legislature gathered during the final week of January, the field consisted of three candidates. Aside from Johnson and Brown, ex-Confederate General William Bate stood as a candidate. Neither man could muster many votes against Johnson with the other in the race. For days, Bate and Brown supporters each tried to convince the other to drop out in order to have any chance to defeat Johnson. They routinely fell back on their war records to help them garner votes. On the 36th ballot, in the legislature Brown dropped out but Bate could still not gather much support. Eventually Bate dropped out, and Brown reentered the race. Regardless of the effort Brown could not overcome Johnson. On the 55th ballot Johnson was elected 55-51 votes.¹⁰⁹

Reeves rushed from the statehouse to Johnson's room at the Maxwell House at full speed with the good news. As he swung open the door he found Johnson crouching over A.A. Taylor and pouring water on his face. Taylor had run to the hotel exclaiming:

¹⁰⁷ Johnson to Martha Patterson Dec.22, 1874 *PAJ* 16: 636; Johnson to Andrew Johnson Jr. Dec. 24, 1874 *PAJ* 16: 637.

¹⁰⁸ James M. Barker to Johnson Jan. 06, 1875 *PAJ* 16: 639; Cyrus Snyder to Johnson Jan.7, 1875 *PAJ* 16: 641; Bible, "Post Presidential," 48.

“You are elected!” then collapsed. Johnson moment of victory forced him into immediately helping his fellow man.¹¹⁰

In the end Johnson polled 30 ex-Confederate men and 22 Union men and three independents. Johnson had not only succeeded in his long waited goal, but he had brought the parties together in the process. In fact, Johnson emerged as a symbol of unity throughout the state and the nation. He also ended the “military ring” in Tennessee. The *New York Times* actually rejoiced in Johnson’s victory, even as it raised allegations of a vote buying fraud. That incident alleged that Johnson bought the extra votes needed to win, an opportunity he turned down five years before. More than anything, the editors wrote, Johnson was honest: “He went into the White House as poor as he entered it, and that is something to say in these times.” More than anything, the paper believed that Johnson would bring an excitement back to national politics that had been missing for years.¹¹¹

More heartening than that, was the serious talk in the days following the election that Johnson now stood as the front-runner for the 1876 Democratic nomination as president. In the years since he left the presidency Johnson had never expressed a desire to return to the White House. This talk must have excited and satisfied his feelings of vindication. Yet these sentiments were only a few of many. In the weeks following the election Johnson received dozens and dozens of congratulatory letters. Everyone wished him luck and offered their support. Everyone from family to national figures such as George Armstrong Custer offered their congratulations. Cassius Clay, the distinguished Kentucky congressman saw it as a vindication of the many Unionists from across the

¹⁰⁹ Hart, *Bourbons*, 21-2; Bible, “Post-Presidential,” 54-5.

¹¹⁰ Bible, “Post Presidential,” 55-6

South. Yet in all of the letters one theme stood out. “Your vindication from the slanders born of the hatred and malice impeachers of 1868, is now well complete,” wrote a correspondent.

It said succinctly exactly what Johnson had striven for in the previous six years and had now accomplished. The correspondent was Edmund G. Ross, a man who had himself drifted into political oblivion and exile after making a life-changing vote. That was the deciding vote for Johnson’s acquittal in 1868.¹¹²

¹¹¹ *New York Times* Jan.27, 1875, Jan.28, 1875.

¹¹² Ethan Allen to Johnson Jan. 27, 1875 *PAJ* 16: 658; *New York Times* Jan.27, 1875 ; George A. Custer to Johnson Feb. 02, 1875 *PAJ* 16: 695; Cassius Clay to Johnson Jan. 27, 1875 *PAJ* 16: 662; Edmund G. Ross to Johnson Jan 26, 1875 *PAJ* 16: 656

Epilogue

What would he do with this victory? What would the six years of striving for office mean once he arrived there? In normal circumstances, Johnson would not have gone to Washington until the fall, since the congressional sessions began in December. He would have months to think through the serious questions about what he would make this term mean. The first was the question of party loyalty. Because Johnson had run independently, he held serious leverage. His stature would make him a distinguished member immediately upon reaching the Senate. Whatever party could woo him to its side would naturally gain an accomplished yet controversial spokesman. Yet Johnson was much too independent to consider saddling himself with party mechanisms that had done so much damage to his career in the past. He soon announced that he would not caucus with either party.¹¹³ For any constituent who worried that Johnson would arrive in Washington with vengeance as his main preoccupation, he tried to soothe worries. “My service in the Senate will not be a personal one, I do not represent myself, but

¹¹³ Interview with New York *World* Correspondent March 6, 1875 PAJ 16: 706.

Tennessee.”¹¹⁴ Johnson said on arrival in Washington. Anyone who questioned Johnson’s motivation would not have to wait, however.

President Grant called Congress into special session in March, 1875, for the Sandwich Islands treaty ratification. Johnson arrived in early March to assume his Senate seat for the session. On March 5, Johnson entered the Senate chamber to be sworn in. As he entered the chamber, the tide of his own history faced him. It was here that he had taken his stand after the beginning of the war casting his lot with the Union. It was this body that he had been elected to as Vice President, just as an assassin’s bullet had not propelled him into the presidential chair. And of course it was here that he faced his greatest hour of challenge, his own impeachment trial.

Now he entered again as a member. Johnson strode through the chamber to greet new faces and many old ones. He was also met with applause, an unusual occurrence in the Senate. Hannibal Hamlin, Lincoln’s other vice president greeted him but others such as Tennessee’s outgoing senator, William Brownlow, was not so gracious. Ironically, Henry Cooper escorted him to the floor. He strode to the pit of the chamber and stood next to Ambrose Burnside and Hamlin, where Vice President Henry Wilson, who had been a strong advocate of his impeachment, administered the oath. Of those who had voted for his conviction only thirteen remained¹¹⁵

Johnson was silent during most of this session of Congress, seeming to be biding his time for the right opportunity to make an impact. In the intermittent weeks a flurry of accusation continued to spread that Johnson had bribed legislators for their votes. The allegations, which have never been proven true, sullied Johnson’s triumph. His

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 709.

hometown paper, the Greeneville *Intelligencer*, defended him best arguing, if “Johnson had intended to bribe anybody, he had offers enough for that purpose during his impeachment trial.” Johnson never appears to have answered the allegations. It seems safe to say that the allegations were not true judging by Johnson's past behavior and the chance to win by this means earlier.¹¹⁶

On Monday, March 22, Johnson broke his silence. The pent up political frustration that he had felt for six years erupted. What started as a routine speech on a legislative measure soon became a diatribe against Grant. In an instant, Johnson turned his triumphant return into the personal vendetta that he promised he would not allow his tenure to become. The obsession centered on Grant desiring a third term. Comparing Grant unfavorably with George Washington, Johnson attacked the President as a power mad general whose every action was geared toward his extension of power: “But what is that to those who are acting behind the curtain and who are aspiring to retain the power, and if it cannot be had by popular consent and the approval of their public acts would inaugurate a system of terrorism of terrorism, and in the midst of the excitement, in the midst of the war-cry, triumphantly ride into the Presidency for a third presidential term; and when that is done farewell to the liberties of the country. Johnson’s remarks, interrupted by a roar of applause from the gallery, were typical of his attacks on Grant that continued all afternoon.

His remarks were perfectly in sync with what Johnson had been saying for the previous six years. “Stratocracy is a military government,” he said. “This word is derived from two Greek works which signify 'army' and 'Power.' We have got now 'army' and

¹¹⁵ Lately Thomas, *The First President Johnson: The Three Lives of the Seventeenth President of the United States of America*. (New York: Morrow, 1969) p. 631-3; Bible, “Post Presidential,” 58,59.

'power.' We have got a stratocracy," said Johnson in words that could have been lifted from one of his campaign speeches. Finally, he yielded the floor, two days later the Senate adjourned. The regular session was to begin that fall.¹¹⁷

Johnson returned home anxious only to get back to Washington. In late July he took the train to his daughter's farm in Elizabethton to see his grandchildren. On the train ride Johnson reminisced about his political life, particularly his enemies and the fights they had. Near the end, many remembered his last conversation being concerned Edwin Stanton. In Elizabethton he began playing with his grandchildren, as he usually did. As his granddaughter turned away from him, she heard a thud. When the family rushed into the room, Johnson lay on the floor, nearly unconscious. For the next several days he suffered in bed at the Elizabethton farmhouse. Family and friends holding vigils hoping for his recovery. As he slipped in and out of unconsciousness, he spoke of his life as a poor boy and the thrill of Tennessee politics before the war. On the last day of July, 1875, Johnson died.¹¹⁸

The family mourned, but so did the nation. The *New York Times* ran a sizable obituary that was wistful about the life and career that it had done so much to attack. In probably his most insincere act as president, Grant ordered all government business suspended the day of the funeral. The White House and several cabinet departments were shrouded in black.¹¹⁹

Johnson's remains were buried on a hill in his hometown. The hill overlooked the town that had done so much to make Johnson's dreams come true. Now he would rest

¹¹⁶ *New York Times* March 11, 1875; *Greeneville Intelligencer* March 19, 1875.

¹¹⁷ "Speech in the U.S. Senate" March 22, 1875 *PAJ* 16: 723,737

¹¹⁸ Milton, *Age of Hate*, 670-4

¹¹⁹ *New York Times* August 01, 1875; "Order of Ulysses S. Grant" July 31, 1875 *PAJ* 16: 764.

under a willow tree that was an offshoot from one planted by Napoleon at St. Helena.¹²⁰ Much like Napoleon, Johnson spent his final years in exile but had found a way to vindicate his name. His entire life since leaving the presidency had been lived for one reason, returning to the Senate. He had achieved that, but his reputation would be lost for generations. He would be compared unfavorably to his predecessor for decades. There would be no celebrations of his birth or remembrance of his death. Indeed, much of what he accomplished would be lost to history. The vindication that his return to the Senate gave died with him.

¹²⁰ Milton, *Age of Hate* 674.

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Aaron Scott Crawford

Professional

Department of History
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University
e-mail: acrawfor@vt.edu

Home

71 Winding Way Road
Bristol, VA 24060
email: mybackpages12@cs.com

Education

Virginia Polytechnic Institute And State University	M.A.	American History
King College	B.A.	History

Work Experience

Virginia Polytechnic Institute And State University	2000-Present	Graduate Teaching Assistant
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assistant to Dr. Ronald Nurse• Class lecturer, United States History• Graded papers• Assist in various research projects		
Collegiate Times	2001-Present	Staff Writer
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Researched various stories publication• File stories for the features department		

Leadership Experiences

Secretary, History Graduate Student Association	2001-2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planned annual Graduate Student History Conference at Tech• Helped organize graduate student functions• Assist president in all duties	
Chairman, Graduate Student Conference Speaker Search Committee	2001-2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approached speaker candidates• Negotiated terms with speakers	

- Helped logistical planning for their visit

Committee Member Affirmative Action Committee 1996-1997

- Assisted in decision making concerning minorities
- Concerned with physical aspects of the campus minorities

Memberships

American Historical Association
 Organization of American Historians
 Southern Historical Association
 Virginia Historical Society
 Tennessee Historical Society

Awards

History Department Research Grant, 2001
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute
 and State University

Honors in Independent Studies, King College 1999

Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities 1999