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THE COMMONERS: ANDREW JOHNSON AND ABRAHAM LINCOLN TO 1861

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

William Terence Martin Riches

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ABSTRACT

This examination of majority rule versus minority rights, as analyzed by Alexis de Tocqueville, uses Andrew Johnson and Abraham Lincoln as a case study. I have relied on government journals, printed diaries, autobiographies, newspapers, magazines, and the Robert Todd Lincoln Collection of Abraham Lincoln papers. The major source has been the enormous collection in the Johnson Project at the University of Tennessee.

The facts of their association are a commonplace. Although these matters have been considered, my concern is with Johnson and Lincoln as commoners entering politics. Their careers would have been impossible without the Jacksonian revolution. In the nineteenth century there were two broad avenues to power: either the aspiring politician joined the elite or he attacked it with democratic rhetoric. It was this rhetoric which alarmed de Tocqueville; the will of the majority, he believed, could be as tyrannical as any European autocrat. While a man like Andrew Johnson, failing by the first avenue, fervently espoused majority rule, he lacked power to translate his radical democracy into legislation.

De Tocqueville's fears that the majority ruled in the 1830's were unfounded. The dominant party, controlled by planters, repudiated democracy. This intellectual revolution among southern leaders did not touch Johnson, who remained an ultra, holding a millennial view of history. Continuing to espouse radical Jacksonianism, he was deserted

by his fellow southerners; increasingly his allies centered in the midwest. When the southern elite seceded, he stayed with the Union and the Republicans.

In contrast, Lincoln had started his career unsuccessfully outside the elite, but his legal training enabled him to join de Tocqueville's American aristocracy--the legal profession. Lincoln's transformation from commoner to elitist was consummated by marriages to a southern belle and the Whigs. When Whiggery collapsed, he joined the Republicans and, faced by secession, adopted majoritarianism. The Constitution, designed to protect minority rights, was disrupted by the southern minority, resulting in the triumph of majority rule.

Both sought social status through political power. Lincoln's joining the elite not only enabled him to survive numerous defeats but also to stand for high office. Thus secure in aristocracy's arms, he could contemplate extension of democracy to Negroes.

Radical Democrats, like Johnson, espoused ultraism because of their insecurity outside the elite. Johnson also belonged to the dying class of artisans. The franchise was gradually extended to most white men; meanwhile, Negroes were no longer considered human. This racism, de Tocqueville noted, was strongest in areas where slavery was non-existent, and particularly virulent among the artisans.

These conflicts were exacerbated by the failure of parties to agree about the Constitution. Continual crises prevented either a consensus or an acceptance of a loyal opposition. The paranoid nature of politics was reflected in Republican fears of the Slave Power--fears shared by Johnson, who saw both fire-eaters and abolitionists endangering

government. As president, he transferred his suspicions to the Radical Republicans.

Ironically, the man who had demanded full democracy for whites was remembered for his refusal to extend democracy to Negroes. He who had struggled to improve the economic status of whites refused to support efforts to provide blacks economic independence from their masters. Lincoln, who distrusted majority rule, was converted to majoritarianism and was prepared to extend the franchise to some Afro-Americans. He is remembered as "the great emancipator"--but his limited concessions would have left the Negro with permanent second-class status. Johnson's opposition to black suffrage ensured the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and the 1866 Civil Rights Act--the bases of a recent civil rights revolution which saw the triumph of the majority.

PREFACE

This dissertation is intended neither as a chronicle of the careers of two succeeding presidents nor as another specialized study of two individuals. Rather it is a reexamination of the age-old issue of majority rule versus minority rights, using the careers of Andrew Johnson and Abraham Lincoln as a case study, seen in the light of Alexis de Tocqueville's classic critique of the American system.

The founding fathers, particularly Madison, were acutely aware of the problem and, while the Constitution-makers ensured a place for majority rule, their primary concern was the protection of the minority. Moreover, as believers in government of a natural aristocracy, these men were convinced that the majority would select their legislators from their social and intellectual superiors. It was this federal constitution which the aristocratic Frenchman admired so much. Sharing the viewpoint of the Federalists, he distrusted majority rule which he believed could become tyranny of the majority. He criticized the eligibility of a president to be reelected because he would no longer govern in the state's interest but only for his own reelection. Reflecting his dislike of Jackson, de Tocqueville argued that the president "is only the docile instrument in the hands of the majority. He loves what it loves and hates what it hates; he sails ahead of its desires, anticipating its complaints and bending to its slightest wishes; the lawgivers wished him to guide it, but it is he who follows."

The omnipotence of the majority which paralyzed presidents was tyrannical at the state level. Believing in a universal law of justice, de Tocqueville insisted on his right to disobey unjust laws and to appeal "from the sovereignty of the people to the sovereignty of the human race." Unless this freedom was granted, the rule of the majority would be as oppressive as any autocrat. "So when I see the rights and capacity to do all given to any authority whatsoever, whether it be called people or king, democracy or aristocracy, and whether the scene of the action is a monarchy or republic, I say: the germ of tyranny is there, and I will go look for other laws under which to live." According to the visiting aristocrat there was less independence of mind and freedom of discussion in America than any country he knew. Lacking a freedom of spirit, the new nation, he believed, was incapable of producing great writers. Convinced that Americans were prepared to delegate all to the majority, he foresaw a nation that was "no more than a flock of timid and hardworking animals with the government as its shepherd."

How accurate were the Frenchman's observations of the United States in the early nineteenth-century? To what extent do the careers of Johnson and Lincoln attest to American belief in majoritarianism? Perhaps de Tocqueville's comment, which he failed to elaborate, that "The surface of American society is covered with a layer of democratic paint, but from time to time one can see the old aristocratic colors breaking through," is a more accurate representation of this young nation in the 1830's than his later opinion that the majority ruled. The new world aristocracy was not the old world peerage but rather

an aristocracy of attorneys.

De Tocqueville's pessimistic view that equality and the concomitant majoritarianism are hard realities to which nations must resign themselves, would have been reinforced by the election of 1860. Certainly he would have considered feeble his harshest attacks on democracy as oppressive had he lived to see a former boatman, shopkeeper, lawyer, and a teller of bawdy stories elected president. His horror would have known no bounds if he had witnessed that man's reelection with a vice-president who had been a runaway apprentice and small town tailor. Perhaps de Tocqueville's worst fears would have been vindicated by Vice-President Andrew Johnson's drunken harangue at his inauguration in 1865.

The triumph of the majority, however, was more apparent than real. Obviously the lack of a hereditary ruling caste, such as a peerage, and the greater mobility of political elites, fostered by the wider pressures of democracy, helped ambitious and talented young commoners such as Lincoln and Johnson. But even the Frenchman himself had observed that America had its aristocracy despite its democratic pretensions. When the ambitious tailor began his political career it was in alliance with the Greeneville elite of the Seviers and Williamses. Ironically when Lincoln started his career it was without any support from the Sangamon lawyer-elite. Whereas Johnson's early rise from alderman to the state house of representatives was one of uninterrupted success, Lincoln's career came to an early defeat.

In the nineteenth century context two broad avenues to power were available to the American commoner. One, the traditional mode, lay

in joining the elite; the other was by attacking with Jacksonian democratic rhetoric those who held the strings of power. When Johnson was deserted by the "Grand Duke of Lick Creek," suffering his first and only defeat, he opted for the second avenue. From that time, certainly, he became a radical Jacksonian democrat. The way to power for the despised mechanic was no longer by ingratiating himself with those who considered themselves the natural aristocracy, but rather by fighting them. All his life Johnson devoted to the fulfillment of the Jacksonian rhetoric--extended democracy and equality of opportunity for white men, and the supremacy of the Democratic party. Although this brought him personal power as congressman, governor, and senator, ironically personal success was not translated into legislation. None of his "Andy Johnsonisms" were adopted. His singular triumph, the Homestead Act, was credited to the Republicans. His demands for popular election of president, vice-president and senators, seem to prove de Tocqueville's thesis. But Johnson was a voice in the southern wilderness because his colleagues repudiated their liberal Jeffersonian beliefs and the Democratic party of the South supported aristocracy.

Meanwhile Lincoln through his legal training and marriage joined what de Tocqueville correctly analyzed as the American aristocracy. Despite a single, desultory term in Congress, as a result of which the Whigs of Sangamon voted Democrat, despite two defeats for election as senator, Lincoln was secure in the arms of the elite. Moreover, as the southern-dominated Democratic party rejected the faith in equality, Lincoln and the Republicans, who previously shared the Frenchman's fears of majoritarianism, now espoused equality and majority rule.

Johnson's faith in the Jacksonian rhetoric meant that he could not join the South in secession. The Union was the ark of the covenant, "the greatest Government on earth," and his ties to slavery were fragile in comparison.

It is expected also that an examination of the lives of two extraordinarily dissimilar men from very similar backgrounds will reveal how and why it was possible for these commoners--born in "gaunt and haggard poverty"--to achieve the highest executive office in the land. This is the first full-length study of these two men. In contrast to Lincoln's life, which has been studied in thousands of monographs and articles (many amounting to hagiography), Johnson's early career has been neglected, just as the history of the mechanic class which he personified has either been sadly ignored or distorted. The Greeneville plebeian's nineteenth and twentieth century critics have considered him an extraordinarily inept politician. In fact, if his handling of the Republicans (whether "moderates" or "conservatives") and the race question are considered, then Johnson was a failure. But a bungling politician does not spend ten years in Congress, win two terms as governor, and serve as senator for his adopted state. His political maneuverings show him to have been a capable and even ruthless politician. But even his admirers of the 1920's and 30's tried to reinstate their hero by presenting him as Lincoln's shadow. Perhaps Robert W. Winston, Lloyd Paul Stryker and George Fort Milton felt that the closer they could nudge their hero to Lincoln the greater he would become. Thus Johnson was impeached because he sought to carry out the martyred president's plans for Reconstruction. Such an artificial

merging of Lincoln and Johnson means that the ironies of their lives and of the great events which they shaped, and which shaped them, are obfuscated.

In this dissertation, I have taken exception to what is generally known as the "consensus" view of history. The American past here is seen in terms of historical ironies and conflicts--in particular, conflicts between elites. It is not assumed in this study that America is a classless society; neither is it assumed that a Marxian world-view can be imposed on American history, but rather that the democratic process has been seen as a struggle between elites. In defense of this position I cite the major critic of elite theory, T. B. Bottomore, as proof of the nature of the American system. Elitists, he argues in *Elites and Society* (London, 1973) substitute for equality the idea of equality of opportunity--a premise which presupposes inequality because opportunity means the ability to advance in a stratified society. "At the same time, it presupposes equality, for it implies that the inequalities embedded in this stratified society have to be counteracted every generation so that individuals can really develop their personal abilities. . . ." However, "self-contradictory" Bottomore considers this to be, he has provided an excellent definition of nineteenth, and perhaps twentieth, century American political and social history.

It may be that in the struggle to achieve historical impartiality, my perspective as a citizen of the United Kingdom may differ from my American colleagues. But I would like to object vigorously to a notion popular nowadays with some "scholars" that a student must be either

a lifelong citizen of a nation or a member of an ethnic group before one can write the history of either. The day that notion is accepted, the universities will be teaching inhumanities in illiberal arts.

According to de Tocqueville a foreigner was "absolutely refused" the right to criticize America. "So America is the land of freedom where, in order not to offend anybody, the foreigner may speak freely neither about individuals nor about the state, neither about the ruled nor about the rulers, neither about public undertakings nor private ones," he wrote, "indeed, about nothing that one comes across, except perhaps the climate and the soil, but yet one meets Americans ready to defend both of these, as if they had a share in forming them." Dr. Ralph W. Haskins gives the lie to the Frenchman's complaint. His interest, enthusiasm, and continued support have made this critical analysis of the American system possible. His fellow editor of the *Johnson Papers*, and department chairman, Dr. LeRoy P. Graf, has supported me frequently in my long association with the department and his advice and help have been gratefully received. I would like to take this opportunity to thank also Dr. John Muldowny, Dr. John Hansen and, in particular, Dr. Galen Broeker who showed continued interest in my graduate studies. I owe a great deal to fellow graduate students who made the limey so welcome, and especially to David and Mary Bowen--David, for the long arguments about Andrew Johnson (to the advantage of Bell Telephone) and Mary, who remained a very dear friend despite the endless debates about the Plebeian. The typing of this manuscript would have not been possible without the assistance of Dr. Graf, and without the expertise of Mrs. Ann LaCava.

There would have been no manuscript at all if the director and pro-directors of Ulster College had not generously granted me a paid leave of absence for the year 1975-76. Finally I would like to thank the staffs of the Andrew Johnson Project, and of Special Collections in the University of Tennessee Main Library, for their cooperation.

I should like to dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Judy, whose sacrifices can only be fully appreciated by husbands and wives who have had to suffer in the name of learning, and to Arthur Laycock who was my first great teacher and who inspired in me a thirst for history that nothing, and nobody, can quench.

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CHAPTER I

ELITES IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

> I know that I am now treading on live cinders. Every word in this chapter must in some respect offend the various parties. . . . Nevertheless, I shall say all I think.
>
> Alexis de Tocqueville*

In the minds of many Americans, the chaos of 1864 had brought the great democratic experiment to its lowest ebb. In spite of battlefield victories the Union tottered and it was quite conceivable that after winning the presidential election Northern Peace Democrats would consent to a final disruption of the Union. There were forces fighting to preserve unity and democracy but they were headed by a strange combination. There was no aristocratic Washington to stand bravely in the face of the storm nor a Jefferson to fling gems of rhetoric at the enemy. Instead the Republicans, according to popular belief, were headed by a tall, slovenly, much-proclaimed railsplitter who loved dirty stories and a drunken tailor who excelled in insulting opponents. This strange situation was not the product of an excess of Jacobinism but the natural result of the operation of the American system--a system whose evolution had produced a unique form of government.

Neither Abraham Lincoln nor Andrew Johnson, with their humble origins and lack of formal education, could have reached leadership positions in most nineteenth century governments. Even the American political system as envisioned by the constitution-makers was not

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*Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, eds. J. P. Meyer and Max Lerner (New York, 1966), 181.

designed for such leaders as these. Their success was due in part to the consummation of seventy years of political evolution and in part to the collapse in 1860 of the elitist government of the founding fathers. It will be demonstrated subsequently that when Jackson and his political advisors appealed to the people, professing that any man was capable of holding office, they opened the door of political power to men such as Lincoln and Johnson. Now it was possible to enter the political arena, not only by joining but also by opposing the established elites. But when Jacksonians appealed to the voters, they not only allowed plebeians into power but upset the delicate balance between the majority and the minority which the founding fathers had tried to create. The period after 1832 was a clash between believers in majoritarianism (a tenet which Jackson personally had never held) and those who struggled to preserve the old concept of the Constitution.

The men who worked for, fought for, and wrote about independence and the need to end the "slavery" of British rule were all close to, or at the center of, power in their respective colonies. Alexander Hamilton, a successful lawyer married to the daughter of a wealthy landowner, and George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, owners of large Virginia plantations and keepers of slaves, belonged not only to the political but also to the social and economic elite.[1] Dominating American political life, these men wrote a constitution which further

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[1]Alfred H. Kelly and Winifred Harbison, *The American Constitution: Its Origin and Development* (New York, 1970), 114-21. Merrill Jensen argues that the Articles of Confederation were the true expression of the "democratic" aspiration of the American revolutionaries. Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation: An Interpretation of the Social Constitutional History of the American Revolution, 1774-1781* (Madison, 1963).

protected their interests (which they firmly believed were the best interests of the country) until they were ultimately challenged and overthrown by the hard-pushing, brawling capitalist class of the western lands. The new planter-capitalists headed by Andrew Jackson succeeded at the cost of the older concept of the Constitution because the only way to destroy the old eastern alliance was to awaken the sleeping giant whom the easterner feared--the common man.

This revolution, which had its European counterpart in England where the economic elite pushed through the Reform Bill of 1832, dictated the politics of the antebellum period. As will be shown the Jacksonian leadership did not believe in democracy any more than did the old Federalist-Democratic-Republican elite. But the faith once aroused could not be controlled, as the Jacksonians learned to their chagrin in the Whig "Log Cabin and Hard Cider" election of 1840. The Harrison-Tyler campaign was utterly cynical, betraying the widely-held Whig skepticism of the ability of the masses to make intelligent political decisions.

An analysis of these revolutionary developments is necessary in order to understand the major characters of this study. Abraham Lincoln was a staunch Whig, with a Whig's skepticism of the *demos*; but he knew he must move warily and take account of public opinion. This detachment and cynicism made him a leader and a great president. Andrew Johnson became a fervent Jacksonian with a difference--he believed literally in the rhetoric. His unwavering faith in the people brought him great personal political success, but in the end his only way of achieving the highest political office was with the aid of an opposition

party, men he had hated and distrusted; for the southern Democrats had parted company with their northwestern allies, attacking democracy and even their old hero, Thomas Jefferson.

In a country professing social mobility such realignments are natural. Vilfredo Pareto's modern analysis of the internal dynamics of elites is applicable to the changes in early nineteenth century American society. According to Pareto, decadent families fall from the ruling elite and their positions are taken by the most talented members of the lower class. Without elite mobility there would be too many inferior people among the ruling class--a condition which would result in the mismanagement of society and end in social decay. Absence of opportunity for upward movement would lead to a revolution by the able members of the non-elite. To Pareto, who "viewed society as fragile and was preoccupied with how to protect it," history is the graveyard of aristocracies.[2] His concern, like that of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John Adams, was essentially to ensure the survival of the elite, which would guarantee social stability.

But the elite which met at Philadelphia to write the Constitution can be defined in broader terms. According to the political theorist Gaetano Mosca, the circulation of elites "is more than a surfacing of talented individuals from the lower classes and the dismissal of weaklings from the ruling group. It is the process by which entirely new social interests and new social groups express themselves in the

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[2]Kenneth Prewitt and Alan Stone, *The Ruling Elites: Elite Theory, Power, and American Democracy* (New York, 1973), 161-62.

public life of a nation."[3] Thus the War of Independence can be seen as being provoked by the ruling elite of an English colonial system which failed to incorporate not only individual Americans who wished to belong to that elite (as defined by Pareto) but also failed to accommodate the new social and economic elite in the colonies. This new class was not the proletariat of Marx but middle class capitalists who used the liberal Whig rhetoric of individual rights.[4]

Having achieved independence from the old, the new elite sought to defend and secure its new powers in the Constitution. As Madison wrote in Federalist No. 10, "the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of rival parties . . . measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minority party, but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority." His definition of "faction" was no more than what George III had thought of the American patriots: "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community."[5] Madison and his colleagues were just as eager to limit the voice of the majority, if not more so, as they were concerned with the rights of the minority.

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[3] *Ibid.*, 163-65.

[4] James K. Martin, *Men in Rebellion: Higher Governmental Leaders and the Coming of the American Revolution* (New Brunswick, 1973).

[5] Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Benjamin F. Wright (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), 129-30.

Madison's concern about factionalism and the tyranny of a majority was eloquently expressed throughout the *Federalist Papers*. The dangers of factions if they are a minority are easily resolved by the use of the vote which removes them from office. But under popular government the majority *are* the faction. The public good and civil rights of others will be sacrificed to the ruling passion. The aim of the Constitution was "to secure the public good and the private rights against the danger of such a faction, and at the same time to preserve the spirit and the form of popular government. . . ."[6] However, he warned in No. 48 that a piece of paper setting down the constitutional limits of the various departments of state governments was not sufficient because it would not prevent encroachments which result in a tyrannical concentration of power.[7] Although he was conscious of man's limited abilities in government, his faith that separation of powers and checks and balances in the federal constitution would limit abuses was such that he failed to see that the same argument could still be applied to the constitution he had helped draft.

Madison believed that factionalism and tyranny were inherent in a pure democracy, which he defined as "a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person." Such democracies, he declared, had always been turbulent and contentious--always been "found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property." They had never lasted long and had always ended violently.[8]

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[6] *Ibid.*, 132. [7] *Ibid.*, 347. [8] *Ibid.*, 81.

Madison was far fron egalitarian, remarking contemptuously that "theoretic politicians, who have patronized this species of government [the pure democracy], have erroneously supposed that by reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights, they would at the same time be perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions, and their passions."[9] On the contrary, men were not only unequal but irrational and factious. One of the advantages of the Constitution which would limit these faults was that it provided for a representative democracy; such a system would ensure the rule of the best men. A firm believer in a deferential society, Madison declared that government was delegated to a small number elected by the remainder; the effect was "to refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country, and whose patriotism and love of justice" would rarely be sacrificed. The United States had an additional advantage in its size:

> as each representative will be chosen by a greater number of citizens in the large than in the small republic, it will be more difficult for unworthy candidates to practise with success the vicious arts by which elections are too often carried; and the suffrage of the people being more free, will be more likely to center in men who possess the most attractive merit and the most diffusive and established characters.[10]

It is true that the Americans made a significant contribution to political theory with their concept of "a mixed or balanced democracy,"

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[9] *Ibid.*, 133.

[10] *Ibid.*, 134. See also Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (4 vols., New Haven, 1911), I, 22-27, 51; Gottfried Deitze, *The Federalist* (Baltimore, 1960), 68; Arthur E. Ekirch, Jr., *The American Democratic Tradition: A History* (New York; 1963), 51-62.

which vested sovereignty in the people yet removed the people from direct involvement in the government.[11] According to Gordon S. Wood, the Federalist belief that the public good could be formulated "by the best men of a large society may have been a chimera. So too perhaps was the Federalist hope for the filtration of the natural social leaders through a federal sieve into political leadership." Wood sees these as "partisan and aristocratic purposes that belied the Federalists' democratic language."[12] Yet neither the Federalists nor their Republican successors considered their basic aims either chimerical or contradictory. Sovereignty was to be vested in the people with the franchise; but it was the elites of the states that controlled that franchise. Such sovereign elites would select representatives to form the national government, which would carry out limited authority delegated by the state sovereignties.

European commentators have generally expressed a concern about the powers delegated to the presidency. But the framers as well as later American constitutionalists, were equally concerned about the possibility of the legislative branch's acquiring too much power. "Ambition," wrote Madison, "must be made to counteract ambition." His view of man would have pleased John Winthrop: "if men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary."[13] A government which was to rule the people and control itself might be limited by the people, but "auxiliary precautions" were required.

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[11] Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969), 604.

[12] *Ibid.*, 615.

[13] *Federalist Papers*, 356.

> The remedy for this inconveniency is to divide the legislature into different branches; and to render them, by different modes of election and different principles of action, as little connected with each other as the nature of their common functions and their common dependence on the society will admit.[14]

The rule of the elite was further ensured by state-enforced property qualifications for voting, and by a federal senate whose membership was to be chosen by state legislatures. Thus the elite of each state, duly selected by a limited franchise, delegated two of their number to represent the state in the national government.[15] Nor would the people select the president or vice-president; rather, that process was vested in the members of an elite who would form the electoral college.

A latter day conservative, Irving Kristol, has pointed out that the founding fathers were concerned about "the *problematics* of democracy" [author's italics]. By this expression, he means "those kinds of problems that flow from, that are inherent in, that are generated by democracy itself."[16] Criticizing American historians for believing in "an ideology so powerful as to represent a kind of religious faith," he theorizes that this ideology can be called "the democratic faith" because "this term is frequently and approvingly used by members of the congregation themselves."[17] He argues that as in all faiths the emphasis is on man's good intentions, democratic intentions, rather than what results from these intentions. The democratic

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[14] *Ibid.*, 356-57.

[15] *Ibid.*, 396.

[16] Irving Kristol, *On the Democratic Idea in America* (New York, 1972), 51.

[17] *Ibid.*, 50.

faith also grapples with evil which ought not to exist in a democratic society, but does. At one time democracy

> *was* a matter for political philosophy, rather than for faith. And the way in which a democratic political philosophy was gradually and inexorably transformed into a democratic faith seems to me to be perhaps the most important problem in American intellectual--and ultimately political--history. In this transformation, American historians have played a significant role.[18]

Certainly when one reads statements by such historians as Saul K. Padover on the election of 1800--"On the Federalists' side it was a struggle to preserve power for the rich and the privileged. On the Jeffersonian side it was a battle to keep America a democracy, with liberty and opportunity for all the people"[19]--or sees the widepread influence of a simplistic thesis that the United States was a democratic society because of the existence of a large land mass,[20] one is tempted to agree with Kristol's reservations.

The high priests of the democratic faith have ordained Thomas Jefferson as their Hercules; the man who slew the many-headed Hydra of Federalism and made America safe for democracy. Historians such as Merrill Peterson, Padover, and Dumas Malone agree that Jefferson was a liberal democrat.[21] Yet the man who maintained that all men were

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[18] *Ibid.*, 50-51.

[19] Saul K. Padover, *Jefferson: A Great American's Life and Ideas* (New York, 1952), 113.

[20] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," American Historical Association, *Annual Report for 1893* (Washington, D.C., 1894), 199-227. For an excellent critique of Turner's thesis, see Louis Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies: Studies in the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia* (New York, 1964).

[21] Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation:*

created equal went to great pains to advance the proposition--"as a suspicion only"--that the Afro-American was inferior.[22] That Jefferson was a racist is not surprising. But historians have had greater difficulty in explaining the behavior of their hero during his term as war governor when he bitterly attacked the legislature, and in accounting for his cautious overall reaction to the French Revolution. Despite the dreams of some student romantics of the 1960's, Jefferson was never an enthusiastic revolutionary. A member of the Virginia elite, he was prepared, like the land-owning nobility of the Whig party in England, to see gradual change; he endorsed the French Revolution only because he could see no alternative.[23]

Jefferson's limited faith in the people was based on the belief that the enlightened voters would elect the most enlightened of their number to represent them. By appealing to the voters, Jefferson--like Martin Luther appealing to Scripture rather than the Church--did not consider that he was in any way attacking the Constitution. On the contrary, he and Madison believed that they were saving the

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A Biography (New York, 1970); Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the Virginian* (Boston, 1948), *Jefferson and the Rights of Man* (Boston, 1951), and *Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty* (Boston, 1962); Padover, *Jefferson.*

[22] *Notes on the State of Virginia* in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Lester Ford (12 vols., New York, 1904-1905), IV, 48-59. In Jefferson's defense, see Adrienne Koch, *Jefferson and Madison: The Great Collaboration* (New York, 1970), 13.

[23] *Autobiography*, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, eds. Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh (20 vols., Washington, D.C., 1903), I, 151-52, 154-57; Robert R. Palmer, "The Dubious Democrat: Thomas Jefferson in Bourbon France," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXII (1957), 404.

republican form of government. The admirers of the Sage of Monticello deny any personal ambition on his part. He is strictly a reluctant hero.[24] And although Jefferson did much to advance liberal ideals in the nation and particularly in Virginia, his record on civil liberties was frequently blemished.[25]

The Puritanical battle between good and evil was fought out in the United States and, naturally, good triumphed.[26] But was there such a gulf between the Federalists and the Democratic Republicans? C. Vann Woodward has pointed out that "the Federalist administrations on the whole maintained standards of conduct that were lofty, and endured abuse for offenses that were petty, in comparison with later experience.' He adds, "The Jeffersonian 'revolution' of 1800 did not alter in essentials the high tone of conduct set by the Federalists."[27] Both accepted the republican form of government, both opposed factions, both believed that the elite should rule. The difference was that the Jeffersonians believed that the most talented of the non-elite should be able to join the elite. This is what Jefferson meant when he admitte

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[24]Koch, *Jefferson and Madison*, 160-69.

[25]Leonard Levy, *Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), thoroughly documents the third president's abuses of civil liberties.

[26]Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation* (New York, 1963), 86-87.

[27]C. Vann Woodward comments that the period of the presidency pric to the election of Andrew Jackson showed the least corruption in government. See "The Conscience of the White House," an introduction to Woodward, ed., *Responses of the Presidents to Charges of Misconduct* (New York, 1975), xiv-xv, 65, a study undertaken at the request of the House Judiciary Committee which was considering the impeachment of Richard Nixon.

to John Adams that he believed in a "natural aristocracy," and this belief explains why he considered his proposals for the University of Virginia so important.[28] Yet we are told that his penchant for an educated ruling class is meaningless; and, according to David Fischer, Jefferson's election in 1800

> symbolized changes of sweeping significance which were gradually taking place in the minds and hearts of men. The expansive ideals of liberty, equality, and majoritarianism were affirmed with unprecedented force and clarity; the old-fashioned elitism, the orders and distinctions, the postures of deference and subordination which had prevailed in eighteenth-century America were dealt a killing blow.[29]

The majority of the old school Federalists abandoned ship and quit politics but, Fischer continues, the younger Federalists adopted the democratic rhetoric and sought to emulate the Republicans in party organization so that they might control the increased numbers of voters.[30] These young men replaced "the happy vision of a silent multitude and a speaking elite [with] an uglier but more workable

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[28]For Jefferson's belief in a natural aristocracy see Jefferson to John Adams, October 29, 1813, in Lipscomb and Bergh, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, XIII, 396-97; for further discussion of this belief, see also I, 54. His concern for the University of Virginia is discussed in Koch, *Jefferson and Madison*, 261-84.

[29]David H. Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism; The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, 1965), 25.

[30]For studies of increased suffrage and voter participation, see Richard P. McCormick, "New Perspectives on Jacksonian Politics," *American Historical Review*, LXV (1960), 288-301; J. R. Pole, "Suffrage and Representation in Massachusetts: A Statistical Note," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, XIV (1957), 560; XV (1958), 412-16; Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 187-92.

arrangement--a silent elite in the midst of a speaking multitude."[31] Through the Federalist acceptance of the rhetoric of democracy and the idea of party organization, the American Constitution devised to ensure minority rights with limited participation of the majority, was moved toward the dominance of the latter.

It may be contended, however, that the Jeffersonians sought only to restore the Constitution. The danger of a permanent aristocracy perverting the Constitution was to be prevented by appealing not to the people directly, but rather to the elites of the states which would have the power to nullify unconstitutional laws passed by the Federalists. These Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions did much to encourage the later southern disunionists.[32] Thus, the differences between the ruling elites in early America lay in the greater flexibility of the Jeffersonians in including talented members of the non-elite, and in their willingness to call on elite centers in the states to check federal power. Although American historians have spent much time and energy counting the number of voters, this in itself proves only that elites had to develop new techniques of management and persuasion when threatened with the loss of office through elections.[33]

Perhaps Fischer's description of the young Federalists' ambition to transform politics into "a silent elite in the midst of a speaking multitude" can be broadened into an excellent definition of the American

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[31] *Ibid.*, 33.

[32] Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jeffersonian Image in the American Mind* (Oxford, 1960), 57-66.

[33] Prewitt and Stone, *The Ruling Elites*, 171-82.

democratic process--prior to the Jacksonian revolution. Despite the Republican rhetoric the leaders of that party did not assume that the common man would or should play a leadership role in society, or that he was even capable of so doing.[34] Thus, while on the one hand it has been suggested that "Jacksonian democracy was not a noticeable departure from the Jeffersonian but rather a continuation or moderate extension of the earlier egalitarian movements,"[35] on the other it can be maintained that the Jacksonian argument that *any* man was capable of holding office represented a significant move away from the ideas of the founding fathers and of the Virginia-New England dynasty. The alteration in the political environment between the ages of Jefferson and Jackson has been noted by Richard McCormick: "As long as politics could be managed informally, without the agency of elaborate party apparatus, those who were recognized at the time as 'the gentry' wielded decisive influence. But the role of the gentry declined when politics was organized on a party basis." He maintains that parties required increased manpower which was prepared to spend a lot of time on organization, and through patronage enabled men from many ranks to accept politics as a vocation.[36]

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[34]For the continued existence of a deferential society, see William H. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina 1816-1836* (New York, 1966), 7-24.

[35]Sidney Aronson, *Status and Kinship in the Higher Civil Service: The Administrations of John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson,* quoted in Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 198.

[36]Richard P. McCormick, *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill, 1966), 30.

The appeal to the common man with its concomitant need for party organization coincided with significant economic and social changes in the country. The opening up and rapid settlement of the northwest and southwest had brought a shift in economic power. Although it would be unwise to exaggerate the speed of this development, the United States, still an overwhelmingly agricultural nation in the early nineteenth-century, saw the expansion of the western states at a time when the southeastern states in particular were on the decline.[37]

The expansion of the railroads and urban development both indicate a westward shift,[38] which encouraged the formation of new elites. The problem was that the westerners were effectively shut out from federal power. Western states had never had organized parties--the Federalist was an eastern bogey. This failure to recognize and incorporate the western elite, combined with the gradual change in choosing presidential electors and the extension of white male suffrage, led to the formation of a second party system. In 1800, for example,

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[37]Ohio led in wheat production in 1839 but Pennsylvania, New York and Virginia all topped Illinois and Indiana among the top six producers. Twenty years later, however, the leaders were Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Ohio, followed by Virginia and Pennsylvania. The six leading corn producing states in 1839 were Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. But two decades later the order had changed to Illinois, Ohio, Missouri, Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee. South Carolina and Tennessee were the fourth and fifth largest cotton producing states in 1849 but by 1859 they were not in the top six which consisted of Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, Texas, and Arkansas. Lance E. Davis, Jonathan R. T. Hughes, and Duncan M. McDougall, *American Economic History: The Development of a National Economy* (Homewood, Ill., 1965), 386.

[38]*Ibid.*, 278-95, 305-8; Glyndon E. Van Deusen, *The Jacksonian Era, 1828-1848* (New York, 1959), 2-15.

legislators chose electors in ten states and in only two were they popularly elected. By 1824 this was reduced to six states and by 1832 only South Carolina continued the practice. These changes added "a popular dimension to the presidential contest, created or enhanced the need for state party machinery, weakened the political authority of legislative caucuses, occasioned the development of national party conventions, and made the presidential election the dramatic focal point of American politics." The extension of the franchise between 1800 and 1824 meant that nearly all adult white males were eligible to vote in the latter year's election, excluding the states of Rhode Island, Virginia, Louisiana, and South Carolina.[39]

These significant changes were exploited by Andrew Jackson and his wealthy advisors such as John H. Eaton. Nothing in Old Hickory's early career indicated that he was interested in the rights of the common man. His political career in Tennessee does not show him to have been a champion of the poor, rather the reverse. As a member of the committee which drafted the state constitution in 1796, a constitution that allowed the state assembly to appoint justices of the peace for life (and the justices, with some exceptions, would appoint county officials), he did not show himself to be a friend of democracy. Further, the constitution provided a uniform tax for all acreage regardless of value. Following the panic of 1819, which severely hurt the poor farmers in particular, Jackson and Edward Ward protested

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[39]McCormick, *Second American Party System*, 29. In New York the 1824 suffrage revisions extended the vote to virtually all white males but at the same time limited the franchise for blacks.

against the assembly's efforts to help the debtor class. Jackson then unsuccessfully championed his neighbor Ward, a Virginian of wealth and education, as governor in 1821. The victor in this election was William Carroll, an ex-Pennsylvania merchant and small merchant of Nashville, who was to be the true champion of the underdog.

Carroll's supporters argued that he represented the people in distinct contrast to the snobbish, slave-owning Ward and the sheer magnitude of his victory, winning all but two counties, suggests that "his success was due to his reputation for democracy rather than to his merchant-class economic ideas."[40] It was under Carroll's leadership that such social reforms as abolition of imprisonment for debt, the whipping post, the pillory, and the branding iron, were enacted. It was Carroll who strengthened the banking system and put the sale of public land on a cash basis, with graduated prices. And it was Carroll, not Jackson, who finally forced the legislature to have a referendum which resulted in a constitutional convention in 1834. This convention overturned the obnoxious clauses approved by Jackson and introduced popular election of county officials and taxation of real estate according to value. "Thus," a critic of Andrew Jackson has written, "democracy won its victory in Tennessee and the guiding spirit was William Carroll."[41] For Jackson to have become the sincere champion of the common man, he would have to have undergone a conversion

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[40]Thomas P. Abernethy, "Andrew Jackson and the Rise of Southwestern Democracy," *American Historical Review*, XXXIII (1927), 68.

[41]*Ibid.*, 70.

experience like that of Saul on the road to Damascus. There is no evidence that Old Hickory saw the light.[42]

Why did the Old Hero later become identified with popular democracy? There are many reasons, among them the skillful development by Jackson and his advisors of the first modern party organization to exploit the widespread demand for increased participation by the majority in the political process.[43] To another scholar Jacksonianism was the convergence of the "massive emotions and psychological sanctions" of three ideas, nature, providence and will, in the image of Andrew Jackson. This had nothing to do with Jackson or the Democratic party, but was "the creation of the times. To describe the early nineteenth century as the age of Jackson misstates the matter. The age was not his. He was the age's."[44] It may be, however, that Old Hickory came to symbolize democracy as the result of cynical exploitation and because of the times. Certainly, of major importance to the careers of Lincoln and Johnson was the element in Jacksonianism best illustrated in the battle with the bank. If the hero of New Orleans was to crush the monster he could not rely on the established political elites; he had to appeal over them to the people.

In rejecting the re-chartering of the national bank he was

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[42] *Ibid.*, 64-77. See also Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy* (Chapel Hill, 1932), 164-81, 262-76, 309-28; Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson* (New York, 1966), 26-50.

[43] Robert V. Remini, *The Election of Andrew Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1963).

[44] John W. Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol of an Age* (New York, 1955), 213.

opposing an institution supported by the old elite. Whigs such as Clay and Webster, who favored a strong federal government, formed an alliance with Calhoun and states rights men in opposition to Jackson. Their concern, it has been ably reasoned, was not executive usurpation but the fact that the veto was aimed directly at the voters. According to Lynn Marshall, the "proto-Whigs" Clay and Webster "sought to show that Jackson had infringed upon the accustomed powers of established, locally based political leaders." He points out that "their chief objection to the veto was its short-circuiting of established political leaders in Congress and Court. They objected to the direct appeal of the veto message to the electorate." They recognized that this was a new approach to politics which meant new rules for political leaders.[45]

Jacksonian organization was similar to that of Jefferson's Republicans in that both had centralized control and wide organization as well as many newspapers. "But," writes Marshall, "the national and state caucuses of elected representatives had dominated the Jeffersonian party structure. Where the Jeffersonian party had been oriented primarily to established leaders, and only through and by them to popular support, the Jacksonian party went directly to the electorate."[46]

Jacksonian national party development was closely related to the adoption of new principles for the organization of the administration.[47]

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[45]Lynn L. Marshall, "The Strange Stillbirth of the Whig Party," *American Historical Review*, LXXII (1967), 445-68.

[46]*Ibid.*, 452.

[47]For Jacksonian party organization, see Remini, *The Election of Andrew Jackson*.

The new principles were proclaimed as "rotation in office." Whereas previous administrations had selected men on merit to add lustre to the office,[48] Jacksonians argued that the post should be so defined and regulated by law that there would no longer be a necessity to rely on social criteria such as "character" or respectability. They believed that selection of office-holders on the basis of social criteria made the system rigid and inefficient.[49] But the exclusion of such criteria in this selection also enabled them to appoint members of the new and by-pass the old elite.

The Jackson-Van Buren alliance, another chapter in the historic union of interests between southerners and New Yorkers, meant that the politicians of the southwest were able to seize control of the federal government. It has been asserted that there was no difference between the old and new elites. Both were bourgeois capitalist and it was "the grand masters of the pursuit of the fast buck [that] established aristocratic families." It has also been contended that

> the really impressive thing about the Southern aristocracy is the way it has always appeared to be unique while actually swimming swiftly in the mainstream of acquisitive, capitalistic American life. Despite much democratic rhetoric, America has always encouraged the development of elites, and modern America, like the Old South and the Old North, still nurtures rich establishments. This is what the Southern aristocracy is now and always has been, simply the white economic elite of Dixie. It is and always has been all American.[50]

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[48]Leonard D. White, *The Federalists: A Study in Administrative History* (New York, 1948), 118, 126, 257-58, and *The Jeffersonians: A Study in Administrative History 1801-1829* (New York, 1951), 347-68.

[49]Marshall, "Strange Stillbirth," 455-57.

[50]F. N. Boney, "The Southern Aristocrat," *Midwest Quarterly*, XV (1974), 218, 229.

Certainly James H. Hammond and John C. Calhoun, in marrying money, followed an excellent example set by the twenty-three year-old Virginian William Carter who, in 1771, married a widow of eighty-five, described as "a sprightly old Tit, with three thousand pounds fortune."[51]

While it may be disputed that John Adams' and Thomas Jefferson's idea of a natural aristocracy was limited by the sole criterion of wealth, few swam faster or with more success in the mainstream of acquisitive, capitalistic American life than Andrew Jackson, the hero of New Orleans and the friend of the common man. According to the party propagandist and historian, George Bancroft, Jackson, Amos Kendall, and Francis Blair were rescuing the Constitution from an aristocratic conspiracy. It was important for Bancroft to dismiss the beliefs of the founding fathers and to emphasize their pragmatism; by so doing he could not be accused of contradicting them when he articulated the Jacksonian view that "the common judgement in taste, politics, and religion is the highest authority on earth, and the nearest possible approach to an infallible decision."[52] But, "Bancroft's notion of popular infallibility," according to Kristol, "was utterly alien to the founding fathers, and had been explicitly rejected by them."[53] In fact the Constitution incorporated two conflicting ideas of aristocracy and democracy in order to achieve the common good.

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[51]Boston *Massachusetts Spy*, April 19, 1771, quoted in Carl Bridenbaugh, *Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South* (New York, 1963), 11.

[52]George Bancroft, *History of the Formation of the Constitution*, quoted in Kristol, *Democratic Idea*, 55.

[53]*Ibid.*

"Democracy," ~~sayd~~ said Paul Eidelberg, "is a powerful principle. It must have great weight in a civilized society. But democracy is a principle which can lead to the tyranny of the many. If only for its own sake democracy requires restraints, the restraints of a contrary principle, the principle of aristocracy."[54] Professed faith in such a democratic principle without restraints is one feature which distinguishes the Jacksonian era.

Another important change from Jefferson was that Jackson formalized a modern political party so that the elite would continue to control an increasingly complex, mobile, and ethnically diversified society. He claimed that he wished to destroy faction and save the Constitution from any further corrupt bargains. But the party was one way to ensure victory for those who believed in the Constitution. Similarly the Whigs saw themselves in the same light: they would save America from the power-hungry "King Andrew," a foul-mouthed braggart who had lived with a woman in dishonor and who would dishonor the Constitution. American politics were the great battleground of truth--both parties being its sole possessor. If there is a heaven, then John Winthrop would have understood the language of these politicians. He would have applauded their assertion that truth is held by a divinely-appointed group, and that the people were always in danger of being misled by faction and opposition.

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[54]Paul Eidelberg, *The Philosophy of the American Constitution: A Reinterpretation of the Intentions of the Founding Fathers* (New York, 1968), 260. For further discussion of the role of the aristocratic principle, see 78-92, 247-60.

With the increased number of voters, which many Americans mistakenly equated with democracy,[55] the elites formed their party machines. The convention system, widely hailed as a democratic reform and the overthrow of "King Caucus," perpetuated the rule of the elite and served to dramatize for the delegates and the nation the battle for truth.[56] It is not surprising that Stephen A. Douglas, fresh from New York which had a convention system, should have been eager to have it adopted in Illinois.[57] A young Frenchman, impressed by the democratic nature of American society, nonetheless astutely observed that "The surface of American society is covered with a layer of democratic paint, but from time to time one can see the old aristocratic colors breaking through."[58] Indeed it was an aristocratic American, and a Jacksonian, who expressed his reservation about the emergence of the party system with its appeal to majoritarianism. James Fenimore Cooper lashed the Whigs for misleading the people, portraying themselves as

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[55]A student of antebellum urban politics has pointed out, "Despite his possession of the suffrage, the common man had little influence, let alone power, in the nation's cities during the era named in his honor." Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class and Power Before the Civil War* (Lexington, 1973), 299.

[56]McCormick, *Second Party System*, and Remini, *The Election of Andrew Jackson*. Although Pessen argues that wealth and not national party affiliation was the important influence in urban politics, this was not the only factor in state party organization. Pessen, *Riches, Class and Power*; R. Carlyle Buley, "The Political Balance in the Old Northwest, 1820-1860," in Indiana University *Studies*, XII (1925), 405-55; Herbert J. Doherty, *The Whigs of Florida* (Gainesville, 1959), 68-72; John Vollmer Mering, *The Whig Party in Missouri*, in University of Missouri *Studies*, XLI (Columbia, 1967), 8.

[57]Robert W. Johansen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York, 1973), 39-44, 57-60.

[58]de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 42.

the champions of the common man while in fact working for the interest of a wealthy oligarchy. Cooper's criticisms, though directed at the Whigs, are also applicable to the Jacksonians: "The discipline and organization of party, are expedients to defeat the intention of the institutions, by putting managers in the place of the people; it being of little avail that a majority elect, when the nomination rests in the hands of a few," or more succinctly, "When party rules the people do not rule, but merely such a portion of the people as can manage to get control of the party."[59]

Although a minority may control the party, remarked Cooper, it was often subject to the wishes of the majority and as a result substituted public opinion for law. The result often led to private hypocrisy, politicians preferring to hide their opinions if they opposed the majority. "A want of national manliness is a vice to be guarded against, for the man who would dare to resist a monarchy, shrinks from opposing the entire community."[60]

The corruption of power of the majority in the American democratic system was the concern not only of the American Cooper but was noted also by European visitors to the United States. Alexis de Tocqueville, the most astute analyst of democracy's shortcomings, was also worried by the tyranny of the majority. The re-election of a chief executive meant that "The President . . . is absorbed in the task of defending himself. He no longer rules in the interest of

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[59]James Fenimore Cooper, *The American Democrat*, eds. George Dekker and Larry Johnston (Baltimore, 1959), 227.

[60]*Ibid.*, 129-30.

the state, but in that of his own re-election; he prostrates himself before the majority, and often, instead of resisting their passions as duty requires, he hastens to anticipate their caprices."[61]

Unlike Cooper, however, de Tocqueville believed that political parties were an essential, though dangerous, part of the American system.

> It is through political associations that Americans of every station, outlook, and age day by day acquire a general taste for association and get familiar with the way to use the same. Through them large numbers see, speak, listen and stimulate each other to carry out all sorts of undertakings in common. Thus they carry these conceptions with them into the affairs of civil life and put them to a thousand uses.
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> In this way, by enjoyment of a dangerous liberty, the Americans learn the art of rendering the dangers of freedom less formidable.[62]

Associations, self-interest, and the franchise ensure stability under law, Americans having successfully used liberty to combat individualism born of equality.[63]

The ability of a wealthy elite to hold power was denied by de Tocqueville, who saw a "debased taste for equality which leads the weak to want to drag the strong down to their level and which induces men to prefer equality in servitude to inequality in freedom." Men in

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[61] de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 123; also 124-25, 227-29, and 231. It has been suggested that Americans by the middle of the nineteenth century suffered from "an excess of liberty." David Donald, "An Excess of Democracy: The American Civil War and the Social Process," in Kenneth Stampp, ed., *The Causes of the Civil War* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), 95.

[62] de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 495.

[63] It has been argued that de Tocqueville's ideal American was a virtuous conservative. See Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford, 1957), 24-41. For a critique of Meyers' view, see Michael A. Lebbowitz, "The Jacksonians: Paradox Lost," in

democratic states had "an instinctive taste" for freedom but this was not their primary desire and if they failed to achieve it they accepted their lack of freedom; yet they would never be satisfied without equality, preferring to die rather than lose it.[64] When equality is more or less achieved, it "becomes difficult to defend their freedom from the encroachment of power. No one among them being any longer strong enough to struggle alone with success, only the combination of the forces of all is able to guarantee liberty. But such a combination is not always forthcoming."[65] By stressing the need for all to unite, de Tocqueville pointed out the inability of the people to ensure equality with maximum freedom. Jeffersonians, Jacksonians, Whigs, Democrats, and Republicans would always portray themselves as the saviors of equality and freedom from the traitorous hands of a minority.

The tendency of presidents to see themselves as guardians of equality and democratic faith was strengthened because the founding fathers never approved of an opposition and as a result the concept of a loyal opposition was never fully developed. The disputes over the Constitution were a major element in the formation of all the antebellum political parties and because each saw itself as struggling to preserve the purity of republican government, it naturally followed that any

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Barton J. Bernstein, ed., *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (New York, 1968), 70-74. "Presidents view themselves as more than mere party leaders, but as guardians of the Constitution and representative of the nation." Charles E. Merriam and Harold F. Gosnell, *The American Party System: An Introduction to the Study of Political Parties in the United States* (New York, 1949), 187.

[64] de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 49. [65] *Ibid.*, 49-50.

opposition was endangering the Constitution. Opposition parties were frequently labeled un-American. The Federalists passed the Alien and Sedition Acts to save the country from Jacobinism. Jefferson formed his party to preserve the republic from a conspiracy led by an aristocratic minority who sought to restore monarchy.[66] A revival of this Federalist group had duped the Republicans, but the country was saved by the courage of Old Hickory and the ineptitude of John Quincy Adams. The Constitution was saved by the Republicans whose victory in 1860 thwarted a conspiracy by southern "slavocracy" to destroy free government. The weakness of loyal opposition was exacerbated by Article 12 of the Constitution which ensured that the president and the vice-president come from the same party. Compounding an opposing party's lack of constitutional authority is the fact that the president is a symbol of the state as well as the leader of the party. As men sworn to uphold the Constitution, incumbents were subject to attacks which affected the decisions they made.[67]

The fundamental disagreements between opposing factions over the correct interpretation of the Constitution, dangerous in times of peace, as evidenced in the Nullification Crisis, were explosive when infused with the moral issue of slavery. The rumblings of discord had first been heard at the constitutional convention in

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[66]Jeffersonian to Washington, May 8, 1791, to Madison, May 9, 1791, to Paine, July 29, 1791, and to Adams, August 30, 1791, for continual expressions of this fear, see Ford, *Works of Thomas Jefferson*, VI, 255, 258-59, 298, 315.

[67]For de Tocqueville's comments, see *Democracy in America*, 122, 124-25.

Philadelphia and even earlier when Jefferson was forced by the delegates of South Carolina to strike out his condemnation of slavery and the slave trade in the Declaration of Independence. The Missouri Compromise had stilled the clanging of the "fire-bell in the night," but it would take only a gentle breeze to start it ringing again. Abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Weld and the anti-slavery forces in the North were determined to cause a hurricane. But despite their efforts they met with limited success and it was the paranoid over-reaction on the part of the South to their activities which broadened the issue from slavery to civil rights, thereby causing great concern in the racist northern states. For example, it was only a minority who saw the annexation of Texas as a plot by the southern "slavocracy," but increasing numbers of northern Whigs and even a few Democrats were gravely concerned about Mr. Polk's war with Mexico. The vast territories that were to be acquired presented many northerners with the basic dilemma which simply stated was: should the United States have gone to war demanding territory from Mexico, and should the United States allow slavery into the territory if and when it was acquired?

The result is a basic divergence over the nature of constitutional rights, the rights and role of the federal government, the extent to which states were sovereign, the extent to which Jefferson's resolutions of 1798 and 1799 were valid. It therefore became difficult, if not impossible, to evolve a concept of loyal opposition.[68] A written

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[68]For a dissenting view, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1940* (Berkeley, 1969).

constitution was disadvantageous to the development of this concept but it would have been possible, if politicians could have agreed on fundamentals.

This constitutional failure was appreciated by earlier historians but it is unfortunate that modern consensus historians, in revising the work of their "progressive" brethren, have tended to overemphasize shared values and to minimize the role of conflict in American history.[69] There is no dispute that Americans had, and have, many common traditions, customs and beliefs and these were stressed by foreign observers such as de Tocqueville. Ironically the father of consensus history has been embarrassed by his disciples--disciples whom the late Richard Hofstadter had no intention of gathering when he published in 1948 his seminal study, *The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made It*. In the preface to the Hebrew edition of this work he noted that where consensus historians mention conflict "they reduce it to a very *ad hoc* basis. . . ."[70] He confessed that he had "serious misgivings about what is known as consensus history."[71] Granted such history has certain validity, and granted the progressive school needed a corrective,

> the consensus point of view is limited in that it is only an assertion about the frame or the configuration of history and not about what goes on in the picture. . . . Americans may

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[69]Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made It* (New York, 1973), xxiii-iv.

[70]*Ibid.*, xxiii. For a succinct expression of the consensus view of American history prior to 1848, see David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, completed and ed. by Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York, 1976), 8-14.

[71]Hofstadter, *American Political Tradition*, xxiii.

> not have quarreled over profound ideological matters, as these are formulated in the history of political thought, but they quarreled consistently enough over issues that had real pith and moment. And their unappeasable conflicts finally brought them in 1861 to one of the momentous and tragic political failures in modern history.[72]

Hofstadter rightly pointed out that no society can function unless there is broad agreement among its members on certain moral and constitutional issues. But it may be suggested that it was the absence of this consensus on constitutional issues prior to 1861 which led to the collapse of the Union when divided over the moral question of slavery and its extension. Certainly all Americans agreed on a republican form of government but they disagreed violently as to what precisely constituted a republican government. All Americans preached the values of democracy but were increasingly divided about its meaning and later even its virtues. Most Americans would defend free speech but at the same time each party sought to gag the opposition. All agreed with Jefferson that all Americans should be guaranteed "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Andrew Johnson, as a radical Democrat, espoused these Jeffersonian beliefs, demanding the popular election of president, vice-president and senators, schemes which Lincoln could, and would, never support. But for Johnson and most Americans democracy and the American dream were for whites only, for Lincoln, a conservative Whig, democracy and the American dream were eventually to include the black American. Are such fundamental disputes mere side-shows? Must the resolutions of 1798 and 1799, the Hartford Convention and the Nullification Crisis be reduced to

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[72] *Ibid.*

insignificance? Certainly the actors in the American drama did not perceive them as such. Are political philosophers such as John Randolph of Roanoke, John Taylor of Caroline and John C. Calhoun to be denigrated as mere eccentrics? Surely not. They believed passionately that their views of republicanism, democracy and of the American dream were as valid as any northerner's view. In fact, it was they who clung to law seeking to preserve their rights and it was northerners from Garrison to Lincoln who increasingly appealed to higher law and to their Puritan morality in order to prevent the movement of slavery and blacks into the territories. American pragmatism has been grossly exaggerated and contrary to the belief of many American sociologists, political scientists and historians, Americans as a people are one of the most ideologically committed nations in the world. The American ideology of representative democracy (liberty), republicanism, federalism, individualism and equality is reinforced by a long historical belief that the people who came to the United States were not only improving their earthly lot, but were establishing a perfect society which would be an example to their less fortunate cousins left in Europe. Colonial Virginia was infused with this sense of mission as much as Puritan Massachusetts. The Revolution of 1776 reinforced this missionary zeal.[73] However, while Americans shared a similar ideology their disputes over its precise meaning were not the mere side-shows of consensus history but passionate, firmly-held

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[73]Clinton Rossiter, "The American Mission," *American Scholar*, XX (1950-51), 19-20; Conrad Cherry, ed., *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971).

convictions, so much so that Americans were prepared to slaughter each other for them.

With the sections so polarized that the dispute over the Constitution was infused with moral righteousness either for or against slavery, the result was, for example, Sumner's violent denunciation of southern slave-holders in the Senate and Preston Brooks' violent beating of the Massachusetts senator, an act which made Brooks a hero in the South and a bullying coward in the North. With such tensions how was it possible for either party to see the other as loyal? Loyal opposition which had evolved in England had done so in order that alternative governments would be feasible. Rapid shifts in political fortune could result in overnight changes of government. Thus it was essential for political parties to share the same constitutional views and have a wide measure of agreement as to the role that central government should play. The essential arguments between parties were about ends and not means. Therefore the English evolved the Shadow Cabinet system which gave formal recognition to the leaders of the opposition as the next potential government whereas such formal recognition of the minority leader in the House of Representatives was not agreed on until 1883.[74]

Men of the Hartford Convention and the South Carolina Nullification Crisis may have been extremists but the 1840s to 1860 saw increased sympathy for nullification in the North and South. Although

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[74]Randall B. Ripley, *Party Leaders in the House of Representatives* (Washington, D.C., 1967), 28-29.

Jackson had crushed the bank and had apparently routed the nullifiers, political satirist Seba Smith's Major Jack Downing knew that the monster had not been stamped out.[75] Sympathy for nullification was not only a southern phenomenon and it was not only Garrison and Lowell that talked of disunion from the evils of slavery. It was also the staid and conservative justices of the Wisconsin Supreme Court who in 1854 declared the Fugitive Slave law null and void and who resisted the authority of the United States Supreme Court in the name of states' rights.[76]

The conspicuous failure of Presidents Fillmore, Pierce and Buchanan to provide any leadership during these years suggests that Jefferson's earlier complacency about the executive powers was justified;[77] but de Tocqueville was aware of the inherent danger of a separate executive with extensive authority. In particular, he focused on the president's power as commander-in-chief. Circumstances and not law ensured the weakness of the executive, but the circumstances could change. "If the Union's existence were constantly menaced, and

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[75]Major Jack Downing [Seba Smith], *My Thirty Years Out of the Senate* (New York, 1859), 241. Downing, a Yankee peddler, was the hero of Seba Smith's satirical columns which first appeared in his Portland [Maine] Courier in 1830. Republished in periodicals such as *Emerson's United States Magazine*, the columns were also reprinted in three separate volumes.

[76]Robert M. Cover, *Justice Accused: Antislavery and the Judicial Process* (New Haven, 1975), 186-87.

[77]Jefferson to Madison, March 15, 1798, in Ford, *Works of Thomas Jefferson*, VII, 312. "The tyranny of the legislature is the most formidable dread at present and will be for many years. That of the executive will come in its turn, but it will be at a remote period."

if its great interests were continually interwoven with those of other powerful nations, one could see the prestige of the executive growing, because of what was expected from it and of what it did."[78] Thus the presidents would remain weak because the United States was separated from Europe by an ocean, possessed no desire to rule the waves, had no enemies, and was rarely in touch with other nations.[79] The extension of presidential power and executive prestige came not from an external threat to the Union but rather from an internal danger.

Although de Tocqueville was aware of the disadvantages of dividing sovereignty between the states and federal government, and of the deep love Americans held for their states, he believed that the different states had more or less the same interests and the same level of civilization--so it was nearly always easy for them to agree.[80] His assessment that the presence of blacks in America was a cause for revolution was more prescient: "it will not be the equality of social conditions but rather their inequality which may give rise thereto."[81]

During the antebellum period, the southern Democratic politicians dropped the rhetoric of egalitarian democracy and championed inequality as they sought to protect their peculiar institution. The white economic elite of the South were faced with increased pressure to limit or even abolish slavery, the very basis of their power. The

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[78] de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 114.

[79] *Ibid.*, 114-15.

[80] *Ibid.*, 151. "They give the Union money and soldiers, but the states retained the love and the prejudices of the people."

[81] *Ibid.*, 614.

defense of their economic system required them to repudiate the rhetoric of equality which they had used to gain power in the Democratic party. For the South, the slogan of "free soil, free labor and free men" had to be attacked. Southerners asserted that the Republican party was not a legitimate party but a group of northern fanatics whose sole desire was to crush the South. The warning of Calhoun, as expressed in his South Carolina Exposition and Protest, that majoritarian democracy would mean oppression of the southern slave-holding minority, were now heeded. South Carolina was no longer alone.[82]

The price demanded by the southern Democrats for maintenance of the Union--denial of the infallibility of the majority--[83] was too high for the northwestern elite. The Democratic party in the northwest was already on the defensive and many Democrats had already deserted the party.[84] The Douglasites could no longer concede the right of the southern minority to control the party and with the collapse of the last national political institution, secession was inevitable. It was impossible for the southern Democrats to consider the Republican party loyal to the Constitution.

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[82]Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, 360.

[83]The most extreme example is George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond, 1854). In a comment on the Southern shift from liberalism to conservatism, Louis Hartz writes, "Fitzhugh substituted for the social blindness of Jefferson a hopeless exaggeration of the truth. The South exchanged a superficial thinker for a mad genius." Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, 1955), 159.

[84]Mildred Stoler, Influence of the Democratic Element in the Republican Party of Indiana and Illinois, 1854-1860 (Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1938), 11.

During the period in which southern Democrats dominated the party, the power of the president and the federal government were steadily reduced until Buchanan, when faced with disunion, could only say that it was wrong but that he had no power to prevent the formation of a southern confederacy. This impotence on the part of the executive had previously led de Tocqueville to predict that if a state did leave the Union, the federal government would be unable to coerce it to return.[85]

Abraham Lincoln, "the black Republican," was certainly not impotent when faced with the secession crisis of 1861. He acted vigorously and, as revisionist historian William Barney has pointed out, "The first republic of the Founding Fathers collapsed in 1860, destroyed as much by the inertia of the Constitution as by the intransigence of Northerners and Southerners."[86] Lincoln mobilized the war powers to resolve the crisis and made a key decision, resulting in a radically new and increased power for the executive. To ensure rapid action and to avoid sterile congressional debates about nationalism versus states' rights, he "turned to an untapped and unencumbered source of constitutional authorization, his powers as commander-in-chief."[87] The constitutional failure which contributed to secession and war had its origins in Jacksonian democracy, and Lincoln's extraordinary use of war powers was to influence Andrew Johnson's actions,

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[85]de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 338.

[86]William Barney, *Flawed Victory: A New Perspective of the Civil War* (New York, 1975), ix.

[87]*Ibid.*, 51.

undertaken in the peacetime task of Reconstruction, although it must be emphasized that Johnson's experience as war governor of Tennessee does much to explain his later actions as president.

Lincoln, with very little previous political experience, had the advantage of being a president in wartime. The major opponents of Republican ideology had seceded from power to the consternation of Andrew Johnson, a Democrat who believed the Democratic party was a Jacob's ladder to heaven. Therefore he was to come to power as the leader of the Unionist party and needed to win the confidence and support of men whom he had considered previously no better than the Essex Junto Federalists. Johnson clung to the Jacksonian faith in the Union and the power of the common man. Increasingly isolated inside his own party before the Civil War by "an upstart, swell headed, iron heeled, bobtailed aristocracy," he clung to the ideal that it was a minority of the planter aristocracy that conspired against him and that plotted to lead the South into disunion, frustrating his efforts for a more democratic society. For Johnson the answer to aristocratic elitist control was greater democracy. He agreed with George Bancroft that the common man's judgment was the final test of validity because it was by his appeal to the majority that he had won political power throughout his career.

Their humble origins, a determination to save the Union at any price, their conception of presidential authority, were the major characteristics shared by the sixteenth and seventeenth presidents. But these border-state men were as strikingly dissimilar as they were similar, and it was not solely a question of temperament.

Although each grew up attended by "the gaunt and haggard monster" of poverty, they soon took different political paths and represented two opposing views on the problems inherent in majoritarian democracy. Ironically Lincoln, who shared the Whiggish distrust of the majority, was to become the great emancipator and champion of democracy while Johnson was repudiated by the people and was to become the first president to be impeached because he opposed the extension of democracy. One of the keys to understanding this contradiction lies in their early careers and the social status they achieved.

CHAPTER II

A QUESTION OF STATUS: PLEBEIANS' PROGRESS TO WASHINGTON

> Men who have made a special study of the laws and have derived therefrom habits of order, something of a taste for formalities, and an instinctive love for a regular concatenation of ideas are naturally strongly opposed to the revolutionary spirit and to the ill-considered passions of democracy.
>
> Alexis de Tocqueville*

The young aristocrat, ostensibly on a visit to study penal institutions in New York and Pennsylvania, returned to France and noted in his study of American democracy that lawyers, with their belief in common law, were not only the great conservative force in England and the United States against "the ill-considered passions of democracy"; but that in America, bereft of a titled aristocracy, the lawyers formed "the political upper class and the most intellectual section of society. Consequently they only stand to lose from any innovation; this adds interest in conservation to their natural taste for order." According to de Tocqueville, "It is at the bar or the bench that the American aristocracy is found."[1]

Certainly the only bench Andrew Johnson knew was the one in his tailor's shop and he never acquired a "taste for formalities." Although "opposed to the revolutionary spirit," he was a fervent defender of "the ill-considered passions of democracy." On the other hand Abraham Lincoln,

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*_Democracy in America_, 243.

[1]de Tocqueville, _Democracy in America_, 243-47.

born under similar circumstances and with similar handicaps, was imbued with the legal spirit which was well adapted "to neutralize the vices inherent in popular government."[2] The explanation of this paradox may be seen as simple--Lincoln moved North and Johnson stayed in the South, but it is not only sectional issues which explain the extraordinary careers of these men; rather it is an understanding of the social milieu in which they struggled for status which in turn would reward them with political power.

Despite the importance of these early years the career of Andrew Johnson has been virtually ignored whereas there is a mountain of literature on Abraham Lincoln. The latter, notable mainly for his early political failure, has been studied extensively, but there is a paucity of material on Johnson's early life, which was one of continual success. Even his admiring biographers slide quickly over these years. A man who served for a decade in Congress has no book on his congressional career, but Lincoln who served for one term has two.[3] No monographs deal with Johnson's service as a state legislator although Lincoln's years in the Illinois legislature have been called his "preparation for greatness."[4] There is no published monograph on Andrew Johnson as governor of Tennessee prior to the Civil War, and there has been no recent study on his vitally important years as war governor. The latter is even more

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[2] *Ibid.*, 243, 247.

[3] Donald W. Riddle, *Lincoln Runs for Congress* (New Brunswick, 1948); Riddle, *Congressman Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana, 1957).

[4] Paul Simon, *Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness: The Illinois Legislative Years* (Norman, 1965).

surprising when one considers what a crucial influence the stay in Nashville had on Johnson and the later history of Reconstruction. It is only as president that biographers have concerned themselves with Johnson, either to damn or defend. Much ink could have been spared if defenders and detractors alike had held their pens and researched his early career with the same depth as the students of the man from Illinois have researched their subject.[5]

Although writers, journalists, and scholars have tended to neglect the tailor of Tennessee and favor the Railsplitter from Kentucky, these men shared similar origins. Born into the lower class of border states, they share the dubious distinction of having been dubbed "bastards." In 1899 a North Carolina journalist, James H. Cathey, sought to verify a tradition that Abraham Lincoln's true father was a farmer and slave-trader from the Tarheel state, namely Abraham Enloe. Cathey compiled numerous letters from neighbors and relatives to prove that Nancy Hanks, Lincoln's mother, was Enloe's servant and while in his employ became pregnant by him. Enloe's wife was not amused. Nancy was ordered from the house and Abraham escorted her to Kentucky. There the pregnant Nancy, on June 12, 1806, was married to a poor farmer, Thomas Lincoln. These charges against Nancy Hanks Lincoln have been disproved--it is unlikely that she was with child for over two years! But it is true that

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[5]For a massive, thorough dissertation on Johnson's antebellum governorship, see Hubert Blair Bentley, Andrew Johnson, Governor of Tennessee, 1853-57 (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1972). There are even two monographs on Lincoln as a lawyer, including a 370-page study! Might we see a similar history of Johnson's tailoring days? See John J. Duff, *A. Lincoln, Prarie Lawyer* (New York, 1960); John P. Frank, *Lincoln As a Lawyer* (Urbana, 1961).

Lucy Hanks, her mother, was indicted for fornication. She was never tried, probably because of her marriage to Henry Sparrow. The allegation that Nancy was illegitimate is also doubtful.[6] Lincoln's secretaries, on the other hand, sought to establish a respectable family tree descending from English gentry,[7] but perhaps his own description of his origin is still the best: "I was born February 12, 1809 in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families--second families perhaps I should say."[8] The author of Lincoln's 1860 campaign biography, J. L. Scripps, informed Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, that the Illinoisian had warned him it would be folly to concentrate on his early life: "It can all be condensed into a simple sentence and that sentence you will find in Gray's elegy; 'The short and simple annals of the poor.' That's my life, and that's all you or anyone else can make of it."[9]

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[6]James H. Cathey, *Truth is Stranger than Fiction or the True Genesis of a Wonderful Man* (---------, 1899), 25-103; Harold E. and Ernestine B. Briggs, *Nancy Hanks Lincoln: A Frontier Portrait* (New York, 1953), 28-32; J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "The Many-Sired Lincoln," *American Mercury*, V (1925), 129-35. Hamilton analyzes the numerous stories about the sixteenth president's parentage and dismisses them as a "modern attempt at deification . . . at its best a feeble imitation of the ancients." *Ibid.*, 135.

[7]John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography* (10 vols., New York, 1917), I, 23.

[8]Lincoln to Jesse W. Fell, December 20, 1859, in Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (8 vols., New Brunswick, 1963), III, 511.

[9]J. L. Scripps to William Herndon, June 24, 1865, quoted in James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President: Springfield to Gettysburg* (4 vols., New York, 1945-55), I, 4.

Six weeks before Lincoln's birth, Andrew Johnson was born in Raleigh, North Carolina, on December 19, 1808, into a family even more undistinguished than the Lincolns. Andrew's father, Jacob Johnson, was a member of the most despised class in the South--a white servant.[10] Jacob was a "mud-sill" of society. For white men to hold servant status in the South or to work with their hands meant that as a class they were looked down upon by the planter-lawyer aristocracy and even by the slaves.[11] Not satisfied with this humble background, William G. Brownlow, in the bitter 1843 congressional campaign, accused Johnson of being a bastard--the natural son of John Haywood, member of a prominent North Carolina family.[12] In 1912 a professor at the University of North Carolina recalled what was "common knowledge" in Raleigh: "On the night that Andrew Johnson was born . . . old Mrs. Casso (who kept a hotel, Casso's Hotel--in Raleigh) found Mrs. Jacob Johnson, a young flighty

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[10]Chancellor Harper of South Carolina argued in "Slavery: In the Light of Social Ethics," that "The offices which employ knowledge and intellect will always be regarded as more liberal than those which require the labor of the hands." E. N. Elliot, comp., *Cotton is King and Pro-Slavery Arguments, Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright* (Augusta, 1860), 589. See also J. Henry Hammond, "Slavery in the Light of Political Science," *ibid.*, 637-38, and Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* (New York, 1860), 126, 298-99, 376, 401.

[11]For black attitudes toward the poor white, see Johnson's exchange with Frederick Douglass and the reply to the President by the colored delegation, in Edward McPherson, *The Political History of the United States During Reconstruction* (Washington, D.C., 1880), 52-56; Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois from its Commencement as a State in 1828 to 1842* ed. Milo Milton Quaife (2 vols., Chicago, 1945-6), II, 89.

[12]Robert W. Winston, *Andrew Johnson: Plebeian and Patriot* (New York, 1928), 64.

thing, in the loft of Casso's Hotel, a mother by an hour or so." Apparently the landlady wanted to know who the father was because "had Andrew been Jacob's child, it would not have been necessary for Mrs. Johnson to seek concealment in the loft of the hotel." Johnson's mother, Mary McDonough, is said to have told Mrs. Casso, "It his [*sic*] between Mr. Henderson (Leonard, Chief Justice of N.C., a man of somewhat loose morals--my great uncle) or Mr. Haywood (Stephen--if I recall correctly)." That Haywood was the father was confirmed by Mr, Charles E. Johnson and also by the Episcopal bishop of North Carolina. Apparently when Andrew Johnson returned to Raleigh in 1867 to unveil a monument to his father, many noticed the facial similarity of Dallas Haywood, the mayor, and Andrew Johnson, and commented on: "the two half-brothers strikingly alike, driving up town together--the legitimate child mayor of Raleigh (not so high an office!), and the illegitimate child, President of the United States."[13]

The tailor also denied similar charges made by the Fighting Parson concerning his wife. In an open letter to the electors of the first district, Johnson wrote, "that my wife, though the daughter of an humble mechanic, and the only child of a widow, was born more than nine months after wedlock, which proves that she had not her origin in an adulterous bed."[14]

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[13]Archibald Henderson to St. George L. Sioussat, August 29, 1912, St. George L. Sioussat Papers, University of Tennessee Library.

[14]To the Freemen of the First Congressional District of Tennessee, October 15, 1845, in LeRoy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Johnson* (4 vols. to date, Knoxville, 1967 -----), I, 271.

Certainly, the poverty of Johnson's childhood was much more severe than that suffered by Lincoln. Jacob Johnson was a faithful servant at Casso's Inn, and it may be that the son's later hostility to James K. Polk was influenced by the fact that the Polk family were part of the elite which Jacob Johnson had to wait upon: Colonel William Polk, cousin of the future president, employed Jacob as a janitor at the state bank.[15] This animosity would be compounded by the fact that, according to later biographers, Jacob lost his life rescuing one of the aristocratic gentlemen from a river.[16] While it is unlikely that it took twelve months for him to expire from his efforts, his bravery did ensure that Jacob would not be, as he would otherwise have been, totally ignored by history. It was the local newspaper editor, Colonel Thomas Henderson, who owed his life to Jacob and on the latter's death published an obituary which informs us that he had occupied "a humble but useful station," as city constable, sexton, and janitor of the state bank. Colonel Henderson also observed that during Jacob's last illness his visitors included "the principal inhabitants of the city, by all of whom he was esteemed for his honesty, industry, and humane and friendly disposition."[17] Henderson and his colleagues may have genuinely missed the unambitious, faithful servant but they did little, if anything, to help the family that was left.

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[15]Winston, *Johnson*, 5. For Polk's dislike of Johnson, see Milo Milton Quaife, ed., *The Diary of James K. Polk* (4 vols., New York, 1919), II, 35-41; IV, 265. Col. William Polk was also reputedly Andrew's father. S. A. Ashe to St. George L. Sioussat, February 1, 1912, Sioussat Papers.

[16]James S. Jones, *Life of Andrew Johnson: Seventeenth President of the United States* (Greeneville, 1901), 13-14; Winston, *Johnson*, 7.

[17]Raleigh *Star*, January 12, 1812, quoted in Jones, *Andrew Johnson*,

Many years later, James Russell Lowell in a reflective, philosophical article, speculated about Johnson's early life. He noted that "a remarkable instance of wellconcealed [*sic*] but authentic greatness . . . has just been brought to light and joyfully commemorated in North Carolina."[18] It had taken fifty-five years to reveal the true greatness of Jacob Johnson. "He seems to have been as well concealed as a burglar would wish to be after a successful job," jibed Lowell, "obscure as an explanation of Hegel." He was certain that Andrew "himself rose not from greater obscurity, even in his own strongest statement of it, than that into which his father had sunken."[19] Johnson during his remarkable career had never alluded to his father, "nor did equally oblivious Raleigh think to rear a monument whose ponderous and marble jaws should proclaim the merits of her long-buried citizen."[20] Why should Jacob Johnson be the object of such an honor when "the progenitors of Jackson, Van Buren, Polk and the rest, so far as we remember, had not *their* sleep disturbed by this clangor of belated mourning. . . ." The reason was that Jacob not only foresaw but foredetermined that Andrew would be president and, "Until the revolving years had brought

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13; see also John Savage, *The Life and Public Services of Andrew Johnson, Seventeenth President of the United States* (New York, 1866), 13.

[18]LeRoy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, "'This Clangor of Belated Mourning;' James Russell Lowell on Andrew Johnson's Father," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXII (1963), 430. Lowell described Johnson as "A lord of misrule, an abbot of unreason," in "The Seward-Johnson Reaction," *North American Review*, CIII (1866), 529.

[19]Graf and Haskins, "'This Clangor of Belated Mourning,'" 431.

[20]*Ibid.*, 432.

that consummation of his vow in which the country now rejoices, his son, of course could not remember a father whose promise was unfulfilled." The reader had no need to go to Raleigh to see the monument but had only to look at the son.[21] In mock awe Lowell asked his readers to:

> Consider the strength of mind that could not only carry such a secret to the grave, but keep it there so long when any table would have tipped or any wainscot rapped it out for him. Consider the equally iron temper of the son who could leave such a father so many years without a threnody in marble.[22]

Not only Jacob, but the whole family "had sunken" into obscurity and little is known about the hardships the family endured, but eventually Mrs. Johnson apprenticed her sons, William and Andrew, to a tailor. Andrew was 14 years old.[23] The years he worked as an apprentice and journeyman ensured that he would be bound to the mechanic class. Born of the lowest class, he now had the additional handicap of being a white man who was a mechanic.

Young Andrew did not like his master and as a result ran away. Some biographers have suggested that he absented himself because of a

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[21] *Ibid.*, 433.

[22] *Ibid.*, 433-34. A young student who attended the dedication ceremony later recalled Johnson saying that the monument was a mark of respect to a man "I claim to be my father." Seward explained that the President had returned to North Carolina to honor the man "said" to be the President's father. Post Master General Randall was reportedly greeted with hoots of laughter when he declared: "Fellow citizens the President has returned to N.C. to pay the last tribute of respect to the man that '*bore*' him--" Alexander Graham to St. George L. Sioussat, February 18, 1931, Sioussat Papers.

[23] Indenture to James J. Selby, February 18, 1822, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 3.

passionate romance--a love for an aristocratic young lady which was crushed by the girl's parents who considered him too inferior.[24] In love or not, Johnson was obviously prized by his master who, in offering ten dollars reward for William and Andrew, was willing to give the total for Andrew alone.[25]

Although in Johnson's account to a Greeneville resident, as reported some years later, he was badly treated by his master, while in Raleigh he did meet a young man who inspired him by reading the speeches of great statesmen.[26] According to one source, Johnson was taught his letters by men at the coal pits and a servant girl taught him to write.[27] Later biographers credit his wife Eliza with teaching him to read and write, particularly the latter.[28] The important fact is that Johnson did not learn these skills until somewhat later and as his

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[24]Jones, *Andrew Johnson*, 15; Savage, *Life and Public Services*, 16.

[25]Notice of Runaway Apprentices, June 24, 1824, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 3.

[26]Blanche Gray Jordan in unidentified newspaper report, Box 16, Appendix II, O. P. Temple Papers, University of Tennessee Library, refers to it as the *United States Speaker*. John Savage was told by Andrew Johnson that it was the *American Speaker* (1810); see Savage, *Life and Public Services*, 23. The man who read to Johnson was named Hill according to John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, February 19, 1892, Temple Papers. However, Hill could not remember Andrew Johnson or having read to the apprentices in the shop "but I think it very *probable that I did do so*. . . ." W. R. Hill to David L. Swain, October 26, 1865, Sioussat Papers.

[27]Jordan clipping.

[28]The question of whether or not Andrew Johnson was taught to write by his wife is discussed extensively in Oliver P. Temple, *Notable Men of Tennessee from 1833 to 1877: Their Times and Contemporaries* (New York, 1912), 360-61.

correspondence reveals he was not a master of writing even after emerging on the political scene. As late as 1836 he wrote to his close friend and mentor, George W. Jones, a former saddler now become legislator: "I will conclude this incoherent scrawl [.] you must parden the ma[n]y blunders, you know the difficulties that the subscribed has labored under, enough said."[29]

As a fugitive and mechanic, Johnson entered Tennessee with his brother, "a worthless, unenergetic fellow," his mother and his step-father, "a shiftless, dissipated old man by the name of Doddery [Daughtry]."[30] This motley crew headed for Tennessee, according to Johnson's later account, because of an offer of land near Lebanon by Colonel Henderson, the man Jacob had rescued. Johnson became a tailor in Greeneville and Blanche Gray Jordan recalled that Mr. Daughtry "was given work as a collar and harness maker by my great-grandfather, Richard West, who was a merchant and operated a tannery at Greeneville at that date and the family occupied a small house situated about a mile north of Greeneville and belonging to my great-grandfather [Richard West]." William meanwhile went to Henderson, persuaded him that Daughtry was unreliable and had the land signed into his name. No sooner was this done than William sold the land and fled to Texas.[31]

With the loss of the farm at Lebanon, Andrew Johnson lost any hope of having the same start in life as Abraham Lincoln. The

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[29]Johnson to George W. Jones, December 25, 1836, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 20.

[30]It was believed that he had two or three sisters who were left in North Carolina, but they have not been traced. Jordan clipping.

[31]*Ibid.*

Railsplitter's father, Thomas, was certainly not the poor white trash that Herndon tried to portray,[32] because when Thomas settled in Kentucky he bought 238 acres of land for which he paid one hundred and eighteen pounds.[33] That this was a substantial property is indicated by the inclusion of "barns, stable, ways, houses, water and conveniences."[34] The money to purchase the farm was probably earned while working as a cabinet maker for Samuel Haycraft, Sr., and from an inheritance. His defenders have to admit that despite this "affluent" start, including the ownership of a house in the village of Elizabethtown, when he sold the farm at Mill Creek on October 27, 1814, he lost money on the deal.[35] When Thomas and his family left Kentucky for Indiana in 1816 he had owned three farms but was poorer than when he first arrived.[36] The history of Lincoln's stay is not unusual; rather it was the all too familiar story of a man heading west to seek his fortune but losing it because of disputed land titles.[37] But because Thomas had some extra

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[32]William H. Herndon, *Life of Lincoln* (Cleveland, 1944), 12-13. It has been suggested that Herndon's work "must more and more be evaluated as literature rather than as biography." David Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon* (New York, 1948), 367.

[33]Deed of Possession from John F. Stater to Thomas Lincoln, September 2, 1803, reproduced in R. Gerald McMurtry, *The Kentucky Lincolns on Mill Creek* (Harrogate, Tenn., 1939), 18-20.

[34]*Ibid.*

[35]For the deed of conveyance, see *ibid.*, 31-32.

[36]*Ibid.*, 46-47, 50.

[37]The misfortunes of Thomas Lincoln are dealt with in Abraham Lincoln, "Short Autobiography," in John G. Nicolay and John Hay, eds., *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works* (2 vols., New York, 1920), I, 638-39; McMurtry, *Kentucky Lincolns*, 28-37; Lewis A. Warren, *Lincoln's Youth: Indiana Years Seven to Twenty-one, 1816-30* (New York, 1959), 3-14; Benjamin Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography* (New York, 1968), 3-8.

cash, he was able to allow his son, Abraham, to have a rudimentary education. As Lincoln himself later recalled, "Before leaving Kentucky, he and his sister were sent, for short periods, to ABC schools, the first kept by Zachariah Riley, and the second by Caleb Hazel."[38] And during his stay in Indiana he attended "ABC schools" run by "Andrew Crawford, ---------Sweeney, and Azel W. Dorsey. He does not remember any other. . . . Abraham now thinks that the aggregate of all his schooling did not amount to one year." Despite this advantage of literacy from his brief education in Kentucky and Indiana, Lincoln, like Johnson, was later conscious of his educational deficiencies. In his campaign autobiography of 1860, he confessed: "He was never in a college or academy as a student. . . . What he has in the way of education he has picked up." Not until he was twenty-three did Lincoln study English grammar, and although "he mastered the six books of Euclid since he was a member of Congress," he regretted "his want of education and does what he can to supply the want."[39]

Although the Lincoln trek to Indiana was "chiefly on account of the difficulty in land titles in Kentucky," Abraham later claimed that "the removal was partly on account of slavery." In his biography of the sixteenth president, Albert J. Beveridge asserts, on the dubious authority of Denis Hanks, that "not the faintest evidence has been found indicating

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[38]Lincoln, "Short Autobiography," in Nicolay and Hay, *Works*, I, 639. The autobiography, written in the third person, was supplied to John L. Scripps, author of Lincoln's campaign biography of 1860. Randall, *Lincoln the President*, I, 4.

[39]Lincoln, "Short Autobiography," in Nicolay and Hay, *Works*, I, 639-40. See also his Communication to the People of Sangamon County, March 9, 1832, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 8.

that slavery was so much as a contributing cause for their departure; indeed it is doubtful whether that institution made any impression, one way or another, on Thomas Lincoln's pallid mind."[40] Such an assertion ignores the fact that the local Baptist church two miles from the Lincoln Kentucky Sinking Spring home was so divided over the issue of slavery that it had to close down. In 1808, fifteen members "went off from the church on account of slavery."[41] Friends and relatives of the family were members of this church while Thomas of the "pallid mind" and Nancy belonged to a Separate Baptist congregation whose members held anti-slavery sentiments.[42] There is little evidence to suggest, however, that whatever anti-slavery feeling may have motivated Thomas Lincoln had any effect on the young Lincoln.[43]

During his stay in Indiana he was "raised to farm work, which I

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[40]Albert J. Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln* (2 vols., New York, 1928), I, 33.

[41]South Fork Baptist Church Record Book, July 3, 1808, and July, 1810, as quoted in Warren, *Lincoln's Youth*, 13.

[42]*Ibid.*

[43]The Republican nominee for president, in writing of his childhood and youth, makes only one reference to slaves. At the age of nineteen he made a trip as a hired hand on a flatboat to New Orleans. While trading along the coast, "one night they were attacked by seven negroes with intent to kill and rob them. They were hurt some in the mêlée, but succeeded in driving the negroes from the boat." Lincoln, "Short Autobiography," Nicolay and Hay, *Works*, I, 640. However, reporting a later trip to New Orleans, the poet Carl Sandburg surmises that the slave-sale advertisements made Lincoln "thoughtful and brooding." Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years* (1 vol. ed., New York, 1954), 23; Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Alton, October 15, 1858, in Basler, *Collected Works*, III, 312.

continued till I was twenty two."[44] His mother Nancy died from the "milk-sick" and his father married a good-natured Kentucky widow with three children. According to an historian of these years, his father was the hero figure that the young Lincoln needed.[45] This interpretation of Lincoln's relationship with his father is open to some doubt. In 1851, as Thomas Lincoln lay dying, Abraham wrote to his half-brother, John D. Johnston, and admitted he had not replied to two previous letters "because it appeared to me I could write to nothing which could do any good." He was prepared to help his parents and would help defray medical expenses. Mary Todd Lincoln was in bed with "baby-sickness" so he could not leave home. Even though there was still a chance of recovery, he advised John to tell their father to "confide in our great, and good, and merciful Maker; who will not turn away from him in any extremity." Apparently even his father could be saved. John was told to "Say to him that if we could meet now, it is doubtful whether it would be more painful than pleasant. . . ."[46] Whatever his relationship may have been with his father as a youth, it evidently did not last into manhood and Lincoln never did go to see Thomas, who died later that year.

If Thomas Lincoln was a hero for his son Abraham as a youth, young Andrew Johnson was unable to find a similar figure in his hard-drinking step-father. The young tailor had no one in his family on whom

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[44] Lincoln to Jesse W. Fell, December 20, 1858, in *ibid.*, 511-12. For a detailed coverage of Lincoln's stay in Indiana, see Warren, *Lincoln's Youth, passim.*

[45] *Ibid.*, 84-86.

[46] Lincoln to John D. Johnston, January 12, 1851, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 96-97.

to model himself, but Andy like Abe was very ambitious. Such ambition in the "political type" (that is, someone who always chooses power opportunities over any others offered), it has been suggested by a twentieth-century analyst, "is characterized by an intense and ungratified craving for deference." A politician "pursues power as a means of compensation against deprivation. *Power is expected to overcome low estimates of the self*, by changing either the traits of self or the environment in which it functions." [The author's italics] The power to change the environment is held by middle-class families who are "the custodians of the dominant myths of the community" and who glorify the professional standard of serving for collective rather than purely private advantage. Business activity is disparaged. The ideal is some form of public service, as in law, medicine, education; law, in particular, leads to active participation in the power process. If subject to deprivation the tendency of the middle-class professional, it has been hypothesized, is to react with indignation. Similar compensatory response is seen in the "provincial" or "small-town boy": who wishes to overcome "a low respect position through the use of power and other available means."[47]

Johnson sought to modify his environment and overcome "a low respect position" by attending the debates at Greeneville College and by paying students to read to him.[48] Thus, initially he sought his way into the elite of Greeneville which was headed by the Whig "Grand Duke

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[47]Harold Lasswell, *Power and Personality* (New York, 1948), 21-50.

[48]Temple, *Notable Men*, 361-63.

of Lick Creek," Dr. Alexander Williams. According to Oliver P. Temple, a later Whig opponent, Johnson as late as 1835 was a Whig.[49] Certainly a witness to his unhappy marriage to Eliza McCardle was the lifelong Whig Valentine Sevier.[50] But the justice who conducted the service was Mordecai Lincoln, a first cousin of Abraham Lincoln's father and a Democrat.[51] Stronger evidence of the tailor's Whig connection is found in his first extant letter, which is to Sevier, in which Johnson writes "my good friend I want you to Cum and See me if possible in 10 day[s] from the date of this[.] I have Sumthing that Concerns me to Communicate to Mr. Earnes and you." Wishing to "unbosom" himself to Sevier, he sent his best compliments to Sevier and his wife "and the Doctor"--very probably none other than his later arch enemy, Alexander Williams.[52] Further evidence of Johnson's efforts to join the Greeneville elite (if that description is not a contradiction in terms) is his letter of January 27, 1836, to the good doctor: "I tak the pleasure of Informing you that T. L. Williams [Alexander's brother] of Knoxville is elected Chancerlor for the first division." The letter was signed "Your friend."[53] The son of the "Grand Duke" later claimed, "My father was the first one

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[49] *Ibid.*, 365.

[50] Marriage License and Certificate, May 17, 1827, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 4.

[51] Samuel C. Williams, *The Lincolns and Tennessee* (Harrogate, Tenn., 1942), 18-21.

[52] Johnson to Valentine Sevier, June 7, 1832, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 14.

[53] Johnson to Alexander Williams, [January 27], 1836, in *ibid.*, 16-17.

to suggest to Johnson to offer for the Legislature,& I have somewhere, a letter he wrote to my father when he got to Nashville in which this sentence occurs 'let them come on with this d----d Democracy Doctor we are ready for them.'"[54]

Johnson may not have assumed the label Whig in 1836 but there is no doubt that the tailor's steady rise from alderman, mayor, and member of the Tennessee legislature would not have been possible if Williams and his colleagues had wished to prevent it. In the light of later events it has been suggested that Andrew's climb to power was solely due to his ability to unite the mechanic and yeoman classes in order to defeat the local elite. According to Robert W. Winston, "It did not take Andy Johnson long, after arriving in Greeneville, to decide in which crowd he belonged." He denies that "Andy" ever fawned on the rich but rather he, with his friend Blackston McDannel, planned "to build up a real democracy in Greeneville and to put the slave-holding oligarchy to rout." The election of Johnson as alderman and mayor for three terms was a question of "who should run the town of Greeneville, the aristocrats or the democrats, the money interests or the laborers?" Johnson was therefore the choice of the poor democrats and was successful, according to this romanticist, despite the bitter opposition of Dr. Williams and his friends.[55] But Winston ignores Johnson's earlier

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[54]William D. Williams to O. P. Temple, April 5, 1892, Temple Papers. Unfortunately, the letter Williams refers to has not been traced.

[55]Winston, *Johnson*, 17-18, 23.

relations with the "aristocrats" and totally ignores the fact that his hero supported Hugh Lawson White rather than Jackson's candidate Martin Van Buren, in the 1836 presidential election. The tailor admitted that Van Buren "would have been my second choice."[56] Although Johnson and the editors of his papers emphasize that his only defeat prior to the Civil War, in the state house of representatives election of 1837, was mainly due to his support of White and not because he had gained an exaggerated reputation as an opponent to internal improvements, it is doubtful that his support for White would have lost him the backing of Williams or the Whigs of East Tennessee, but his opposition to internal improvements would certainly have cost him their endorsement.[57] He was unreliable. Unlike his father, Andrew did not show sufficient deference to his betters. Parson Brownlow, long-time foe of Johnson, warned his readers about the tailor's ambition. "He is an ambitious and selfish man, [who] looks to the office of Governor, United States Senator *and even to the Presidency.*"[58] Thus after winning his first election by over two-thousand votes he was defeated by Brookins Campbell, a Democrat, who was supported by the Whigs under Williams' leadership.[59] Both men, Campbell and Williams, were hated by Johnson from that date and as the Whig Unionist

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[56]Johnson to George W. Jones, December 25, 1836, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 18; *Tennessee House Journal*, October 16, 1835, pp. 67-68.

[57]Knoxville *Whig*, May 14, 1853; Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, xxv; Johnson to George W. Jones, December 25, 1836, in *ibid.*, 19.

[58]Jonesboro *Whig*, October 5, 1844.

[59]Temple, *Notable Men*, 366-67.

of East Tennessee were to discover, Andy was a good hater.[60]

Although it cannot be denied that Johnson found great appeal in Jacksonianism, many of his battles were personal and vicious. His attack on the Tennessee Whig, William B. Carter, is typical. In a letter to his future son-in-law, David T. Patterson of Greeneville, Johnson reports the story that Carter "was going about with tobacco in his pockett, a bottle of whiskey in one hand, and his prick in the other--or in other words he was 'Chewing drinking & *fucking* his way to the Legislature.'"[61] This contempt was not restricted to Whigs. John Bell Brownlow recalled many years later a typical incident from "the early part of his career, when he was poor and when the people of means of his own party--and particularly slave-owners--looked down upon him," Johnson became involved in a dispute with a slave-owning neighbor. The neighbor complained about the noise Johnson's cow was making in a nearby field. Years later, after he had made money, his neighbor failed and Johnson outbid everybody for the field. When asked why he had paid so much he said he was going to turn it into a calf pasture. As Brownlow noted, Johnson was initially angered because the comments of his neighbor "assumed a superiority to him *socially* and the remark he made at the sale showed how for many years, they had rankled in his bosom,

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[60]He called Brookins Campbell "a political judas" who sold votes "as sheep in a shambles for the thirty pieces of silver." *Tennessee Senate Journal*, Extra Sess., November 12, 1842.

[61]Johnson to David T. Patterson, July 10, 1845, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 218. There is a similar story more delicately told in Ford, *History of Illinois*, I, 145. See also the incredible attack on Dr. Alexander Williams, To the Freemen of the First Congressional District of Tennessee, October 15, 1845, in Graf and Haskins *Johnson Papers*, I, 258-69.

and how he rejoiced at his superiority to his ancient enemy--financially."[62]

Johnson, who had suffered deprivation and hardship all his life, had slowly dragged himself up from the lowest level of southern society. But to many of his contemporaries he was guilty of striving too hard--of having ideas above his station. The rejection by this elite deprived him of any hope of entry into the ruling class other than by turning to Jacksonianism. The appeal that any man could rule now justified the battle he would wage against the purse-proud aristocrats for the rest of his career. While fighting the elite resulted in political power for Johnson, it never brought him the power that he felt he deserved. Only when the elitist system collapsed in 1860 was it possible for Johnson to be seriously considered for the highest executive office. The personal sense of deprivation helps to explain Johnson's attitude when he acquired status as president.

His personal insecurity as a member of a class that Hammond had designated the "mud-sill" of society, made him extremely sensitive to any disparaging remarks about artisans. Jefferson Davis, defending graduates of the military academies during the Mexican War, asked rhetorically if blacksmiths or tailors could have achieved the same result. Immediately Johnson was on his feet to denounce the Mississippi representative, informing him that "he was a mechanic, and when a blow was struck upon that class, either direct or by inuendo, from Whig or Democrat, he would resent it. He knew we had an illegitimate, swaggering,

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[62]John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, no date, Appendix II, Box 16, Temple Papers.

bastard, scrub aristocracy." Johnson then went on to vindicate "the respectability of the mechanical profession," citing Adam, who sewed fig leaves as a tailor; Jesus Christ, the son of a carpenter; General Morgan, a blacksmith, "&c., &c.,"[63] as the *Congressional Globe* reports it.

The ex-runaway apprentice tailor was very conscious of the declining status of the despised mechanics, a class which has been largely neglected by students of American history. De Tocqueville, however, was aware of the artisans' plight. He knew that associationism and the existing parties did not provide an answer to the threat of a new industrial aristocracy in a democracy. The development of the factory system, with its division of labor, made the workers more adroit but less industrious: "the man is degraded as the working man improves." The industrial worker was bound by an economic theory which assigned him to a fixed place in society. Mistakenly, de Tocqueville considered such an industrial aristocracy "an exception, a monstrosity within the general social condition."[64]

Not only the Frenchman, but many Americans also were concerned about the developing factory system and the decline in status of the mechanic class. It was the mechanics like Johnson who praised Andrew Jackson, and many of this class rallied to Jackson under the leadership of George Henry Evans and the Workingmen's Movement of New York. Many historians have confused the mechanic, a man owning his own business and

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[63]For the full exchange between Johnson and Davis, see *Cong. Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 Sess., 884, 885, 887.

[64]de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 528-30.

employing apprentices and journeymen, with the Marxist urban proletariat.[65] Evans, on the other hand, defined the term as "including not merely the manual laborer, but every man who earns his bread by *useful* exertion, whether mental or physical."[66] The conservative nature of the leadership, struggling to maintain its social standing, is reflected in its retreat to land reform as a solution to the problems facing the urban mechanic; many supported the Homestead Bill, Johnson's greatest cause. This conservatism, which he fully shared, was, according to Walter Hugins, a student of the Jacksonian labor movement, a result of economic and social changes: "Increasing rivalry between the dominant mercantile community and the rising mechanic-manufacturer was succeeded by rivalry within the trade between master and journeyman, exacerbated by the emergence of the merchant-capitalist as employer in place of the master craftsman."[67] The master mechanic relied on quality produce in a market increasingly concerned about price. Added to this dilemma were the problems of obtaining money to expand his business and the social stigma of being a mechanic.

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[65]Glynn Williams, *Artisans and Sans Culottes: Popular Movements in France and Britain During the French Revolution* (New York, 1969), 18, 110-11.

[66]George Henry Evans, quoted in Walter Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class* (Stanford, 1960), 53.

[67]*Ibid.* For the political influence of the Whigs with the master mechanics, see *ibid.*, 69. For Jacksonians' anti-labor activity, see John R. Commons and E. A. Gilmore, eds., *Labor Conspiracy Cases, 1806-1842,* in Commons, *et al., A Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (10 vols., Cleveland, 1910-11), III, *passim.* For southern mechanics see Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee*, 207 286.

Increasingly journeymen broke away from the craft associations and used the strike as a weapon to achieve a ten-hour day and better wages. But unlike Evans and his fellow working men, the trade unions were an instrument for the skilled elite of the working class; in their battle to maintain their own position, they rarely recognized the plight of the unskilled. Although the New England factory system had not reached New York by the 1840's, "slop shops" were increasing in the clothing and shoe trades, with a resultant loss of status for the craftsman. "[T]he journeyman, even though wage-conscious in an inflationary periods," writes Hugins, "did not consider himself a member of a permanent proletariat, nor did his objective of an entrepreneurial position seem chimerical." Having achieved independence from one stratified society, he was not prepared to surrender this new-found freedom to the demands of a society based on industrialization which was dependent on the multiplication of credit and the division of labor.[68]

Hugins' view that journeymen or mechanics did not consider themselves a class is the same as de Tocqueville's view of the wealthy: "although there are rich men, a class of rich does not exist at all, for these rich men have neither corporate spirit nor objects in common, neither common traditions nor hopes. They are limbs then, but no body."[69] But it may be argued that increasingly journeymen and apprentices saw themselves as a separate class from the master mechanic--a point of view

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[68]Walter P. Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement* (Stanford, 1860), 80.

[69]de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 530.

which Johnson did not appreciate--and although the rich may not have belonged to the same party, they shared similar economic and social goals, resulting in legislation which furthered their interests both on the federal and the local level."[70]

If Lincoln had become a blacksmith as he had wanted to when he moved to Illinois, he might have had greater sympathy with the mechanic class and with Andrew Johnson.[71] But such was not to be the case. There were, however, many similarities in the early careers of these men. Johnson sought power "to overcome low estimates of the self" and Lincoln admitted the same in his election manifesto during the 1832 canvass for the Illinois legislature. "Every man," according to the new arrival in Illinois, "is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for one that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem."[72]

The young candidate who sought the esteem of his peers was opposed, like Johnson, to an increase in the interest charged on loans--generally known as usury.[73] As a state senator in 1842, Andrew Johnson was accused

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[70]Pessen, *Riches, Class and Power*, 288-99. For a critique of the idea of tyranny of the majority, see *ibid.*, 304-6. See Speech on the Homestead Bill, April 29, 1852, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, II, 47.

[71]Lincoln, "Short Autobiography," in Nicolay and Hay, *Complete Works*, I, 641.

[72]Communication to the People of Sangamon County, March 9, 1832, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 8.

[73]For Lincoln's sentiments on usury, see *ibid.*, 7-8.

of supporting usury laws, a charge which Congressman Johnson vigorously denied in his 1845 appeal to the electorate of the first district. Lincoln would have agreed with his sentiments that he could not "join senators in such sweeping terms of denunciation of all those who by industry and economy, had collected together a little more of the dross of this world, in the form of dollars and cents, than was needed for present purposes . . . that [each was] a grinder of the poor and a Shylock." Perseverance, industry and economy should be a matter for praise not criticism.[74]

It would have been impossible for the Plebeian to have endorsed Lincoln's enthusiasm for internal improvements, an enthusiasm young Lincoln had caught from Bowling Green, his friend and justice of the peace in New Salem.[75] Although the tailor and the Railsplitter originally opposed railroad development, Lincoln did so in the belief that it was cheaper to develop the Sangamon River.[76] Johnson saw railroads as a basic threat to a way of life and in particular a menace to the old mechanic class such as waggoners and blacksmiths.[77]

Despite Lincoln's entry into the election of 1832, he does not seem to have had much hope of winning it. "I am young," he admitted, "and unknown to many of you. I was born and have ever remained in the

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[74]To Freemen of the First Congressional District of Tennessee, October 15, 1845, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 225.

[75]Simon, *Lincoln's Preparation*, 4, 38-39, 227.

[76]"Cliometrican" Fogel would be delighted with Lincoln's reasoning that most of the money appropriated for internal improvements should be spent on river and canal transportation.

[77]Knoxville *Whig*, May 14, 1853; Temple, *Notable Men*, 364-65.

most humble walks of life." He had no wealthy connections and relied on the independent voter. Almost flippantly he concluded, "if the good people in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined."[78] And the good people did not disappoint him; he was eighth out of a field of thirteen.[79] His initial foray into politics had met with failure, but he had impressed the Democrat Bowling Green, the sickly Dartmouth graduate, Dr. John Allen, and Mentor Graham, a teacher six years his senior, who helped him with his English grammar, essay writing, and mathematics.[80]

The defeat for the legislature was compensated for by his election as captain in the Black Hawk War.[81] Lincoln did not see action and thus his election did little to further his political career. In 1848, Congressman Abraham Lincoln mocked Democratic efforts to make Lewis Cass, who had been a general in the Black Hawk War, a military hero.[82] Noting that Cass had "*in*vaded Canada without resistance, and he *out*vaded it without pursuit," Lincoln went on to ask if his fellow congressman knew that he was a military hero? He had "fought, bled and came away"

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[78]Communication to the People of Sangamon County, March 9, 1832, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 8-9.

[79]Simon, *Lincoln's Preparation*, 10.

[80]*Ibid.*, 4-5. For a vivid account of Illinois politics from 1818 to 1847, see Ford, *History of Illinois, passim.*

[81]Muster Roll of Lincoln's Company, May 27, 1832, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 10.

[82]He described these efforts as "so many mischievous boys tying a dog to a bladder of beans." Speech in U. S. House of Representatives on the Presidential Question, July 27, 1848, in *ibid.*, 509.

and the military exploits of Cass reminded him of his own:

> I was not at Stillman's defeat, but I was about as near it as Cass was to Hull's surrender; and like him I saw the place very soon afterwards. It is quite certain Idid not break my sword, for I had none to break; but I bent my musket pretty badly on one occasion. If Cass broke his sword, the idea is, he broke it in de[s]peration; I bent the musket by accident. If Gen. Cass went in advance of me in picking huckleberries . . . , I guess I surpassed him in charges upon wild onions. If he saw any live, fighting indians, it was more than I did; but I had a good many bloody struggles with musquetoes; and, although I never fainted from loss of blood, I can truly say I was often very hungry.[83]

However, he did meet Major John T. Stewart, a lawyer, who persuaded him to join the legal profession. After the election Lincoln borrowed books from Stewart and studied hard at home while he continued to earn his living as a postmaster and surveyor. An earlier commercial enterprise had "winked out."[84] He took a break from his legal studies and was elected to the Illinois legislature in 1834.

Meanwhile in East Tennessee the tailor was elected to the state house of representatives in 1835, but whereas Johnson alienated the Whig clique in Greeneville, resulting in his defeat in 1837, Lincoln was closely associated with the whig lawyers and was reelected in 1836, 1838, and 1840. By 1836, when he became a lawyer, he had joined what de Tocqueville described as the American aristocracy. And as a congressman, Andrew Johnson was acutely conscious of the legal lords who ruled instead of farmers and mechanics. The state legislatures, he maintained, were made up entirely of lawyers. Although he claimed that "he entertained

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[83] *Ibid.*, 509-10.

[84] Lincoln, "Short Autobiography," in Nicolay and Hay, *Complete Works*, I, 641-42.

no ill-will against lawyers: he wished himself he was a good one," he knew that the exclusive club was closed to him and men of his background. He did not think there were more than twenty laboring men--men "who performed physical labor--a farmer or a mechanic"--in the legislatures. "Mr. J. had no objection to any man because he was a lawyer; but he stated the fact when he said lawyers ruled this Government, and that they constituted the aristocracy in this country." Young men educated according to Blackstone and Kent, declared Johnson, knew more about British government than their own, and after their higher education they might still talk about democracy but they had no real concern for the men in the workshops and the fields.[85] Eleven years later, Johnson reiterated his opinion that there should be no aristocracy but if there was to be one it should consist of mechanics and farmers. When he was in Congress, he had compiled information on fellow members including their professions, "and I ascertained in this way, that out of the two hundred and twenty-three members of the Congress of the United States, at that time, two hundred of them belonged to the legal profession--the other twenty-three were divided between mechanics and farmers of this country." After listing the wealth produced by the latter groups, the Tennessee governor piled on more statistics. "It is known that there are about twenty-seven thousand lawyers in the United States and they have a representation of two hundred members in the Congress of the United States," declared the angry artisan, "whilst our twenty-three million mechanics, traders, artisan [*sic*] and agriculturalists

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[85]Speech on Appointment of Federal Clerks, May 31, 1848, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 432-33.

have a representation of only twenty-three members." One way to fight back, he asserted, was for laboring people to educate their children "so as to make labor respectable."[86]

His answer to the problem of a lawyer aristocracy was based on a belief in Jacksonian rotation of offices, and in the idea that any man could be an administrator. Thus in 1846 he introduced a resolution which stipulated that no one should hold a federal appointment for more than eight years. Office-holders would be allocated equitably to each congressional district and would be in four categories--eight to two-year appointments. The latter provision would ensure that a quarter of the federal appointees would be removed from office every two years. He was resolved also that "due regard should be had to the farmers and mechanics of the country, so as to give them their fair proportion of said offices." When the resolution was finally considered, the House rejected it.[87]

Johnson was eager to break the power of this American aristocracy but Lincoln was anxious to join it. He became a partner in Stewart's Springfield law firm,[88] and he committed himself to the newly-formed Whig party in Illinois. R. Carlyle Buley's description of Whigs in Indiana is applicable to Lincoln's new party. "As in other states of the Northwest, the Whigs, generally speaking represented the more well-

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[86]Remarks at the Opening of State Agricultural Fair, October 12, 1857, in *ibid.*, II, 506-7.

[87]Resolution to Rotate Appointive Offices, January 13, 1846, in *ibid.*, I, 280-81; see also Remarks on the War with Mexico and Other Matters, May 29-30, 1846, in *ibid.*, 309-10.

[88]Simon, *Lincoln's Preparation*, 16.

to-do, conservative and commercial class and many of the settlers from New York and New England, who had the advantages of education and some wealth, belonged to that party."[89]

Lincoln was finally wedded to the governing elite when he married Mary Todd. In contrast with Eliza McCardle, whose husband described her as "the daughter of an humble mechanic," the sophisticated Mary Todd came from an aristocratic Kentucky family. Whereas Eliza, a cobbler's daughter, resident in an isolated village, could barely read and write, Mary was well educated and spoke fluent French. "By his marriage with Mary Todd," according to W. O. Stoddard, who was to be Lincoln's third secretary, "he had become settled in life and had been admitted more fully than before as a member of the very peculiar social and political clique which clustered around the State Capitol, and which held in its hands the control of both parties in Illinois during almost a generation."[90]

Lincoln may have been a member of the elite, but Johnson's position was more ambivalent. However, the tailor was a loyal Democrat and a leading member of the "Immortal Thirteen" who, by preventing the joint

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[89]Buley, "Political Balance in the Old Northwest," 423. For leadership role of the lawyer elite in the southwest, see William Francis English, *The Pioneer Lawyer and Jurist in Missouri*, in the University of Missouri *Studies*, XXVI (Columbia, 1947), *passim.*

[90]W. O. Stoddard, *Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson* (New York, 1888), 96. However, he was never accepted by the aristocratic family with whom Mary Todd stayed in Illinois, including the superior Ninian W. Edwards. Simon, *Lincoln's Preparation*, 236-37. For a good description of Lincoln's Springfield, see Willard Murrell Hays, Polemics and Philosophy: A Biography of Albert Taylor Bledsoe. (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1971), 128-70.

sitting of the House and Senate in 1841, ensured that the Whigs would not elect two senators--an action which meant that the state went unrepresented in the United States Senate for two years.[91] In defending his action, Johnson appealed to the defenders of the Constitution but referred to their work as the "Letters written by Madison, Hamilton and Jay," carefully avoiding the use of "Federalist," which he considered a term of opprobrium and which he always sought to attach to the Whigs.[92] Johnson's attack on the Whigs, that "they have gathered themselves together and rallied behind a flimsy breast work," is an apt description of the behavior of the thirteen Democrats.[93]

Johnson may have relied on a flimsy breastwork; Lincoln relied on a large window. Such was Lincoln's devotion to the Whigs and the Whig-controlled banks of Illinois, that in 1840, in an attempt to prevent a quorum and frustrate Democratic attacks, he and one or two colleagues jumped out of the window before the vote was called. A Democratic paper noted that "this gymnastic performance of Mr. Lincoln and his flying brethren did not occur until after they had voted and consequently the House did not interfere with their extraordinary feat."[94] Apart from this precipitate exit, his most memorable achievement was as a

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[91]Speech in Defense of the "Immortal Thirteen," October 27-28, 1841, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 36-38; Protest Against the Senate-House Convention, December 11, 1841, in *ibid.*, 62-71.

[92]Knoxville *Argus*, April 13, 1842. For an excellent description of Johnson exposing the evils of Whig-Federalism, see Temple, *Notable Men*, 372-73.

[93]Speech in Defense of the "Immortal Thirteen," October 27-28, 1841, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 50.

[94]*Illinois State Register*, December 12, 1840, quoted in Simon, *Lincoln's Preparation*, 229.

member of the "Long Nine" who were successful in their efforts to move the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield.[95]

Earlier in 1836 he had made another daring leap, in support of women's rights. In his election platform printed in the *Sangamon Journal*, he declared, "I go for sharing the privileges of government, with those who assist in bearing its burthens. Consequently I go for admitting *all whites* to the right of suffrage, who pay taxes or bear arms, (by no means excluding females)."[96] Yet he did not maintain his advanced position on women's rights and he was careful to note that while willing to represent the people's interest on issues, "upon all others, I shall do what my judgement teaches me will best advance their interests."[97] His enthusiasm for the voice of the people waned rapidly when as a result of pressure from the electorate in 1836 the Illinois legislature rushed through a huge internal improvements program and consequently bankrupted the state. "He saw the same lesson in other issues also, but never more sharply than on internal improvements."[98]

Johnson was determined to extend democracy to all white men. As early as 1836, the tailor wrote to his friend George W. Jones, that "the president should at all times be made by the people and I would prefer an amendment to the Constitution of the United States to that effect, so as the people could vote direcly [*sic*] for president & vice-president."[99]

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[95]Ford, *History of Illinois*, I, 288-89.

[96]*Sangamon Journal*, June 18, 1836, quoted in Simon, *Lincoln's Preparation*, 43.

[97]*Ibid.*

[98]*Ibid.*, 291.

[99]Johnson to George W. Jones, December 25, 1836, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 18.

Rejected by the Whig elite, Johnson embraced the Jacksonian view that, as articulated by George Bancroft: "the common judgement in taste, politics, and religion is the highest authority on earth, and the nearest possible approach to an infallible decision."[100] His "white basis" argument created a furor, however, because he proposed the abolition of the three-fifths compromise in state apportionment. Application of this federal electoral device ensured a disproportionate number of representatives from Middle and West Tennessee because of large slave populations in comparison with East Tennessee where there were few slaves.[101] Johnson's resolution was heard on October 18, 1842, when, vigorously denying the Nashville *Whig's* charge that he was an abolitionist, he demanded a vote; the resolution was defeated by three votes to twenty-two.[102] He was attacked throughout his career for this proposal, which was simply an effort to win votes in and for East Tennessee.[103] Although he had first proposed it in 1842, Johnson was still advocating the reform, at least in East Tennessee, as late as the 1855 gubernatorial campaign.[104]

Parson Brownlow was later to accuse him of being an abolitionist and free-soiler, but most of Johnson's contemporaries, including Whigs,

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[100]Bancroft, *Formation of the Constitution*, quoted in Kristol, *Democratic Idea*, 55.

[101]Resolutions on Congressional Districting, October 5, 1842, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 85-86.

[102]Nashville *Whig*, October 20, 1842.

[103]Knoxville *Whig*, May 5, June 16, 1855.

[104]*Ibid.*, April 12, 1856.

did not take the charge seriously. However, it has recently been contended by a biographer of the Plebeian, Colonel Fay W. Brabson, that the young Andrew "found himself working closely with the anti-slavery forces in East Tennessee." Brabson even suggests that in addressing an anti-slavery convention, Johnson said that the "peculiar institution" was unsuited to the freedom-loving mountain people and, moreover, that East Tennessee should form a separate state.[105] According to Brabson, anti-slavery groups "saw great possibilities in Johnson's plan to create a new 'free state' in the South."[106] The proposal for a separate state of Frankland submitted to the Tennessee legislature, was indicative of the strong sectional feelings within the state and was an attempt by Johnson to appeal to these prejudices.[107] Frankland, which would also

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[105]Fay W. Brabson, *Andrew Johnson: A Life in Pursuit of the Right Cause* (Durham, 1972), 18. Colonel Brabson cites as the source of these remarks *The Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention* (London, 1832). The author was unable to find any reference to such a work in either the Library of Congress or the British Museum catalogues. A search of Colonel Brabson's papers also failed to illuminate the matter. Fay W. Brabson Papers, University of Tennessee Library.

[106]Brabson, *Andrew Johnson*, 18. For East Tennessee anti-slavery activity, see Knoxville *Register*, May 22, 1849; Anti-Slavery Petitions, *Journal of the Convention of the State of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1834), 125-30.

[107]Resolutions for the Establishment of the State of Frankland, December 7, 1841, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 61; Johnson to William M. Lowry, January 9, 1842, in *ibid.*, 75; Knoxville *Argus*, November 24, 1841. Johnson extolled "the republican simplicity of the people of East Tenn." and recalled the old days when "the public officers received their salaries in tow linen, maple sugar, beaver and racoon skins and other commodities of the same kind." The reporter doubted that public officials were such "simple republicans" that they would accept such pay. Nashville *Whig*, January 20, 1842; Jonesboro *Whig*, quoted in Knoxville *Post*, July, 19, 1842. Johnson proposed that the capital be moved from Nashville to Knoxville. Unlike Lincoln's, Johnson's efforts failed. Proposal to Move Capital from Nashville to Knoxville, February 3, 1843, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 78-79.

have included parts of adjoining states, never had a chance of success. Even if the proposal was serious, there is no evidence to suggest that the slave owner who initiated the bill would have freed his blacks and abolished servitude in the new state.[108]

The young Lincoln was positive that only the states could end slavery. The Illinois House Journal of March 3, 1837, contains his first public criticism of the "peculiar institution"; with fellow legislator Dan Stone, he protested against the pro-slavery resolutions which the legislature had passed. Lincoln and Stone declared that slavery was "founded on both injustice and bad policy," but that the abolitionists' agitation only increased the evils of the institution. Under the Constitution, Congress had no power to abolish slavery in the states but could do so in the District of Columbia. Abolition there, however, should only be undertaken if the people of the District requested it. In 1842 Andrew Johnson denied that the federal government could do this because the District was granted by the states of Maryland and Virginia with no reference to abolition.[109] Lincoln maintained in 1860 that these resolutions of 1837 defined his views on the subject.[110] Whatever anti-slavery feelings he may have held as a young man, they were those of conservative Hoosiers who had no time for agitators, and

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[108]Johnson acquired his first slave in 1837.

[109]Lincoln, "Short Autobiography," in Nicolay and Hay, *Complete Works*, I, 642. For Johnson's views, see Speech on the Gag Resolution, January 1, 1844, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 134.

[110]Lincoln, "Short Autobiography," in Nicolay and Hay, *Complete Works*, I, 642.

it was this conservatism that would win him the Republican party nomination.[111]

Johnson gradually gained power by battling the local elite, but, ironically, Lincoln, who was now a member of the political and social elite of Illinois, had failed to carve out a leadership role for himself in his party. This was in sharp contrast to fellow Illinoisian, Stephen A. Douglas. The 'Little Giant was soon known throughout Illinois and although it has been suggested that these years prepared Lincoln's way to greatness, perhaps a more accurate assessment would be that they augmented his skills as a lawyer.[112] As he was to confess when comparing his career with that of Douglas, "we were both ambitious; I perhaps, quite as much so as he. With me the race of ambition has been a failure--a flat failure; with him it has been one splendid success."[113] Lincoln might have been writing about Andrew Johnson, who, the Whigs alleged, gerrymandered himself a seat in Congress.[114] Unlike Lincoln, Johnson who had voted regularly with his party, was frequently in

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[111]Buley, "Political Balance in the Old Northwest," 453.

[112]Duff, *Prairie Lawyer*, 73.

[113]Fragment on Stephen A. Douglas [December, 1856], in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 382-83.

[114]Temple, *Notable Men*, 377-78. Temple states that Johnson was a Calhoun states"rights Democrat but the historian St. George L. Sioussat notes that "if this account be correct, Johnson was immediately received into the regular Van Buren Democracy and from this position of regular Democrat he never varied." See Temple, *Notable Men*, 375; Notes for an Andrew Johnson Biography, Sioussat Papers; Johnson to Robert B. Reynolds, September 9, 1843, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 121.

opposition to its national leadership. As has been noted already, this primarily self-educated small-town politician opposed Van Buren; more seriously, as a delegate to the 1844 Democratic convention in Baltimore, he opposed the nomination of James K. Polk, a fellow Tennessean. As Gideon J. Powell informed the dark horse candidate, "some of our own faithful delegation . . . who have done all they could in their secret, assassin-like manner to destroy your prospects and sacrifice you are overwhelmed with the result."[115] The ex-tailor from Tennessee was to suffer because of his support for Cass.[116] Although he was an ardent advocate of the annexation of Texas and claimed that "Gov. Polk was the plebeian President," trusting "the country would have a plebeian Administration for once" the Polk administration denied the Greeneville congressman power and patronage.[117] As he wrote to a constituent, *"E. Tennessee is not much known in these parts when favors and offices worth having are to be bestowed."*[118] This bitter confession came after an interview with Polk that same day and the President recorded in his diary that Johnson "had not been in my office or at the President's Mansion for many weeks, indeed months."[119] Apparently Johnson was

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[115]Gideon J. Pillow to James K. Polk, May 22, 1844, reprinted in *American Historical Review*, XI (1906), 836.

[116]Johnson to Robert B. Reynolds, September 9, 1843, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 121; Johnson to David T. Patterson, February 27, 1844, in *ibid.*, 154.

[117]Speech on the Admission of Texas and Other Matters, January 21, 1845, in *ibid.*, 193.

[118]Johnson to an Unidentified [East?] Tennessean, July 21, 1846, in *ibid.*, 330. It was not for want of trying, either. Johnson to Polk, April 9, 1845, in *ibid.*, 213.

[119]Quaife, *Diary of James K. Polk*, II, 35.

concerned about the stories of his opposition to the administration, which he denied. Polk reminded him of his attack in the House on administration appointments. The President decided that it was obvious from the tenor of the conversation "that he wished to play the demagogue at home, and to assume that the administration intended to attack him and make a victim of him."[120] Although he denied this to Johnson, he noted in his diary:

> The truth is that neither Johnson or Jones have been my personal friends since 1839. They were in the Baltimore Convention of 1844, and they were not my friends then. I doubt whether any two members of that convention were at heart more dissatisfied with my nomination for the Presidency than they were. This I learned from members of the convention from Tennessee. Mr. Johnson, I was informed, said at Baltimore when my nomination was suggested that it was 'humbug.'[121]

Polk was certain that if he informed the voters of the first district, he could destroy Johnson's career. This was an exaggerated claim of an embittered man, but it may be that Polk carried out this threat, which would explain partially why in 1847 the Plebeian was almost returned to his work-bench instead of Congress.[122]

While Johnson was busily establishing an apparent stranglehold on his congressional district, Lincoln had withdrawn from the political battlefield. He suffered from severe depression in 1841 and had missed several meetings of the legislature. The story was that Mary Todd and Lincoln had broken their engagement and many locals thought

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[120] *Ibid.*, 39.

[121] *Ibid.*, 40.

[122] *Ibid.*, 41.

he had gone mad.[123] Despite his undistinguished career in the legislature, his marriage on November 4, 1842, and his success at the bar meant that Lincoln was still closely associated with, and campaigned for, the Whig party. As a result he was selected as Whig candidate for Congress. If Johnson suffered for backing the wrong candidate, many Illinois Whigs later felt they had sent the wrong man to Washington.

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[123]Lincoln referred to his illness as "the fatal first." Lincoln to Joshua F. Speed, March 27, 1842, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 282; Simon, *Lincoln's Preparation*, 236-39. As late as 1846 Lincoln composed a narrative verse, in the early hours of the morning, about an Indiana school friend who had gone mad.

My childhood home I see again,
And gladden with the view;
And still as mem'ries crowd my brain,
There's sadness in it too.
. . . . . .
Poor Matthew! I have ne'er forgot
When first with maddened will
Yourself you maimed, your father fought,
And mother strove to kill.
. . . . . .
And when at length, tho' drear and long
Time soothed your fiercer woes---
How plaintively your mournful song,
Upon the still night rose.

I've heard it oft, as if I dreamed,
Far-distant, sweet, and lone;
The funeral dirge it ever seemed
Of reason, dead and gone.
. . . . . .
The very spot where grew the bread
That formed my bones, I see.
How strange, old field, on thee to tread,
And feel I'm part of thee.

Lincoln to Andrew Johnston February 24, 1846, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 367, 369, 370.

CHAPTER III

THE COMMONERS AND THE ETERNAL CITY: AN IRONIC TALE

> When the Americans planned to build a capital, they marked out a vast extent of land for a huge city. . . . They have already rooted up trees for ten miles around, lest they should get in the way of the future citizens of this imagined capital. They have erected a magnificent palace for Congress in the center of the city and given it the pompous name of the Capitol.
>
> Alexis de Tocqueville*

The nation's capital in 1860 was described as "the paradise of paradoxes--a city of magnificent discrepancies." According to an article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, "everything may be affirmed of it, everything denied. What it seems to be it is not; and although it is getting to be what it never was, it must always remain what it is now." The writer noted acidly, "It might be called a city, if it were not alternately populous and uninhabited; and it would be a widespread village, if it were not a collection of hospitals for decayed or callow politicians." Warming to his task, he proceeded to catalogue the city's faults. "It is the hibernating place of fashion, of intelligence, of vice,--a resort without the attractions of waters either mineral or salt, but drinking in abundance and gambling in quantity." Defenseless against the siege of "the allied army of Contractors and Claim Agents," Washington was a "great, little, splendid, mean, extravagant, poverty-stricken barrack for soldiers of fortune and votaries of folly."[1]

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*Democracy in America, 436.

[1]"Washington City," *Atlantic Monthly*, VI (1861), 1.

Thirteen years earlier, Andrew Johnson had with greater vehemence denounced the corruption in the capital and national government. The Tennessee congressman "wished to Almighty *God* that the whole American people could be assembled in this city," and an amphitheater built to seat all the nation's voters so that they could see for themselves "all the intriguing of officers in authority, from the highest to the lowest." He refused to predict that as a result of what they saw the voters would demolish the edifice built by the founding fathers but averred that "they would rip up and tear off some of these funguses that have been fixing and have fixed themselves upon the vitals of this Government for years gone by." That "they would turn some mighty stream through the Augean stable until it was thoroughly cleansed from the abominable filth that has been preying upon the lifeblood of the republic for too long," he was certain. "The people will," he declaimed yet again, "the people must, begin to take things into their own hands."[2] Despite these fulminations Johnson was eager to return to the Augean stables and the young lawyer from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, was equally eager to join him.

It did not always pay to criticize Washington and this became evident when Johnson sought reelection in 1847. His young Whig opponent, Oliver Perry Temple, used the Plebeian's attack on his fellow Tennessee Democrat's administration to great advantage. Temple realized that Johnson's attacks on Polk gave him ammunition against

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[2]Speech on Tea and Coffee Tax, February 2, 1847, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 385.

his fellow Greeneville resident that he would never have again. Temple later suggested that this attack was made because Johnson expected only Democratic opposition from Brookins Campbell and had made a deal with the Hawkins County Whigs to obtain their vote. Johnson was accused of making a similar bargain "in 1851 to beat Haynes, even where it involved the swapping off of his political and personal friends who were running for the legislature by which such Whigs as Netherland were elected." Apparently after his reelection in 1847 the Democrats "called the first Dist. the slaughter pen of the Democratic party," because the Whigs gained five or six state legislators which in turn enabled them to send John Bell to the United States Senate.[3] After his defeat, which he attributed to the Whigs' failure to vote, Temple declined to run in 1849.[4] Another factor in this young Whig's defeat was his method of electioneering. He was probably wise in urging Parson Brownlow not to be too enthusiastic on his behalf or to denounce his opponent too severely; for Temple believed "the battle must be fought *secretly*. The *factions* in the district must be artfully *appealed* to and *managed*."[5] But although this strategy did not offend Democrats and indeed may have kept some Democratic voters at home, it failed to arouse his Whig supporters.

Although Johnson came close to defeat in 1847, winning by only

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[3]Temple, *Notable Men*, 228-31; J. B. Brownlow to Temple, n.d., Box 16, Appendix 11; Brownlow to Temple, February 5, [1891?], April 19, 1892, Temple Papers; Knoxville *Whig*, July 11, 1857.

[4]Temple, *Notable Men*, 216-32.

[5]Temple to W. G. Brownlow, July 18, 1847, Temple Papers.

314 votes, the incumbent had several advantages over his young challenger. Twelve years older than Temple, he had held public office for twelve years, "during which time he had thought of politics by day and dreamed of politics by night," a reporter observed many years later. "In fact, there was never a more astute politician than Andrew Johnson."[6]

In contrast to Johnson's continuing political success, Lincoln's career was decidedly disappointing and marked by several reversals. The irony is that Johnson's uninterrupted progress confirmed his belief that his "fixed principles" were right but it was this consistency which led to his ultimate failure. Frequent reelection had proved this to be the case, and Johnson's faith in "the people"--the artisan and farmer--was reinforced with each triumph. He wrote the Democratic committee of Maury County in 1843 that "my opinions in relation to most if not all great questions that have agitated the country for a series of years then became a matter of record, and experience has only tended to increase my convictions of their correctness."[7] As he confessed privately to his friend Blackston McDannel, he lacked politically "that philosophy that gives the human mind an elastic[i]ty, that enables it to yeald to the force of circumstances and bear up under the greatest possible misfortune . . ." and in 1858 he declared that it was his intention to follow Jefferson's advice and pursue principle; as a result

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[6]J. S. Mathes, "Andrew Johnson Runs for Congress," Knoxville *Journal and Tribune*, September 14, 1904.

[7]To the Democratic Committee of Maury County, August 29, 1843, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 118.

he was sure he could never reach a wrong conclusion.[8] Lincoln never made such remarks because his personal failure, his legal training, and the collapse of the Whig party meant that he was both required and equipped to seek new ground and adopt new principles.[9] Whereas this flexibility made Lincoln America's greatest president, Johnson's belief in correct principles made it impossible for even conservative Republicans to support him when he came to the presidency.[10]

The young Sangamon County lawyer, who had made a name for himself in the Illinois legislature as one of the "dexterous jugglers and managers in politics,"[11] was now eager to join the Greeneville Plebeian in Washington. He had hoped to be nominated in 1843, but the Whig choice was John J. Hardin.[12] Lincoln's explanation of his defeat to a Maynard County supporter, reveals the remarkable change in his fortunes: "It would astonish if not amuse, the older Citizens of your County who twelve years ago knew me a strange, friendless, uneducated, penniless boy working on a flat boat--at $10 per month to learn that I have been put down here as the candidate of pride, wealth, and

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[8]Johnson to Blackston McDannel, January 10, 1847, in *ibid.*, 369; Speech on Popular Sovereignty and the Right of Instruction, February 23, 1858, in *ibid.*, III, 52, 59.

[9]Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's* (Stanford, 1962), 9.

[10]Alexander K. McClure, *Recollections of Half a Century* (Salem, 1902), 62-64.

[11]Ford, *History of Illinois*, I, 288; Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln*, 79.

[12]Lincoln to Richard S. Thomas, February 14, 1843, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 307.

aristocratic family distinction."[13] Lincoln may have failed to gain the nomination but his proposal that his friend, Edward D. Baker, should be the nominee for the next Congress was adopted. With some difficulty he persuaded Baker not to seek reelection,[14] but the latter's willingness to pull out of the race was not shared by Hardin who persisted despite efforts by Lincoln's friends to sidetrack him into the governorship.[15] Lincoln had struggled to maintain party harmony through the convention system and rotation of office, both of which were to his own as well as his party's advantage. He was not going to "yield to Hardin" because it seemed to him "as nothing else than yielding to one who would sacrifice me altogether."[16]

Unlike Johnson, Lincoln was an advocate of the convention system. Hardin was eager to do away with it; but as Lincoln pointed out, the fact that Hardin had already served in Congress gave him an advantage in that his name was more familiar to the voters.[17] Learning from the Democratic example in Illinois, Lincoln had been a leader in pushing the Whigs to accept conventions; despite this fact, many

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[13]Lincoln to Martin S. Morris, March 26, 1843, in *ibid.*, 320. Lincoln encouraged Morris' efforts on his behalf despite the fact that the young Springfield lawyer had to vote for Baker. A modern study has shown that Whigs of the northwest were generally from the "well-to-do, conservative and commercial classes." Buley, "Political Balance in the Old Northwest," 423.

[14]Lincoln to Henry E. Drummer, November 18, 1845, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 350.

[15]Lincoln to Benjamin F. James, November 24, December 6, 1845, in *ibid.*, 350-51.

[16]Lincoln to Robert Boal, January 7, 1846, in *ibid.*, 353. For comprehensive coverage of this campaign, Riddle, *Lincoln Runs for Congress, passim*

[17]Lincoln to John W. Hardin, January 19, February 7, 1846, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 356-58, 360.

continued to oppose them as anti-democratic.[18] Johnson sympathized with Calhoun and Lincoln's critics but while such opposition was always couched in terms of extending democracy, the foes of the convention system were always those who, like Johnson, Calhoun, and Hardin, either knew or doubted their ability to win nomination.[19] Despite Hardin's resistance, Lincoln's preparatory efforts ensured his nomination and election. Hardin went to Mexico, where he was killed, and Lincoln went to Washington--where for the first time he met the mechanic from Greeneville.

During the canvass, Lincoln's opponent was Peter Cartwright, a Methodist revivalist, and in 1845 Johnson's Whig opponent had been the Methodist circuit-rider and newspaper editor, William G. Brownlow. Cartwright accused Lincoln of being an infidel, and Brownlow, writing in a more colorful, emphatic style, leveled the same charges against Johnson. Neither of the infidels was noted for his regular church attendance and both were compelled to defend themselves. Lincoln issued a handbill in which he admitted he was not a member of a

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[18]Call for Whig State Convention, October 20, 1841, in *ibid.*, 261-62. For the Illinois Democratic party and conventions, see Johannsen, *Douglas*, 38-45. Many Democrats considered conventions anti-republican and designed to cheat them of their vote.

[19]For Calhoun's views, see Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil: The Election of 1848* (Lexington, 1970), 20. For Hardin's views, see Lincoln to Hardin, January 19, 1846, Lincoln to Benjamin F. James, February 9, 1846, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 360-65, 365-66. A few examples of Johnson's thoughts, Johnson to George W. Jones, December 25, 1836, Johnson to James K. Polk, February 20, 1843, Constitutional Amendments on Presidential, Senatorial and Judicial Elections, February 21, 1851, To [First District Democratic Committee], April 26, 1845, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 18, 113, 216, 604-5; Johnson to David T. Patterson, December 3, 1852, Johnson to Albert A. Graham, December 10, 1852, Speech at Shelbyville, June 6, 1853, Speech at Memphis, June 20,

Christian church but asserted that he had "never denied the truth of the scripture; and I have never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in particular." He outlined his belief in the "'Doctrine of Necessity'--that is, that the human mind is impelled to act, or held in rest by some power, over which the mind itself has no control." He had expressed these opinions to his friends but never publicly.[20]

The "Parson" accused Johnson of publicly stating that the Virgin Mary was a whore and Jesus Christ a bastard, charges which Brownlow was to reiterate against Johnson during the latter's second term as governor.[21] Despite Johnson's denial, there is no evidence that he belonged to a church and he admitted privately, while in despair, that he did not have the advantage of a condemned Christian's faith. He believed in pure and unadulterated democracy which he argued was the religion of Christ and which rewarded the virtuous and meritorious regardless of station, wealth, or birth.[22]

This lack of sectarian religious belief made him tolerant of most faiths. In 1845, he defended Catholics when there was no political

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1853, in *ibid.*, II, 69, 95, 97, 98, 147-48, 161; Speech on Trans-continental Railroad, January 25, 1859, in *ibid.*, III, 223-26. In this latter speech Johnson pointed out to his southern critics that Calhoun had opposed conventions.

[20]Handbill Replying to Charges of Infidelity, July 31, 1846, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 382.

[21]Knoxville *Whig*, December 13, 1856, September 5, 1857. John Bell Brownlow to Oliver P. Temple, January 7, February 4, 1894, Temple Papers, reports that Johnson's private secretaries Sam W. Small and W. A. Browning confirmed Johnson's denial of Christianity.

[22]Johnson to Blackston McDannel, January 10, 1847, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 369; To the Freemen of the First Congressional District of Tennessee, October 15, 1845, in *ibid.*, 240.

benefit for so doing because there were few members of that sect in his congressional district.[23] In his race for reelection as governor in 1855 Johnson violently attacked the bigotry of the American party and openly courted the Irish vote in Memphis.[24] He even went so far as to defend the Mormons and Brigham Young, pointing out that he could see no difference between the "practical bigamy" in so many cities and that engaged in by the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.[25] Lack of sectarian commitment also made Lincoln more tolerant than many others of his own party of foreigners and more particularly of the Catholic church. In this respect he was not only motivated by genuine tolerance but was also aware that the Whig party in Illinois stood no chance of success unless it could appeal to the numerous Irish and German voters in the northern half of the state. It was to allay the fears of these mainly Catholic immigrants that, at a Whig rally in 1844, he proposed and defended resolutions which ensured freedom of religion. This stand, taken partly on the basis of belief and good politics, was to pay dividends when the Republican party met in Chicago to select its presidential candidate for the 1860 election.[26]

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Speech at Murfreesboro, May 11, 1855, in *ibid.*, II, 286, 293, 295-96; John Bell Brownlow to Temple, July 22, 1892, Temple Papers.

[25] Speech on Maintaining Federal Authority in Utah, February 17, 1858, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 28.

[26] Speech and Resolutions Concerning Philadelphia Riots, June 12, 1844, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 337-38; Lincoln to Joshua F. Speed, August 31, 1855, II, 322-23. He never allowed his personal views to affect the support he had from nativists. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness*, 14.

What were these two men like when they met in Washington?[27] Johnson had already served two terms when Lincoln became a member of the Thirtieth Congress, which was convened in December 1847. Whatever arrangements Johnson may have made with Tennessee Whigs, he did not consider the national party fit to control the federal government and there is no evidence that the two men ever formed a close relationship. Johnson's denunciations of the Whig party were often violent and he considered them successors of the Federalist party--those who had hung out blue lights to the British enemy and worn black cockades in their hats during the War of 1812, and who had supported the Hartford convention. His old Whig opponent Temple vividly described Johnson on the hustings. "He spoke usually from two to three hours. He commenced in a low soft tone and grew louder as he warmed up," Temple recalled over forty years later. As Johnson's denunciation became hotter "he pictured the old Federalist party in fearful colors and pathetically entreated the people to stand firm on the Constitution, his hearers would huddle closer, as if for mutual protection, and plant their feet more firmly upon the ground." He would end by urging them to stand together, "hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, foot to foot and to make a long pull, a strong pull and a pull together."

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[27]The only evidence we have of this meeting is Lincoln's letter to a first cousin of his father who was resident in Tennessee. Although the two men spoke about Lincoln's relatives in Carter County, they did not become "intimate acquaintances," a description Lincoln reserved for another Tennessean, John H. Crozier. Lincoln to Jesse Lincoln, April 1, 1854, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 217-18.

This reference to double teaming by wagoners always produced a great cheer.[28]

Lincoln's faith in the ability of Democracy was as slight as Johnson's belief in the Whigs. In 1839, while in the Illinois legislature, Lincoln quoted a local Democrat who admitted that his party was "*vulnerable in the heel*," but "*sound in the head and the heart.*" The young legislator agreed with his opponent's confession of vulnerability. So many Democratic office holders had absconded to Europe or Texas with public money that there was no doubt they were "most distressingly affected in their *heels* with a species of '*running itch.*'" It reminded him of the Irish soldier who always retreated when the battle started. Asked by his captain to explain his behavior, the soldier replied, "Captain, I have as brave a *heart* as Julius Caesar ever had; but some how or other, whenever danger approaches, my *cowardly* legs will run away with it." The same was true of the Democracy. "They take the public money *into* their hand for the most laudable purpose, that *wise heads* and *honest hearts* can dictate; but before they can possibly get it *out* again their rascally '*vulnerable heels*' will run away with them."[29]

The Democrats boasted that they would win every state in the coming presidential election. They might be correct but many free countries had lost their liberty and America could lose hers. If such was to be, Lincoln wanted it known that he, at least, had not deserted his country.

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[28]Temple, *Notable Men*, 372-73.

[29]Speech on the Sub-Treasury, [December 26], 1839 in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 177.

> I know that the great volcano there, is belching forth the lava of political corruption, in a current broad and deep, which is sweeping with frightful velocity over the whole length and breadth of the land, bidding fair to leave unscathed no green spot or living thing, while on its bosom are riding like demons on the waves of Hell, the imps of that evil spirit, and fiendishly taunting all those who dare resist its destroying course, with the hopelessness of their effort; and knowing this, I cannot deny that all may be swept away.[30]

Lincoln may not have been a Christian but such imagery rivals the Book of Revelations. This apocalyptic view may have been party rhetoric, but such rhetoric does not encourage a belief in loyal opposition. How can one consider the equivalent of the devil and his demons, the Democrats, loyal when it was their aim to destroy liberty! It is easy to see how as northern fears grew about a slavery conspiracy, free white men of the North repudiated the Democratic party as a tool of the Slave Power which was not content to protect slavery but sought to extend it into the free states.[31]

On the basic issues which divided the Democratic and Whig parties--internal improvements, tariffs, and veto powers--Johnson and Lincoln stood in opposition. Although they were flexible on these issues, Johnson's views were the more consistent. Lincoln had been an advocate of internal improvements in Illinois, so much so that the state had been forced to default. Despite this experience, he denounced the Democratic platform of 1848 because it declared unconstitutional a general system of internal improvements paid for by the federal

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[30] *Ibid.*, 178.

[31] Speech at Edwardsville, Illinois, September 11, 1858, in *ibid.*, III, 92-93.

government. He denied it was unconstitutional, that it would bankrupt the treasury, or that its benefits profited a few at the expense of the many.[32]

Johnson, on the other hand, continued his opposition to such a program and doubted its constitutionality. He introduced an amendment to include the Tennessee River in a bill providing funds for the Mississippi, the Ohio, and the Missouri, but only as a means of testing the sincerity of the bill's advocates. While Lincoln was convinced that the treasury would not be endangered by a general internal improvements program, Johnson was equally certain that "if the floodgates were once hoisted, bankruptcy, indebtedness, and all the catastrophes which come in the train of such measures, would ensue." He referred specifically to the disaster in Illinois as evidence that a similar fate awaited the federal government if the present course was continued. He did not hesitate to attack John C. Calhoun who, as presiding officer of the "South and Western Convention" held in Memphis in November 1845, had called for federal aid for improvement projects.[33] In 1859 he angered his fellow southern Democrats with his opposition to the Pacific railroad bill, lecturing them on states rights and a strict construction of the Constitution. He accused Louisiana Senator Judah P. Benjamin of becoming "a little latitudinous" and he "regretted extremely to lose the senator from Mississippi

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[32]Speech to United States House of Representatives on Internal Improvements, June 20, 1848, in *ibid.*, I, 480-90.

[33]Remarks on Internal Improvements, March 9, 1846, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 297-300.

[Jefferson Davis] by his going over to the doctrines of the latitudinarians." Johnson denied that either the war-making powers in the Constitution made it possible to build the railroad or that the right to regulate commerce conferred such power. Before the line was constructed the state should decide what authority the federal government exercised over works of internal improvements. If it required a railroad to keep California in the Union then he thought it better that California should go rather than create a giant monopoly with land grants exceeding in area the state of Ohio.[34]

Johnson clung steadfastly to the notion that such power granted to the federal government would destroy states' rights and that "the people, the sovereign source of power," were the only ones capable of deciding the issue. Earlier he had warned Whigs and fellow Democrats, in 1846, "Overleap the Constitution once, and it would but furnish a precedent for its infringement again when occasion required; and soon it would be frittered away, and become as valueless as the paper upon which it is written."[35] On this issue it was not a matter of Johnson's leaving the Democratic party but rather the Democratic party's leaving him.[36] Even his close friend, advisor, and speech-writer,

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[34]Speech on Transcontinental Railroads, January 25, 1859, in *ibid.*, III, 214-45.

[35]Remarks on Internal Improvements, March 9, 1846, in *ibid.*, I, 297-300.

[36]Eric L. McKitrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (Chicago, 1967), 85-91; LeRoy P. Graf, "Andrew Johnson and the Coming of the Civil War," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XIX (1960), 208-21.

Sam Milligan, flirted with internal improvements and with bank Democrats such as Brookins Campbell and Landon C. Haynes--men who were Johnson's bitter enemies.[37]

The Greeneville mechanic was willing to modify his position on this issue, particularly after some persuasion from Milligan. Andrew wrote to his Greeneville friend, prior to the 1849 election, that he had proposed that $650,000 be appropriated for East Tennessee. But he did not wish to make an issue out of it and advised Milligan: "If you think it worth while to Say any thing on the Subject of internal improvements do it in general termes a hint to the wise is enough--"[38] Similar political motivations were behind his investments in two railroads, $12,000 in the Nashville and Chattanooga and more than $2,000 in the East Tennessee and Virginia. During the gubernatorial campaign of 1853, Johnson used his ownership of these bonds "as a test of his sincerity."[39] It was political wisdom which made him as governor advocate internal improvements but priority was to be given to those projects which would link the three divisions of the state. He warned the legislature that it should not initiate too many projects at the same time and that these should be regulated so as to prevent the state from incurring heavy liability. Furthermore there should be

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[37]Johnson to Blackston McDannel, January 10, 1847, Johnson to William M. Lowry, August 12, 1850, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 369, 584.

[38]Johnson to Milligan [June, 1849?], in *ibid.*, 510.

[39]Speech at Sparta, June 1, 1853; Statement of Bonds, December 1, 1858, in *ibid.*, II, 141; III, 197.

no resort to oppressive taxation on the majority of the people.[40]

Whereas Johnson was opposed to such Federalism, Lincoln enthusiastically endorsed Clay's system of internal improvements, tariffs, and banks.[41] He espoused the belief that "The legitimate object of government, is to do for a community of people, whatever they need to have done, but cannot do, *at all*, or cannot, *so well do*, for themselves--in their separate and individual capacities."[42] Such broad views of government responsibility and power were a vital factor in ensuring northern success during the Civil War. But to Andrew Johnson government with such power was a tyranny, violating states' rights and the sacred Constitution. His main enemies in the Tennessee Democracy were bank and internal improvements advocates. As governor he failed to solve the banking problem in the state, and was unable to persuade the legislature that the state should dispose of its stock in the Union and Planters Bank of Nashville. To Johnson small government was essential, and as congressman, governor, and senator, he opposed the extension of government over the lives of the people.[43] Frequently his opposition to federal spending took

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[40]Biennial Legislative Message, December 19, 1853, in *ibid.*, II, 190.

[41]Eulogy on Henry Clay, July 6, 1852, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 126.

[42]Fragment on Government [July 1, 1854?], in *ibid.*, 220.

[43]For a representative example of Johnson's speeches on retrenchment, see Resolution on Reducing the Numbers of House Clerks, March 11, 1844; Speech on the Admission of Texas and Other Matters, January 21, 1845; Resolution Concerning Free Books for Congressmen, January 28, 1845; Speech on the Appointment of Federal Clerks, May 31, 1848;

petty forms. He opposed the purchase of Madison's papers from Dolley Madison, complained about funds expended on John Quincy Adams' funeral, slashed an appropriation to purchase portraits of past presidents to one dollar, and objected to buying Washington's Farewell Address.[44] West Point and Annapolis should be abolished because they were palaces of privilege. "We see the lads that are blessed by nature with talents and with the every requisite that would make them competent and efficient in the service excluded," he asserted, "and that the sons of members of Congress, many of them almost imbecile, are crowded into these institutions." This comment was hardly likely to win him friends among his fellow congressmen.[45] Andrew Johnson believed passionately that the least government was the best government, and it is therefore not surprising that he followed the course he did when he eventually became president, opposing the Freedmen's Bureau and refusing to use the authority of the federal government to protect freedmen.

Amendment to General Appropriation Bill, April 16, 1850; Remarks Proposing Reduction of All Federal Salaries, March 1, 1851, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 157, 204, 207, 436, 585, 611-12; Speech at Murfreesboro, [May 1, 1855], in *ibid.*, II, 273-77; Speech at Bristol [Democratic Version], May 21, 1859, in *ibid.*, III, 278.

[44]Remarks Opposing a "Pension" for Mrs. James Madison, May 20, 1848; Amendments on Funeral Expenses for J. Q. Adams, June 20, 1848; Remarks Opposing an Appropriation for Presidential Portraits, January 23, 1849; Remarks on the Ownership of the Washington Papers, February 6, 1850, in *ibid.*, I, 427-28, 440, 488-90, 524-28.

[45]Remarks on Military and Navy Appropriations, August 18-19, 1852, in *ibid.*, II, 80-82. However, he was prepared to offer President Jackson's home, the Hermitage, to the nation as a southern West Point. Johnson to Franklin Pierce, December 18, 1856, in *ibid.*, III, 464.

Although for most Democrats these old disputes had lost their significance, so that they were willing to accept the Walker tariff of 1846 and even advocate a transcontinental railroad, Johnson continued to inveigh against Whig Federalism. For Johnson and his artisan supporters, the tariff was not a dead issue. Just as banks and paper money threatened the status of this class, so did the tariff.[46] Direct taxation was preferable, he declared in 1844, because it would end all extravagant schemes of expenditure. Tariffs benefited the few at the expense of the many and the argument that they helped home industry, and thereby the mechanic, was pure "humbug." He insisted that "no one was benefited but the wealthy manufacturer" and these new capitalists were the ones who posed the greatest threat to artisans as a class.[47] During his first gubernatorial campaign in 1853, he warned that it was not only artisans who were threatened by such policies. It was the Democratic party which "had resisted the policy of grinding the poor of the South to pamper the rich of the North" and it was the Whigs who "contended for a Bank, and high tariff, and distribution."[48] As senator Johnson opposed a congressional appropriation for Washington school funds, partly in the belief that increased government expenditure necessitated higher protective tariffs.[49]

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[46]Speech Opposing Change in Coinage, February 23, 1853; Speech at Shelbyville, [June 6, 1853], in *ibid.*, II, 120-32, 195; The Tennessee Democracy on Banks and Currency [September 22, 1858], in *ibid*, III, 195.

[47]Speech on the Protective Tariff, May 22, 1844, in *ibid*, I, 166-68.

[48]Speech at Shelbyville [June 6, 1853], in *ibid.*, II, 145.

[49]Speech on School Funds for District of Columbia, May 15, 1858, in *ibid.*, III, 126.

As an admirer of Clay, Lincoln naturally would not support such views, as is clear from his notes defending tariffs written after his election in 1846 and prior to taking his seat in Congress in 1847. The Illinoisan argued that the belief that buying the cheapest is best for the nation was not necessarily true because at the same time the nation may be compelled to sell cheaper--nothing being gained. Thus it was not a matter of buying cheap or selling dear but rather of constant employment so that the largest possible amount could be sold. Employment was secured only by an ample, steady, and certain market. This market and this employment, he believed, could be ensured only by protective tariffs--to which Johnson would have replied "humbug." The only point on which the Plebeian would have agreed with the Railsplitter was the latter's contention that "the habits of our whole species fall into three great classes--*useful* labor, *useless* labor, and *idleness*." However, according to Lincoln, low tariffs would lead to "increase of both useless labor, and idleness; and so in pro[por]tion, must produce want and ruin among our people."[50]

In 1859, Lincoln told a Pennsylvania physician, who supported high tariffs,[51] "I was an old Henry Clay tarrif whig." He had spoken frequently in favor of protection and he had not changed his views. It would be better for the nation if a moderate tariff was generally agreed on. "Still it is my opinion that, just now, the revival of

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[50]Fragments of a Tariff Discussion [December 1, 1847?], in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 407-16.

[51]Dr. Edward Wallace to Lincoln, October 17, 1859, Robert Todd Lincoln Collection of Abraham Lincoln Papers (microfilm), University of Tennessee Library.

that question, will not advance the cause itself, or the man who revives it." He confessed that the Whigs had been beaten on the issue and the only hope for the future was that its absence would demonstrate its necessity.[52]

Being "an old Henry Clay . . . whig," Lincoln was in favor of "the practical restriction of the veto power, so that it may not be wielded to the centralization of all powers in the hands of a corrupt and despotic Executive. . . ."[53] As a congressman, he defended Whig presidential candidate Zachary Taylor and quoted with approval from the general's letter to Captain John S. Allison of Louisville, in which Taylor declared: "The power given by the constitution to the Executive to interpose his veto, is a high conservative power; but in my opinion should never be exercised except in cases of clear violation of the constitution, or manifest haste or want of consideration by congress."[54] Lincoln argued that there was no difference between these ideas of Taylor and those of Thomas Jefferson. If the president had doubts about the constitutionality of a law he was to defer to the wishes of Congress and approve the measure.

While campaigning in Massachusetts for the Whig nominee in 1848, he assured the party faithful that General Taylor would not frustrate

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[52]Lincoln to Edward Wallace, October 11, 1859, in Basler, *Collected Works*, III, 486-87.

[53]Resolutions Adopted by the Whig Convention in Peoria, Illinois, June 19, 1844, in *ibid.*, I, 339.

[54]Speech in U.S. House of Representatives on the Presidential Question, July 27, 1848, in *ibid.*, I, 503; Rayback, *Free Soil*, 155.

the will of the people by the use of a veto.[55] The Taunton *Daily Gazette* reported Lincoln as saying "that Taylor was the first Whig candidate that had come fully up to the Whig platform in this point, because unlike all other candidates before him he had not even claimed the right to advise Congress on matters of policy." Lincoln's sensitivity to the rights of Congress and his dislike of the veto power were to influence his actions as president.[56]

In contrast to this Whiggish distrust of executive veto powers, Andrew Johnson as a loyal Democrat sought to defend his hero Andrew Jackson. The opposition might cry "King Andrew" and attempt to slander his name, but they would not be allowed to discredit "Old Hickory" so long as the Plebeian of Greeneville had the opportunity to defend him. Johnson, in what may have been an allusion to his young days as a Whig, confessed that he had had doubts at one time about the use of the veto power, but after careful examination he had discovered that it was of "plebeian origin." The veto originated with the people of Rome who rebelled against heavy taxes imposed by the Senate and demanded the right to forbid legislation. It was not until Augustus that the veto power and royalty were united. The Whigs' argument that the king of England was afraid of his veto powers and had not used them, was fallacious. The English monarchs were only restricted because they were hereditary monarchs and if they tried to use their authority they would be forced to abdicate.

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[55]Speech at Boston, Massachusetts, September 15, 1848, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 5.

[56]*Ibid.*, 8.

In America, the founding fathers all supported veto powers and although Jackson had been "denounced as arbitrary and tyrannical; . . . even he, in the exercise of this power, always exercised it in defense of the people's interests, and in resisting encroachments on their rights." So long as the executive was responsive to the people, the veto operated well--in marked contrast to the judiciary, which had the same powers but was not responsible to the people. In the latter case, however, the "Federal party" never complained because in this case the people were unable to influence it. The veto power was, he suggested, "a breakwater . . . placed on the people's sea or constitution," which would arrest federal power and encroachments on civil liberties. Executive veto was conservative in that it would delay hasty or wasteful legislation until the people had had time to give it thorough consideration.[57]

Five years later when seeking his first term as governor in a bitter campaign against the "eagle orator" Gustavus A. Henry, Johnson accused his opponent of seeking to abolish one of the democratic features of the Constitution--the veto--which from the time it was first devised was a means of protecting popular rights. Answering Henry's attacks on his proposals for popular election of president, vice-president, and senators, Johnson replied that he "was for *perfecting* and *popularizing* the constitution, while his competitor was for striking out of it one of its most republican features." Henry's opposition to the

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[57]Speech on Veto Power and Responsibility for War with Mexico, August 2, 1848, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 444-50.

veto was a far greater threat to the South than Johnson's proposed amendment. The executive was the defender of the people who were sovereign and the veto had to be used to protect the people from unconstitutional legislation.[58] Johnson always saw himself as spokesman of the people, a view which partly accounts for his dislike of the Democratic party nominees, excluding Lewis Cass, from Van Buren to Buchanan.[59] It is hardly surprising that he used the veto so frequently during his term of office with his belief that, unlike planters, railroad magnates and capitalists, he was the only one who understood the people.[60]

It was not internal improvements, the tariff, or the veto which preoccupied Congress when Johnson and Lincoln met for the first time but rather the war then being fought against the Republic of Mexico. This conflict was enthusiastically endorsed by most Americans; but for some northerners Mr. Polk's war was a conspiracy on the part of the slavocracy and, rather than permit the extension of slavery, they preferred to see the North secede from the Union.[61] A far greater

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[58]Speech at Shelbyville [June 6, 1853], in *ibid.*, II, 154.

[59]Graf, "Andrew Johnson," 212-13.

[60]Ironically Buchanan's use of the veto against the Homestead Act deprived Johnson of the credit he deserved for its final passage. Although passed by a Republican Congress and signed into law by Lincoln in 1862, it was Johnson who had battled from 1846, mainly against his own party leadership, and it was Johnson who ensured its eventual adoption.

[61]*The Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 22, 1849; James Russell Lowell, *The Biglow Papers* (Boston, 1898), 69; *The Liberator*, July 7, 1854.

number held the belief that any new territory acquired by the United States must be free territory. To ensure this, Congressman David Wilmot, a Pennsylvania Democrat, submitted an amendment to a bill appropriating two million dollars for ratification of a treaty with Mexico:

> Provided, that as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico by the United States, by virtue of any treaty which may be negotiated with them, and for the use by the Executive of the monies herein appropriated, neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall exist in any party of said territory, except for crime whereof the party shall first be duly convicted.[62]

Angered by Wilmot's Proviso, President Polk told the Pennsylvania Democrat that "I did not desire to extend slavery, that I would be satisfied to acquire from Mexico the Provinces of New Mexico and the Californias, and that in these Provinces slavery could probably never exist."[63] Andrew Johnson shared his fellow Tennessean's belief, considering the Proviso a "firebrand."[64] Johnson voted forty-two times against the measure.

Lincoln, who was now considered a member of the Sangamon County elite, voted over forty times in favor of the Proviso. However, while Lincoln was an anti-slavery advocate, he did not sympathize with the abolitionists.[65] Like most northerners, he was a conservative

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[62] *Cong. Globe*, 29th Cong., 1st Sess., 1217.

[63] Quaife, *Polk's Diary*, II, 289. Polk seems to have shared the widely-held belief that there were natural limits to the expansion of slavery.

[64] Speech at Evans' Crossroads, Greene County [May 26, 1849], in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 501.

[65] Lincoln to Joshua F. Speed, August 25, 1855, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 323.

and a racist. He was

> opposed to encouraging that lawless and mobocratic spirit, whether in relation to the bank or anything else, which is already abroad in the land; and is spreading with rapid and fearful impetuosity, to the ultimate overthrow of every institution, or even moral principle, in which persons and property have hitherto found security.[66]

Why did Lincoln oppose the war with his Spot Resolution of 1847 and with his vote for the Ashmun Amendment declaring the war unconstitutional, after he had helped to raise troops at a Springfield rally? He was undoubtedly influenced by Henry Clay, whom he had heard speak in Lexington. Denouncing the war as unconstitutional, Clay declared that annexation of territory would require a large standing army which would ultimately corrupt the government of the entire Union. Further, it would introduce a large alien population of different race and religion, resulting in the establishment of a party, similar to the Irish in the British parliament, which would block legislation. Even worse, annexation would mean a struggle between North and South over the issue of slavery. The Kentuckian denounced slavery as an institution but denied the right of the federal government to act against it, leaving it to be settled by the states.[67] Clay's solution was a settlement of the disputed border between Mexico and Texas; but for most southern Whigs no annexation whatsoever was

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[66]Speech in the Illinois Legislature Concerning the State Bank, January 1, 1837, in *ibid.*, I, 69.

[67]*Niles' Register*, November 27, 1847.

insufficient,[68] and his anti-slavery position was not strong enough to win over New York Barnburners.[69]

Lincoln, like Clay and most Whigs, was looking to the election of 1848. The Whig strategy was to discredit Polk by claiming the war was begun unconstitutionally.[70] Although they attacked the President's handling of the war, the Whigs, including Lincoln, always voted for supplies. According to Lincoln, the President was mistaken when he believed such a vote indicated support for the war.[71] Lincoln claimed that Polk knew his actions were "in the wrong--that he feels the blood of this war, like the blood of Abel, is crying to Heaven against him." The President's justifications were "like the half insane mumbling of a fever dream . . . his mind, tasked beyond its power, is running hither and thither, like some tortured creature on a burning surface, finding no position, on which it can settle down, and be at ease."[72] Lincoln voted for the Ashmun Amendment censuring Polk, which passed the House 82 to 81.

Lincoln failed to explain his views to his young law-partner,

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[68]A. C. Cole, *The Whig Party in the South* (Gloucester, Mass., 1962), 120-23; Rayback, *Free Soil*, 129. Lincoln was also moved by Alexander H. Stephens, a Georgia Whig's denunciation of the war. Lincoln to Herndon, February 2, 1848, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 448.

[69]Rayback, *Free Soil*, 128.

[70]"Spot" Resolutions, December 22, 1847, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 420-22.

[71]Speech in United States House of Representatives: The War with Mexico, January 12, 1848, in *ibid.*, 432.

[72]*Ibid.*, 440-41.

William H. Herndon;[73] thus it is not surprising that the voters of the seventh district did not appreciate his position. Lincoln wrote Herndon to elucidate his views that, "The locos are untiring in their efforts to make the impression that all who vote supplies, or take part in the war, do, of necessity, approve the President's conduct in the beginning of it; but the whigs have, from the beginning, made and kept the distinction between the two."[74] Later in the House, he regretted that Democrats could not see the distinction between "the cause of the *President* in beginning the war, and the cause of the *country* after it was begun." Lincoln complained that for the Democrats "the President and the country seem to be all one. . . . We see the distinction, as we think, clearly enough; and our friends who have fought in the war have no difficulty in seeing it also."[75] It was a distinction that Herndon and the congressman from Tennessee's first district failed to appreciate.

Johnson denounced Lincoln and his fellow Whigs, vehemently denying that the annexation of Texas had anything to do with the war. He reminded his Whig opponents that after the election of 1840--"that dark and gloomy period when many states wandered from their republican fold"--it was a Whig president, Tyler, who had initiated the

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[73]Lincoln to William H. Herndon, February 1, 15, June 22, 1848, in *ibid.*, 446-48, 451-52, 490-92.

[74]Lincoln to William H. Herndon, February 1, 1848, in *ibid.*, 447.

[75]Lincoln to Usher F. Linder, March 22, 1848; Speech in U.S. House of Representatives on the Presidential Question, July 27, 1848, in *ibid.*, 457-58, 515; John Locke Scripps, *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, eds. Roy P. Basler and Lloyd A. Dunlap. (Bloomington, 1961), 97.

annexation of Texas, a decision the people had sanctified in the following election. Whig representatives such as Milton Brown of Tennessee claimed annexation was a Whig measure; it followed therefore that if annexation caused the war, the Whigs were responsible. Condemning the war as "unjust, unholy and damnable," they voted money to continue it. "If the position assumed by them was correct, that the war was unjust," Johnson continued, "it is certain that we cannot become right by persisting in wrong. If the war is in violation of the Constitution, it cannot be repaired by widening the breach. If it is damnable, it can never be made honorable. If it is unholy, it can never be made righteous." The only possible action open to the United States is to w draw the troops and indemnify Mexico for the injuries that had been done.[76]

Johnson had no doubt about the right or wrong of the Mexican war. Unlike Lincoln, he was not worried about spots. For him the answer was simple. "Our country must have been right, or the God of Battles would sometimes have been against it." Equally simply he declared, "Mexico must be in the wrong; she is a doomed nation. The right arm of an angry god has been suspended over her, and the Anglo-Saxon race has been selected as the rod of her retribution."[77] Anyone who thought otherwise was guilty of treason. Even as the opposition was voting supplies and men, their speeches were encouraging the Mexicans to maintain maximum resistance against American troops and

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[76]Speech on Veto Power and Responsibility for War with Mexico, August 2, 1848, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 450-56.

[77]*Ibid.*, 456.

encouraging the enemy with the hope that the peace party would succeed and Mexico would get a treaty on her own terms. The purpose of the war critics was to extend "aid and comfort" to the enemies of the country. Johnson unhesitatingly agreed with Polk that his critics were traitors. Johnson accused Meredith P. Gentry, a Tennessee Whig, of treason: "In order to discover his independence, the gentleman had voluntarily joined in with the enemies of his country."[78] It is evident that Johnson considered the party a collection of traitors and not fit to control the federal government.

The angry debate between the two parties was not about whether slavery should exist but rather whether the United States should annex territory from Mexico and if slavery should be allowed in that territory. The battle over slavery in the territories was to disrupt both the Whig and Democratic parties.[79] The Whigs' last success came in 1848 with the election of an apolitical military hero, Zachary Taylor. The repudiation of the faithful Henry Clay marked the start of the Whig decline. Four years later the successful nomination of General Scott, "Old Fuss and Feathers," forced many southern Whigs to abandon the party because the candidate of Seward and Weed was seen as anti-slavery

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[78]Speech in defense of the Administration's War Policies, January 5, 1847, in *ibid.*, 350-51, 355.

[79]"The True Issue Between the Parties in the South: Union or Disunion," *American Whig Review*, VI (New Series, 1850), 588. This is a reprint of a pamphlet by A Southron, entitled "Union or Disunion . . . .," in *ibid.*, 587-602; Paul M. Angle, ed., *Created Equal? The Complete Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858* (Chicago, 1958), ix.

and pro free-soil.[80] Efforts by nativists, who belonged to the Know Nothings and American party, failed to establish an effective national organization.

The demise of the Whig party at the national level hastened the disruption of the Democracy but was not the major factor. Sectional discord was already present in the party of Jackson, as evidenced in the earlier defection of ex-president Van Buren and the New York Barnburners to the Free Soil Party in 1848.[81] Similar defections took place in Michigan. Although the vast majority of northern Democrats stood beside their southern brethren, the issue of slavery would not die away. Southerners rightly demanded enforcement of the Fugitive Slave law but northern legislators passed personal liberty laws which sought to deny southerners their property. The Wisconsin Supreme Court even invoked states' rights to declare the Fugitive Slave law unconstitutional.[82] Part of the Compromise of 1850--and one of the bills Johnson did support--provided for stronger fugitive slave laws. The result was an angry reaction in the North dramatized in the Burns case of 1854. This was matched by a growing bitterness among southerners. Charles C. Jones, a young Georgian studying law at Harvard, wrote to his father complaining, "Mob law, *perjury*, free-soilism, and *abolitionism* are *running riot*." He was attending the trial where the courtroom was full of armed men, and lawyers carried revolvers and bowie knives.

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[80]Allan Nenins, *Ordeal of the Union* (2 vols., New York, 1947), II, 27.

[81]Rayback, *Free Soil*, 179-81, 228-29, 244-47, 281-87, 294-302.

[82]Cover, *Justice Accused*, 188.

Burns and the counsel managed to get to the court only because one hundred marines and two militia companies were on hand at the courthouse. Four volunteer companies guarded city hall. The need for such force, he explained, was entirely due to "the infernal machinations of such men as Theodore Parker, Wendell Phillips, Ellis, and others." These abolitionists had secret meetings in which they coached witnesses to commit perjury. He warned his father, "Do not be surprised if when I return home you find me a *confirmed disunionist*."[83]

Three years earlier Horace Maynard, a Yankee professor from East Tennessee University and a Whig lawyer, lamented the very existence of even the Free Soil party, and rhetorically demanded "what has been gained except the defeat of the Whigs--nothing, nothing."[84] Massachusetts and South Carolina were "doing their best to make themselves ridiculous." But he was positive that "This great country is not to be broken in pieces, either by Southern mad-caps or by Northern fanatics"--a sentiment which Johnson and Lincoln would have endorsed.[85]

As a congressman Lincoln introduced on January 10, 1849, an amendment to a resolution by New York Whig, Daniel Gott, who sought to abolish the slave trade in the District of Columbia. Lincoln's amendment would have allowed for the very gradual emancipation of slaves

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[83]Charles C. Jones to Rev. C. C. Jones, May 30, 1854, *The Children of Pride: The Story of Georgia and the Civil War*, ed. Robert Manson Myers (New Haven, 1972), 37-38.

[84]Horace Maynard to Ephraim Maynard, December 7, 1850, Maynard Papers, University of Tennessee Library.

[85]*Ibid.*, March 7, 1851.

in the District, and then only providing the measure was approved by free white voters first. An inducement for this vote was offered by the provision to compensate owners, and by the rigid enforcement of the Fugitive Slave law to prevent Negroes fleeing to the capital for their freedom. He continued to support the Fugitive Slave law during his Senate election campaigns in 1854 and 1858. No vote was taken on Lincoln's amendment and although he indicated that he would reintroduce the measure, he did not, explaining later that the fifteen Washington sponsors had withdrawn their approval and he had "little personal influence" in the House.[86] In 1854 he would claim that gradual emancipation with compensation was supported by the large majority of free people in the District. The fact that he was campaigning for the Senate may partly explain his apparently poor memory.[87] These resolutions were a continuation of Lincoln's anti-slavery feelings, expressed both publicly and privately. In 1841, while on a Mississippi river trip, he had seen slaves being moved to the South "where the lash of the master is proverbially more ruthless and unrelenting than any other where [*sic*]." But the blacks he described as "happy creatures," apparently contented with their lot.[88]

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[86]Remarks and Resolution Introduced in the United States House of Representatives Concerning the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia, January 10, 1849, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 20-22; James Quay Howard, Notes on Lincoln (1861), Robert Todd Lincoln Collection.

[87]Speech at Peoria, Illinois, October 16, 1854, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 260. He insisted consistently, however, that Congress had the right to abolish slavery in the District. Opening Speech at Freeport, August 26, 1858, in Angle, *Created Equal?*, 142.

[88]Lincoln to Mary Speed, September 27, 1841, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 260.

Whereas in 1841 Lincoln considered that their situation was tolerable, he maintained later that the sight of these slaves was "a continual torment to me." He was justified in speaking out against the institution because it continually made him miserable. He admonished his dear friend, Joshua F. Speed, that he ought to appreciate how the majority of the people in the North crucified "their feelings, in order to maintain their loyalty to the constitution and the Union."[89] It was the slavery question which brought Lincoln into the forefront of Illinois politics along with the Little Giant--Stephen A. Douglas. After failing to gain nomination for Congress in 1848 Lincoln made speeches for the Taylor-Fillmore ticket in Massachusetts and Illinois. But even then his major concern was not the Negro as slave but rather the extension of slavery. He warned members of the House in July 1848, that the election of Cass would ensure the extension of slavery into new territory which in turn would lead to new wars, more territory, and still further extension of slavery.[90] He pointed out that Cass had supported the Wilmot Proviso in 1846, he had opposed it in 1847, and finally in his famous letter to A. O. P. Nicholson, editor of the Nashville *Union and American*, had advocated popular sovereignty. Lincoln did not attack the concept of popular sovereignty, which he had incorporated in his amendment concerning abolition of slavery in the District; but rather he attacked Cass for his inconsistency.

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[89]Lincoln to Joshua F. Speed, August 24, 1855, in *ibid.*, II, 320.

[90]Speech in U.S. House of Representatives on the Presidential Question, July 27, 1848, in *ibid.*, I, 505.

During the presidential campaign of 1848 Lincoln denounced Van Buren and the Free Soil party as Locofocos and asserted that the Whigs were as much opposed to the extension of slavery as were the Free Soilers.[91] According to one hostile report in a Van Buren paper, Lincoln suggested that the constitutionality of the Wilmot Proviso had not been questioned and pointed out that the Nicholson letter did not deny Congress the right to exclude the peculiar institution from the territories. "He seemed to be entirely ignorant," the reporter editorialized, "that every propagandist of slavery in existence, with John C. Calhoun at their head, claimed the right, under the Constitution, and independent of Congress to carry their 'property' into any part of the United States territory and there to hold it." The writer contemptuously dismissed Lincoln's claim that Taylor would do more to prevent the extension of slavery.[92] Lincoln repeated his anti-extensionist arguments during a brief campaign in Illinois.[93]

The dilemma posed by the Van Buren Free Soilers was not faced by either of Illinois' great politicians, Lincoln and Douglas. The latter adopted popular sovereignty as the ideal solution to end agitation over slavery in the North: let the people decide the issue. And as a result he introduced the Kansas-Nebraska bill, in which that power was given to the people of the territory. This simple formula, he

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[91]Speech at Boston, Mass., September 15, 1848, in *ibid.*, II, 5.

[92]Speech at Taunton, Mass. [September 21?], 1848, in *ibid.*, 7-8.

[93]Speech in Chicago, Illinois, October 6, 1848; Debate at Jacksonville, Illinois, October 21, 1848, in *ibid.*, 11-13.

believed, would remove the vexed question from politics; instead it exploded in his face. To the majority of northerners, who felt no concern for blacks, the act repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, and as the Free Soil critic had pointed out, opened all the territories to slavery. In the resulting scramble for Kansas, New England abolitionists set up colonization societies, while slavery supporters from neighboring Missouri rushed across the state line seeking to ensure it as a slave state. The violence common to the western frontier was used by abolitionists in their propaganda to heighten northern fears of slavery and the supposed slave power. The result was almost inevitable. Pro-slavery forces drew up a constitution which included the peculiar institution but would not submit the constitution for ratification. Anti-slavery Kansans, who were the majority, refused to participate in the election and formed their own assembly. The Lecompton Constitution was a gross violation of the concept of popular sovereignty. President James Buchanan, popularly known as the "Old Public Functionary," proceeded to placate his southern friends and recognized the constitution.[94]

Douglas was the great defender of popular sovereignty and his support of the Kansas-Nebraska bill meant that he could not vote for the Lecompton Constitution, and although he supported the Dred Scott decision, he had made an irreparable breach with the southern Democrats and as a result, the chance for the nomination in 1860 by a united party.

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[94]For a defense of Buchanan's administration, see Elbert B. Smith, *The Presidency of James Buchanan* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1975).

In 1854, Lincoln was elected to the state legislature but immediately resigned to contest the seat for the United States Senate. Not only did Kansas-Nebraska bring Douglas's ablest opponent back into the political arena, but the Kansas-Nebraska bill severely divided the Democratic party.[95] The importance of this measure has been described as "a bomb which jarred the loose elements into a united organization, split the democracy along sectional lines, and led to civil war."[96]

Fusionist candidates made significant gains against northwestern Democrats. Buchanan, an ex-Federalist and a northerner, was able to carry only two northwest states, Illinois and Indiana.[97] A year later northern fears over slavery extension reached hysterical proportions with the Supreme Court decision in the Dred Scott case. Not content to deny Scott his freedom, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney felt compelled to declare that no state or territory could deprive a slaveholder of his property and that no Negro was eligible for American citizenship. Northerners immediately feared an invasion of the free states by slaveholders and their property and the ruling contradicted the rights of states, such as Massachusetts, which had granted Negros full privileges as citizens. Thus increasingly the North saw itself as on the defensive with the South controlling the executive and judiciary and retaining

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[95]Lincoln to John M. Palmer, September 7, 1854, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 228. Lincoln "pressures" an anti-Nebraska Democrat to campaign against his own party.

[96]Buley, "Political Balance in the Old Northwest," 444.

[97]Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *et al.*, eds., *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968* (4 vols., New York, 1971), II, 1094.

equal power in the Senate. Southerners, they believed, were no longer claiming equal rights under the Constitution but conspiring to extend slavery all over the United States. Free labor and free white men would no longer be free. Southern pro-slavery writers such as George Fitzhugh, who asserted that slavery was a natural state for all menials, were cited in speech after speech as threatening the freedom of the white laborer, mechanic, and farmer.[98]

Douglas had preempted the middle ground and Lincoln was therefore forced to take a stand which had great significance for his later career. Although he had repudiated the activities of abolitionists, he adopted an argument which, like that of the abolitionists, placed primary importance on the Declaration of Independence. Ironically, just as the conservative Whig was inspired by Jefferson's masterpiece of Enlightenment thought, the Virginian's spiritual descendants in the Democratic party repudiated these doctrines as revolutionary nonsense.[99]

In 1854, in the first Lincoln-Douglas debate, Lincoln made his conservative stand clear in a speech at Bloomington when he told his audience "that the Southern slaveholders were neither better, nor worse than we of the North, and that we of the North were no better than they." Faced with the same situation northerners would act and feel as

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[98]Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York, 1970), 261-300; Foner, "Race Attitudes of the New York Free Soilers," *New York History*, XLVI (1965), 311-29; Foner, "Politics and Prejudice: The Free Soil Party and the Negro, 1849-1852," *Journal of Negro History*, L (1965), 232-56.

[99]Roy F. Nichols, *Disruption of American Democracy* (New York, 1948).

southerners did and vice versa. He urged his audience to comply with the Fugitive Slave law but he argued there was "a vast difference" from tolerating slavery where it existed and ensuring the owners their constitutional rights to extending it over free and "uncontaminated" territory. Despite all the compromises the people of the free states had considered final, the South was not satisfied and now it wanted Nebraska and the territories open to slavery. Talking in Johnsonian terms, he declared that the people "were the sovereigns" and given the opportunity to vote they would have repudiated the Kansas-Nebraska bill.[100]

As indicated by his reference to the Sovereign people, Lincoln was acutely conscious of the appeal popular sovereighty had for the majority in the northwest. In a second debate in Bloomington with Stephen Douglas he did not dispute the right of individuals to regulate their families, of communities to make their own arrangements, or of states to pass their own laws subject to the Constitution. Such an argument, he contended, had nothing to do with whether slavery, "a moral, social and political evil," should or should not exist in government protected, owned, and controlled territory if it was conceded that the Negro was not human.

> If the negro is not a man, it is consistent to apply the sacred right of popular sovereignty to the question as to whether the people of the territories shall or shall not have slavery; but if the negro, upon soil where slavery is not legalised by law and sanctioned by custom, *is* a man, then there is not even the shadow of popular sovereignty in allowing the first settlers

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[100]Speech at Bloomington, September 12, 1854, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 230-31.

> upon such soil to decide whether it shall be right in all future times to hold men in bondage there.[101]

At Peoria he said that if the Negro was a man it was the total destruction of self-government to say that the Negro could not rule himself. When a white man ruled himself it was self-government but if he governed another man as well it was no longer self-government--it was despotism. Citing the Declaration of Independence, he argued that government was only possible with the consent of the governed. This was "the sheet anchor of American republicanism."[102] Again at Springfield, Lincoln denounced popular sovereignty as "new-fangled doctrines of popular rights, invented . . . to cloak the spread of slavery." He reminded his listeners that the ordinance of 1787 had outlawed the peculiar institution in territory north and west of the Ohio River. He denied that slavery and freedom were equal and denounced such views "as ignoble teaching. We were proclaiming ourselves political hypocrites before the world, by thus fostering Human Slavery and proclaiming ourselves, at the same time, the sole friends of Human Freedom." After reminding his audience that Judge Douglas had been a foremost defender of the Missouri Compromise, he went on to outline what was to be the theme of the Lincoln-Douglas debates in 1858. "The theory of our government is Universal Freedom. 'All men are created free and equal,' says the Declaration of Independence. The word 'Slavery' is not found in the Constitution."

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[101]Speech at Bloomington, September 26, 1854, in *ibid.*, 234-40.

[102]Speech at Peoria, Illinois, October 16, 1854, in *ibid.*, 266.

What about the claim that slaveholders could move their property into the territories in the same way that a northerner moved his hogs or horses? This would be true only if Negroes were the same sort of property but southerners did not treat blacks like horses. Where had the 400,000 free Negroes come from when as property they were worth two million dollars. He answered his own question. "These negroes are free because their owners, in some way and at some time, felt satisfied that the creatures had mind, feeling, souls, family affections, hopes, joys, sorrows--something that made them more than *hogs* or horses."[103]

Lincoln's espousal of the creed of the Declaration of Independence and his recognition of Negroes as fellow humans, while extremely important in understanding his later policies, did not mean that he considered the Afro-Americans his equal. Speaking at Peoria in October, he reiterated that he was "National" in all positions and eschewed sectionalism. He wanted "to MAKE and to KEEP the distinction between the EXISTING institution, and the EXTENSION of it. . . ." He hated slavery because it made Americans hypocrites and had led some to assault the ideals of the Declaration of Independence. But he emphasized again that he had no prejudice against southerners, admitting that northerners were equally responsible for the existence of the institution and confessing he could "not blame them for not doing what I should not know how to do myself. If all earthly power were given me, I should not know what to do, as to the existing institution." His first impulse would be to free all slaves and colonize them in

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[103]Speech at Springfield, Illinois, October 4, 1854, in *ibid.*, 240-47.

Liberia but although this was the greatest hope, he realized that it could not be implemented immediately. If mass, sudden removal were not possible, would it be possible to simply free them and keep them as "underlings"? For his part, although he could not condemn the slaveholder, he could never become one. Was the solution freedom with political and social equality? "My own feelings will not admit of this," said Lincoln, "and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people will not." The able politician added, "Whether this feeling accords with justice and sound judgment, is not the sole question, if indeed it is any part of it. A universal feeling whether well or ill-founded, can not be safely disregarded."[104]

Lincoln had moved a long way from his youthful denunciations of the people as "the lawless and mobocratic spirit" and revealed much greater sensitivity to the "universal feeling" of the northern electorate. Certainly the collapse of the Whig party in 1852 gave him greater latitude and freed him from the constraint of old Whig thinking as well as from a party that had been a permanent minority in Illinois.[105]

During his more famous debates with Douglas in 1858, Lincoln reiterated his support for the Declaration of Independence, his opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska act and the Dred Scott decision, and also his recognition of Negro inferiority. His defense of the Declaration did not mean that all men were created equal, but "it

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[104]Speech at Peoria, Illinois, October 16, 1854, in *ibid.*, 248, 255-56, 266.

[105]Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness*, 4.

does mean to declare all men are equal in some respects"--these were life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The Afro-American was not the equal of whites in color and "perhaps not in many other respects; still, in the right to put into his mouth the bread that his own hands have earned, he is the equal of every other man, white or black. . . . All I ask for the negro is that if you do not like him, let him alone. If God gave him but little, that little let him enjoy."[106] He explained to Sangamon county representative James N. Brown, that his views of Negro equality and slavery were no different from those of Henry Clay. Both viewed the principle of the Declaration to be the foundation of government. "But it does not follow that social and political equality between whites and blacks, *must* be incorporated, because slavery must *not*. The declaration does not so require."[107] Finally Lincoln attacked the Dred Scott decision because it nationalized slavery, threatening the free states. He voiced northern fears "that there was a *tendency*, if not a conspiracy among those who have engineered this slavery question for the last four or five years, to make slavery perpetual and universal in this nation."[108] In his "House Divided" speech at Springfield in June, 1858, he implied that a

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[106]Lincoln at Springfield, July 17, 1858, in Angle, *Created Equal?*, 82. For a typical passionate defense of the Declaration of Independence, see the Chicago *Press and Tribune*, August 21, 1858, in *ibid.*, 100-101.

[107]Lincoln to James N. Brown, October 18, 1858, in Basler, *Collected Works*, III, 327-28.

[108]Lincoln's Reply to Douglas in the Ottawa Debate, Chicago *Press and Tribune*, August 26, 1858, in Angle, *Created Equal?*, 121.

conspiracy existed between Stephen A. Douglas, Franklin Pierce, Roger B. Taney, and James Buchanan.[109] Contrary to Douglas's assertion, Lincoln did not want "to set the states at war with one another, to make all institutions uniform, and set the niggers and white people to marrying together."[110] There was no danger that Kentuckians would march into Illinois "with a nigger stuck on every bayonet . . . and force them upon us." Similarly the people of Illinois would never attack Kentucky. But the only thing required to achieve nationalization of slavery was the Dred Scott decision which denied the right of a state to exclude slavery under the Constitution. Judge Douglas by supporting the court supported nationalization. On the other hand, Lincoln would follow the example set by Jefferson and Jackson, particularly the latter, who had defied the Supreme Court over the issue of the national bank. Douglas was also a member of the Democratic party whose Cincinnati platform denied Congress the right to create such a bank despite the ruling of the court.[111]

Although Lincoln frequently cited Clay as his authority, he neglected to say that it was the Kentucky senator's firm conviction that emancipation without colonization would make "collisions and conflicts between the two races inevitable, and after shocking scenes

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[109]House Divided Speech, Springfield, June 16, 1858, Illinois *State Journal*, June 18, 1858, in *ibid.*, 6.

[110]Ottawa: Lincoln's Reply, Chicago *Press and Tribune*, August 26, 1858, in *ibid.*, 121.

[111]*Ibid.*, 128-29. In his attack on popular sovereignty Lincoln denied having the "*impudence* to say *the right of people to govern niggers* was the *right of people to govern themselves.*" Speech at Edwardsville, Illinois, September 11, 1858, in Basler, *Collected Works*, III, 94.

of rapine and carnage, the extinction of blacks would take place."[112] While Lincoln agreed with Clay that slavery was regrettable and should be tolerated only because of necessity, Andrew Johnson agreed with Clay that emancipation would result in carnage. Johnson asked if the abolitionists were prepared to free two million Negroes who would terrorize society, if they were prepared to break down the bonds between master and slave, and if they were prepared to promote a servile war and the "entire extirpation of their race in the United States. . . ." He accused John Quincy Adams of trying to give the vote to Negroes in Alexandria and to "place every splay-footed, bandy-shanked, hump-backed, thick-lipped, flat-nosed, woolly-headed, ebon-colored negro in the country upon an equality with the poor white man."[113]

Racism, like any disease, can attack the sufferer with varying forms of virulence. Lincoln had strong racial antipathies but Johnson was a chronic case. Whereas Lincoln was prepared to encourage gradual emancipation with limited civil liberties for blacks in 1854, ten years earlier Johnson had asked Adams if he was "prepared to see the black hands of the negro wreaking in the blood of the white man" or "to see innocent women and children, virtue and beauty, all fall a helpless prey?"[114]

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[112] *Niles' Register*, November 27, 1847.

[113] Speech on the Gag Resolution, January 31, 1844, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 135, 140.

[114] *Ibid.*, 143. Like most racists, Johnson exploited the supposed Negro sexuality and lust to incite prejudice, see Exchange with Palfrey of Massachusetts on the Negro, April 15, 1848, in *ibid.*, 418-20.

According to Johnson, the argument of abolitionists that the majority of whites in the South who had no slaves were opposed to the slaveholder was nonsense. But even he was forced to take issue with James Henry Hammond of South Carolina, who asserted that the menial class and operatives were the "mudsills of society."[115] Johnson angrily reminded him that if slavery should exist it must be for blacks and not whites. It would not do to assume that a man who labors with his hands was a slave. "I am a laborer with my hands," the ex-tailor told Hammond, "and I never considered myself a slave in the acceptation of the term slave in the South." Such arguments did the South infinite harm because the operatives and mechanics were the best defenders of the peculiar institution. Such abuse, however, "has a tendency to raise prejudice and to engender opposition to the institution of slavery itself."[116]

As a senator in 1858 he repeated views that he had held as a congressman in 1849 and on both occasions he argued that the northern mechanics' best friend was the slaveholder who had a large capital investment in labor which forced him to seek new markets and demand higher prices. This demand meant better pay for the northern laborer. Johnson, like de Tocqueville, considered the merchant-capitalist a dangerous new class who held northern laborers in poverty by an iron

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[115] *Cong. Globe*, 35th Cong., 1st Sess., 962.

[116] Speech on the Homestead Bill, May 20, 1858, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 159-60. See also Governor Johnson to William W. Pepper, July 17, 1854, in *ibid.*, II, 236-37, and as senator, Speech on Harper's Ferry Incident, December 12, 1859, in *ibid.*, III, 337-38.

law of economics.[117] Large eastern capitalists with investments in stocks and shares, who "live as drones in the hive, and live on the honey accumulated by the industrious bees," were unanimous in their opposition to higher prices for labor.[118] He believed that "in the absence of negro slavery there must be a class of whites degraded to the position of menials, whose condition in some states of society would be more oppressive than is the bondage of the negro in the South."[119]

Although Johnson tried to remain orthodox in his views of the peculiar institution, he was not considered so by many of his southern Whig and Democratic opponents. Parson Brownlow continually reminded him of his "white basis" proposal[120] and during the campaign against Gentry wrote that Johnson

> appealed to the prejudices and passions of the poor--inquired of the hard-working men of that county [Campbell] how they liked to see their wives and daughters *offset* in enumerating the strength of the county, "by *greasy negro wenches of Shelby, Davidson, Fayette, Sumner* and *Rutherford* counties." He made a real, stirring abolition appeal to the poor and non-slave-holding portion of the crowd . . . to array them against the the rich and especially the owners of large numbers of slaves.[121]

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[117]Speech on Homestead Bill, April 29, 1852, in *ibid.*, II, 17; de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 528-31.

[118]Speech on Tariff and Oregon, June 20, 1846, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 324. Compare Speech at Evans' Crossroads, May 26, 1849, in *ibid.*, 499-500, with Speech on Homestead Bill, May 20, 1858, in *ibid.*, III, 158-65.

[119]Speech at Bristol [Democratic Version], May 29, 1852, in *ibid.*, II, 277-78.

[120]Knoxville *Whig*, May 5, June 16, 1855.

[121]*Ibid.*, April 12, 1856; Excerpt from Speech at Clinton [July 13, 1853], in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, II, 166. Johnson also

Whatever political or demagogic motives[122] Johnson may have had, his record on slavery is fairly consistent, if not monotonous. In 1844, he denied the right of Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia[123] and in 1849 specifically attacked Lincoln's proposals for gradual compensated emancipation in the District. To Johnson this was a bill designed to use federal funds and turn Negroes loose in the country. If permitted there it would soon be applied to the states, resulting in a debt of twelve hundred million dollars.[124]

In his Senate campaign of 1854 and 1858, Lincoln had attacked the Kansas-Nebraska bill, the Lecompton Constitution and the Dred Scott decision, but Johnson supported all three. Whereas Lincoln scoffed at the concept of popular sovereignty, Johnson, as a longtime admirer of General Cass, its first proponent, continually defended it.[125] Although governor of Tennessee when the Kansas-Nebraska bill was brought before Congress, Johnson lost little opportunity to defend it after his election to the Senate. "I know that with some it is considered to be the great error of my life that I stand forth the advocate of

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attacked Southern desire to annex Cuba in Speech to New York Land Reformers, May 27, 1852, in *ibid.*, 60, but six years later declared "let us embrace Cuba." Speech on Homestead Bill, May 20, 1858, in *ibid.*, III, 162.

[122]Johnson always vehemently denied that he was a demagogue. A typical example of his sensitivity to this oft-repeated charge, Exchange with John Bell, February 24, 1858, in *ibid.*, 84-86.

[123]Speech on Gag Resolution, January 31, 1844, in *ibid.*, I, 183-85.

[124]Speech at Evans' Crossroads, [May 26, 1849], in *ibid.*, 505-6.

[125]For his early admiration of General Cass, see On Admission of Texas and Other Matters, January 21, 1845, in *ibid.*, I, 188-89.

popular sovereignty, and of the lodgment of power being with the people." If he was in error, he wished to remain so because "I have become too old, I have gone too far in the advocacy of this great doctrine of free government, and man being the source of power and capable of governing himself, now to retrace my steps."[126] Those who opposed popular sovereignty belonged to the party that was separated from and considered itself superior to the mass of the people.

Did his support of popular sovereignty mean that, like Douglas, he was opposed to the Lecompton Constitution? He denied it. It would, he insisted, take a man with a magnifying glass or a microscope which could multiply a million times, to find anything in his speeches which proved that he favored a free state Kansas. His vote in favor of Lecompton was not because he had been instructed, but because he believed it was right and would end the agitation in the country.[127] He denied there was any conflict with his previous views but was forced to justify his actions with a defense of conventions, which he had previous considered undemocratic. Now, however, "the convention was the representative of the sovereign people; it was, in fact, the people assembled in their highest political attitude, acting in convention to prescribe the nature and character of their institutions." This gathering which represented the people had the power to submit either part, all or none of its handiwork for popular vote. He

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[126]Speech on Popular Sovereignty and the Right of Instruction, February 13, 1858, in *ibid.*, III, 59.

[127]In 1841, as one of the "Immortal Thirteen," he had deprived Tennessee of all representation in the Senate because the Whigs objected to instruction.

confessed that had he been a delegate he would have submitted the constitution to a popular vote, but lamely added that "the people were present in the convention, and they determined this point for themselves." This meant that the only function of Congress was to admit a state provided its government was republican.[128]

Although Johnson had difficulty defending the Lecompton Constitution and popular sovereignty, he had no problem in dealing with the Republican interpretation of the Declaration of Independence. It was an Illinois senator, Lyman Trumbull, who became the object of his scorn and ridicule.[129] Johnson said that no one stripped of party prejudice could possibly think that Jefferson, a slave-owner, considered Negroes were created equal. If that were so, why did the Constitution, devised to fulfill the Declaration, count blacks as three-fifths for purposes of representation and why did it include a Fugitive Slave law? "Will you," he queried, "when the free colored population goes into the Territories, make them equal in all respects with the white population?" If Trumbull would not he should not clamor so much about popular sovereignty and equality of man.

Turning to the Illinois constitution, the Greeneville Plebeian

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[128]Speech on Popular Sovereignty and Right of Instruction, February 23, 1858, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 59-60, 66-67.

[129]If anti-Nebraska Democrats had not been so reluctant to vote for an old Whig, and if the governor of Illinois had not entered the race, the object of Johnson's scorn might well have been Lincoln. The latter, although initially polling the most votes, persuaded his supporters to switch their votes to Trumbull in order to defeat the regular Democrat when it was obvious he could not win himself. Lincoln to Elihu Washburne, [January 6], February 9, 1855, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 303-6.

pointed out that although its preamble included the first paragraph of the Declaration, the laws of the state clearly demonstrated that Negroes were not considered to have been created equal. Afro-Americans could not belong to the militia, they were disenfranchised, they could not testify in court against a white man, they could not intermarry, and they could not stay in a county unless they posted a bond as surety that they would not end up on poor relief. What sort of equality was this? Johnson supposed they enjoyed liberty, but they were deprived of privileges and denied the rights of freedom. Free blacks suffered more than southern slaves because such laws made them slaves. "He is a slave, in fact, without a master; and I think his is a great deal worse condition than that of the slave who has a master."[130] Johnson's assessment was the same as that of de Tocqueville, who had noted twenty years earlier, "Race prejudice seems stronger in those states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists, and nowhere is it more intolerant than in those states where slavery was never known."[131] It is significant that although Johnson owned a few slaves, the peculiar institution never sank deep roots into the soil of East Tennessee.

Trumbull responded with the Republican view that there were "natural rights" and "political rights." Although it was an abstract

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[130]Speech on Harper's Ferry Incident, December 12, 1859, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 319-30. Modern studies of the northern free Negroes support Johnson's contention. Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago, 1961); Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana, 1967); V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal: The Middlewest and the Negro During the Civil War* (Chicago, 1970), 1-9.

[131]de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 315.

truth that all men were created equal, society, in forming its political governments, discriminated. Johnson retorted that when Illinois formed its government it only considered all white men as equal. Africans were equal with Africans but "inferior to the white race" and the fact that they were transported to America did not make them equal.

The unfortunate senator from Illinois was forced to concede that although he believed the federal government was sovereign over a state, he would ensure neither women nor Negroes equality "under ordinary circumstances," nor would he agree to the admission of a state populated by free blacks or Indians, preferring to keep the races separate. He had admitted that God had made the difference between the two races and so Johnson concluded "all this clamor and claptrap about liberty, and man being created equal, falls to the ground, and the construction which should be put on the Declaration of Independence is clear and unobscured."[132]

Unlike the southern fire-eaters,[133] Johnson did not repudiate the doctrines of the Declaration of Independence. He believed that man could be elevated, could increase his inherent divinity and, as he became more godlike in character so he was capable of self-government. "Let us go on elevating our people, perfecting our institutions," he urged the Senate in 1858, "until democracy shall reach such a point of perfection that we can exclaim with truth that the voice of the people

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[132]Speech on Harper's Ferry Incident, December 12, 1859, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 319-30.

[133]Knoxville *Whig*, October 18, 1856; Charleston *Mercury*, November 7, 1856.

is the voice of God." And he quoted the opening paragraph of the Declaration to Alabama senator Clement C. Clay, who had attacked the extension of democracy, to show that government was not instituted solely for the benefit of property but was to guarantee men life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.[134] For the tailor of Tennessee, there was no contradiction in his criticism of Trumbull and his defense of Jefferson. Whereas Lincoln and the Republicans recognized the Negro as human, Johnson did not. He agreed with Stephen A. Douglas that the Negro was innately inferior. There was no problem therefore in his willingness to espouse radical democratic positions and at the same time support slavery. He was positive that the Democratic party could not be conservative. In 1856, while campaigning for Buchanan, he told a Tennessee audience: "I say also that I am no conservative." If this meant the maintenance of an existing institution or form of government in opposition to all reform or radical change "then he did not belong to that class." Conservatism united those who already had power and who wanted to keep it from the people.[135] Three years later, he defined the Democratic party as "radical and progressive." He informed the party faithful, "No good had ever been done, no great principle ever established by a conservative party."[136]

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[134]Speech on Homestead Bill, May 19, 1858, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 152-54; Knoxville *Whig*, June 5, 1858; J. B. Brownlow to Temple, January 16, 1894, Temple Papers.

[135]A good, brief exposition of Johnson's views on the compatibility of slavery and democracy may be found in Address to the State Democratic Convention [January 8, 1856], in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, II, 352-55.

[136]Speech at Bristol [Democratic Version], May 21, 1859, in *ibid.*, III, 278.

De Tocqueville's concern that Americans were so obsessed with equality that they would sacrifice their liberty was unfounded in Lincoln's case. It was his concern with liberty that made possible his considering the Negro human and defending his right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Lincoln's recognition of blacks as human meant that with the onslaught of war he would be able to consider them as a human problem. But Johnson did represent the fears expressed by the Frenchman in his critique of Jacksonian democracy. The Plebeian, with his obsession for equality for white men, was prepared to sacrifice liberty, in this case for Negroes.

While Johnson exhibited paternalistic concern for his own slaves, essentially blacks as chattels were part of an institution which he, as a member of an insecure artisan class, defended passionately. His apparent schizophrenia was shared by the majority of Americans, North and South. Thus he was able to espouse radical views on democracy yet support the gag resolution against abolitionists. As a congressman, governor, and senator, he continually advocated such "d---d Andy Johnsonisms" as the popular election of president, vice-president, and senators.[137] He believed that such a program would increase the divinity of man, an argument which he had first advanced in 1845.

On his election to the governorship in 1853, Johnson used the occasion to spell out his theory of democracy. For the man who had fought his way from runaway apprentice-tailor to governor had a world

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[137]J. B. Brownlow to Temple, January 1, 1896, Temple Papers.

view of history in which from the time man had formed social communities there had been a struggle between those who believed that power should be held by the few and those who believed that it should rest in the hands of the masses. Hamilton and Madison represented the struggle in the constitutional convention and it was continued by the Federalists and Democratic Republicans. Now it was time for the Democratic party to return to first principles, adopting once again the "republican simplicity and economy" that Jefferson had preached.

If the Democratic party was divided, Johnson belonged to the division "which is progressive . . . and which holds that man is capable, when it *becomes necessary*, of altering or amending the law and the Constitution, so as to conform to his advanced and constantly advancing social and intellectual condition." The governor admitted that man was not perfect but was capable of perfection. However, he revealed his feelings of social insecurity in his criticism of college education, and teachers as "bigotted and supercilious on account of their literary attainments, and assumed [*sic*] superior information on most subjects" and accused them of imbuing their students with ideas of their own superiority and of despising the great mass of mankind. Despite these anti-intellectual attitudes, Johnson was convinced that democracy--the people's ability to govern themselves--was inherent in man, enabling him to reason and separating him from the rest of animal creation. Democracy was man's intelligence, the "*Divinity of Man*," which could be enlarged making him more godlike. What was the instrument to ensure this Divine man? The Democratic party. "I hold that the Democratic party proper, of the whole world,

and especially of the United States, has undertaken the *political redemption of man*, and sooner or later, the great work will be accomplished."

Christianity and Democracy were going along converging lines. Politics was equated with a great Calvinist battle and for Johnson, "Democracy progressive, corresponds also to the Church Militant: both fighting against error--one in the moral, the other in the political field." Man was capable of perfection in religion and politics and, "At this point . . . the Church Militant will give way and cease to exist, and the Church Triumphant begin: at the same point, Democracy progressive will give way and cease to exist, and Theocracy begin." Thus the governor concluded, Democracy was a ladder similar to that seen by Jacob in his vision, reaching from the poorest on earth to God in Heaven, upon which "all discerning young men . . . might find a position somewhere between the upper and lower extremes . . . commensurate, at least, with their virtue and merit, if not equal to their inflated ambition, which they could occupy with honor to themselves and advantage to their country."[138] His Jacob's Ladder address vividly recalls the twelfth-century wall painting in a Surrey church which depicts a ladder stretching from hell to heaven with men struggling to ascend while others are forked into the pit. With Johnson, however, there is no hell. It is a secular millennialism and man is capable of reaching perfection on earth so that "*the voice of the people is the voice of God.*"[139]

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[138]First Inaugural Address, October 17, 1853, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, II, 172-77.

[139]*Ibid.*, 176.

Was Johnson merely playing the politician and was this simply political rhetoric? Certainly his old Whig rival, Oliver P. Temple, later asserted that the governor sought to make Christianity and the Democrats of Tennessee analogous, as exemplified in Johnson. For Temple the speech was absurdity--the work of a crank. "It was in fact a ridiculous production, mere idle vaporing."[140] But were the governor's efforts mere political posing, partisan waffling about a "pseudo-philosophy"?[141] It has been suggested that ideas expressed often enough and repeated with enough conviction are eventually believed by the speaker even if the audience is skeptical.[142]

Johnson's conviction that Christianity and democracy were linked did not originate with him.[143] His millennial views were not unusual except that unlike such groups as John Humphrey Noyes's perfectionists or the Fourierites, Johnson believed that the millennium could be achieved inside the system and with reform of existing governmental institutions. Millennial beliefs were widely held during this period, particularly in the northeast and northwest. It was here that ultraism flourished. A modern student of this nineteenth-century phenomenon has defined it "as a combination of activities, personalities, and attitudes creating a condition of society which could foster

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[140]Temple, *Notable Men*, 381.

[141]Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, II, 183n.

[142]Smith, *Presidency of James Buchanan*, 8.

[143]For example he quotes from a pamphlet advancing essentially the same ideas in the debate on Homestead. This may have been the origin of his "pseudo-philosophy." Speech on the Homestead Bill, May 20, 1858, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 155-56.

experimental doctrines," and which by the 1830's had evolved into perfectionism.[144] Johnson frequently repeated his faith in this "pseudo-philosophy" and there is no reason to doubt his sincerity "that the millenial morning has dawned."[145] Although a God may have implanted the divinity in man, it was man in society and man regardless of religion, who belonged to "the democratic church," which would ensure the extension of democracy for white men and hasten the dawn.[146]

It may well be that his initial belief that the voice of the people represented the voice of God was merely political posturing. Increasingly, however, with each success, Johnson's pose became conviction. The new honor which the people had bestowed on him was further evidence of their trust in him. He assured members of the legislature that he was inspired by true humility which he hoped would characterize his public life and which would be proof of his "REVERENCE and *profound* respect for the *high behest* of a *free* people, who have so far never deserted me, and *God* being willing, I will never desert them."[147] Ironically, the man who had always outmaneuvered his aristocratic enemies with the support of the people would, as president, try

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[144]Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York, 1950), 173, 337.

[145]First Inaugural Address, October 17, 1853, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, II, 176.

[146]Speech on the Admission of Texas and Other Matters, January 21, 1845, in *ibid.*, I, 198.

[147]First Inaugural Address, October 17, 1853, in *ibid.*, II, 183. He repeated these sentiments in his Second Inaugural Address, October 23, 1855, in *ibid.*, 342-43.

once more to gain social acceptability with his aristocratic opponents and would desert his natural supporters.

But during these years his millennial convictions were reinforced by his hatred for an aristocracy which he could not join and which treated him with contempt.[148] Personal rebuff from the Greeneville elite and the scorn of Middle and West Tennessee planters encouraged Johnson to present himself as the Messiah of the middle-class.[149] He loathed and feared the proletariat as much as Jefferson ever did, but he realized that the new capitalist class--"this Boston cod-fish aristocracy"--threatened the mechanic class.[150] How could artisans and farmers, the true aristocracy of America, recover their former position? For Johnson the answer was simple. The federal government should provide land for the homesteader and Johnson fought a long and bitter battle from 1846 to 1860 to achieve his end.[151]

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[148]William L. Haskell told John Bell Brownlow that "if Andy Johnson had had his way he would have been born a snake to crawl in the grass and sting rich men's children." Brownlow to Temple, April 21, 1894; Temple Papers.

[149]Johnson, who considered the Homestead to be a holy cause, told the House that he had nothing to gain personally from the measure, adding significantly, "Our political garments have been divided, and hereafter they will cast lots upon our vesture. . . ." Speech on the Homestead Bill, April 29, 1852; Speech to New York Land Reformers, May 27, 1852, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, II, 48, 59. As a young tailor he had signed himself in his account book as "Jesus Christ Johnson." Johnson Account Book, Photostatic Copy, in Sioussat Papers.

[150]Speech on the Whigs and Expansion, June 5, 1850, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 542; Speech at Shelbyville, June 6, 1853, in *ibid.*, II, 156.

[151]Ironically, his appointment as military governor by Lincoln deprived him of credit for the measure, passed in 1862, which went to the Republicans.

Government homesteads would enable the United States to avoid the example of the Roman Empire where the lack of a middle class had caused its collapse. Everything should be done to build up the middle class because "I want no miserable city rabble on the one hand," the senator echoed Jefferson in 1858, "I want no pampered, bloated, corrupted aristocracy on the other; I want the middle portion of society sustained, and let them have control of Government." He insisted that he opposed agrarianism,[152] which to contemporaries meant a leveling of society. The Homestead Bill would help to ensure the survival of the finest class. "Keep up the middle class, lop off an aristocracy on the one hand, and a rabble on the other; let the middle class maintain the ascendance, let them have the power, and your Government is always secure." He assured the Senate that "mechanics and agriculturalists are honest, industrious and economical." The defeat of the measure would "defeat the object of God himself."[153]

The Plebeian's advocate declared that, "Since the crucifixion of our Savior, emigration has been westward. . . ." It was the Americans' duty and destiny to fill the western lands and once settled the United States would be "the great sensorium" from which American notions of

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[152]Speech on Homestead Bill, May 20, 1858, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 144-47. He had made an earlier denial. Speech at Shelbyville, June 6, 1853, in *ibid.*, II, 155.

[153]Speech on Homestead Bill [Appendix Version], July 25, 1850, in *ibid.*, I, 565. Parson Brownlow did not agree. Knoxville *Whig*, April 26, 1851, June 5, 1858.

religion, government and general knowledge would radiate out to revolutionize "the whole world."[154]

It must be noted, however, that not all contemporaries believed in Johnson's professed love for the middle class. The son of an old enemy, John Bell Brownlow, corresponded with Johnson's old rival Oliver P. Temple. Brownlow recalled visiting a tailor in Washington about 1877, who on hearing his name asked him if he knew either George W. Jones or Andrew Johnson. According to the tailor the two Tennessee congressmen passed his shop everyday and once they came in to select material for suits. Jones, an ex-saddler, was told by the tailor that he should let Johnson make the decision because he informed him, "'you are only a horse tailor, while your coleague [*sic*] is a man tailor.' Instantly, he said, Johnson got mad and told him he was d---d impertinent, while Jones laughed heartily and enjoyed it." Brownlow asked, "Don't it strike you that these incidents really prove that Johnson was really ashamed of having been a working man & all his pretended love for the dear people--bosh?"[155]

With the hostility and disputes between the sections over slavery increasing, as de Tocqueville had forewarned, and paranoia spread, it was inevitable that Homestead became involved in the dispute. Increasingly the southern leadership, if not the southern people, denounced Homestead. It was squatter sovereignty, a threat to the

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[154]Speech on Homestead Bill, May 20, 1858, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 144-47.

[155]J. B. Brownlow to Temple, January 17, 1894, Temple Papers. Earlier Brownlow maintained, "By nature he [Johnson] was an aristocrat." Brownlow to Temple, April 19, 1892, Temple Papers.

rights of slave states, and encouragement to settlers from free states.[156] Thus, Johnson, in the battle for his holy cause, was forced to rely more and more on Whig and Republican support. But surprisingly Lincoln showed little interest in the measure; the best that can be said on his behalf is that "he was not opposed to Homestead," and that as president he did sign the bill into law.[157]

Why did a politician who considered the Democratic party the only "church" collaborate on Homestead with opponents such as George W. Julian and Horace Greeley?[158] Increasingly Johnson was concerned with the safety of the Union--the most perfect government which man had ever devised and which was capable of perfection. As early as 1844, he had detected a conspiracy against the Union and informed the House that the North was trying to secede.[159] As sectional discord mounted Johnson continued to call for a united South against northern aggression, but to preserve the Union, not dismember it.[160] As for southern fears of free soil settlers, he told the Senate in 1858 that

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[156]Speech on Homestead Bill, May 20, 1858, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 149.

[157]Helene Sara Zahler, *Eastern Workingmen and National Land Policy, 1829-1862* (New York, 1942), 105, 175.

[158]George W. Julian, *Political Recollections, 1840-1872* (Miami, 1969), 103-4; Johnson to Horace Greeley [New York, N.Y.], December 15, 1851, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 631-32.

[159]Speech on the Gag Resolution, January 31, 1844, in *ibid.*, 141. "[W]hen we come to examine the subject, I am forced to come to the conclusion that there is a deliberate design to dissolve the Union."

[160]Speech at Nashville, July 15, 1856, in *ibid.*, II, 405, 419.

that he was "as good a southern man as any one who lives within the borders of the South," but "I care not where he goes, so that he is under the protection of our stars and stripes." For Johnson, the agitation over slavery would be ended by Homestead which was a national program which could unite North and South. It would attach people to the soil, make them lovers of their government, reconcile both sections, "and we shall not have invidious doctrines preached to stir up bad feelings in either section."[161] Johnson was aware that the vast majority of northerners shared his belief in the Negro's inferiority and did not support abolition. An Indiana clergyman in 1852 explained, "It is not *Negro* slavery, but it is their *own* independence, which they think they see, vitally affected in the present disposal or distribution of the Public Domain, which they had hoped would have been kept sacred by their Congressional guardians, as Homes for their children." He warned Johnson that although Congress should be respected the people saw only concern for states' rights, not individual rights, and as a result that respect "is greatly, if not entirely diminished."[162] By 1852, Johnson also was concerned about the growing power of southern extremists. He had supported Houston over Pierce and obviously considered himself the ideal vice-presidential candidate. But the party's adoption of the Resolutions of 1798 and 1799 was a setback for compromise Democrats. "For those resolution[s] when examined closely furnish the very *germ* of nullification and disunion which gives the

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[161]Speech on Homestead Bill, May 20, 1858, in *ibid*, III, 165.

[162]James Elliot to Johnson, March 22, 1852, in *ibid.*, II, 25-26.

ultras to the South a decided advantage over the Union men--and there is a Spirit existing among the ultras to crush ev'ry union man in the whole South."[163] Although he was confident that the Union would survive without his singing its praises and confident that factionalists would be defeated because he believed it was in the interests of the states to preserve the Union,[164] twelve months later he was worried because "the idea is obtaining too much currency that this Union is to be dissolved." Just because the South could not get its constitutional rights, he did not intend to become a dissolutionist. He would defend the Constitution that he had sworn to uphold. "So far as I am concerned, I intend to stand by the Constitution and its guarantees as the ark of our safety, as the palladium of our civil and our religious liberty; I intend to cling to it as the shipwrecked mariner clings to the last plank when night and the tempest close around him."[165]

These Unionist sentiments are similar to those expressed by Lincoln and Douglas. During the campaign of 1858, Lincoln's ability to win more votes than the Little Giant was, however, to make him not only a viable candidate for the Republicans in 1860 but also the spokesman of northern Union sentiment. If Douglas and the Democrats had won the popular vote in Illinois in 1858, Lincoln would never have

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[163]Johnson to Milligan, July 20, 1852, in *ibid.*, 67.

[164]Speech on Transcontinental Railroads, January 25, 1859, in *ibid.*, III, 232.

[165]Speech on Harper's Ferry Incident, December 12, 1859, in *ibid.*, 340.

been chosen by the Republicans as their presidential nominee because there would have been no proof that he was able to carry his own state. Thus it was defeat which helped him towards the presidency. In 1848 he had failed to win re-nomination for Congress partly because of his opposition to the war with Mexico but also because he had deserted the founding father and the Whig party's perennial nominee, Henry Clay. Lincoln supported the Young Indian movement started during the 1840's by southern Whigs such as Alexander H. Stephens and Robert Toombs of Georgia. He backed the winner for the presidency but lost re-nomination for the only Whig district in the state; his actions resulted in the district's going to the Democrats.[166]

Johnson always backed the losing side in his party's struggles over the presidential nomination. Even General Cass, the Democratic nominee whom he had enthusiastically supported, was defeated in 1848. Each time, however, Johnson rolled up victory after victory, especially with the support of the "copperas-breeches, one-gallused crowd."[167] Even when he was gerrymandered out of his seat in Congress in 1853, he outmaneuvered his Whig and Democratic opponents and to the surprise (and disgust) of many, he won the party's endorsement as governor. He won reelection in 1855 and by this time was not only able to dictate his own elevation to the Senate but also the choice of his fellow

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[166]Rayback, *Free Soil*, 78; Riddle, *Congressman*, 1-3, 116-25, 128, 142. Lincoln's claim that he had always fought for Henry Clay, "my beau ideal of a statesman," was not true. Ottawa: Lincoln's Reply, August 26, 1858, in Angle, *Created Equal?*, 130.

[167]J. B. Brownlow to Temple, September 8, 1892, Temple Papers.

senator.[168] Johnson's selection of A. O. P. Nicholson was dictated as much by personal friendship as it was by his hatred for Aaron V. Brown and Isham Harris. Thus the man who had fought and defeated his political enemies now sought to maneuver himself into position as the party's nominee for the presidential election of 1860. But the senator from Illinois was to play a crucial role for both parties. Douglas was not only the major stumbling block for Johnson, but it was his prestige, fame, and authority which had brought the obscure Springfield lawyer back into politics and given him a national reputation so that he was a major contender for his party's nomination. The role played by Stephen A. Douglas would be crucial for both men--especially for Johnson.

Apart from this mutual interest in the activities of the Little Giant, and despite their many political differences, the Railsplitter and the tailor shared a devotion for the Constitution and it was as Unionists that they sought their parties' nominations in 1860. Ironically, the man who had the poorer record was victorious and the man who had always known success tasted defeat. Out of that success and that defeat, with the Union disintegrating about them, both men moved onto the national scene to join the long, bitter struggle to save the states--united.

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[168] J. B. Brownlow to Temple, April 19, 1892, Temple Papers.

CHAPTER IV

"THINGS FALL APART, THE CENTRE CANNOT HOLD": THE ELECTION OF 1860

> As the election draws near, intrigues grow more active and agitation is more lively and wider spread. The citizens divide up into the several camps each of which takes its name from its candidate. The whole nation gets into a feverish state, the election is the daily theme of comment in the newspapers and private conversation, the object of every action and the subject of every thought, and the sole interest for the moment.
>
> Alexis de Tocqueville*

As the nation prepared itself for the presidential election of 1860, numerous politicians scrambled to hold the center and prevent the Union from falling apart. Two of many men seeking the nomination of their respective parties as moderates were Andrew Johnson and Abraham Lincoln. Other moderates, chiefly in the South, and many old Whigs and Know Nothings were also casting about for a leader to unite the nation and quiet the sectional discord. Despite defeats in the senatorial campaigns of 1854 and 1858, and an unsuccessful bid for the vice-presidential nomination in 1856, Lincoln was widely supported in the midwest as the most likely conservative candidate for the Republicans. That the Tennessee senator was considered a prominent southern aspirant for the Democratic nomination is evidenced by his portrait in a national magazine. It included a short biographical sketch of his steady rise from mayor of Greeneville in 1830 to the

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*_Democracy in America_, 123.

Senate in 1857.[1] It succinctly and accurately concluded that, "In politics he is claimed as a National Democrat."[2]

A grim face, with the stern frown that all politicians of the nineteenth century were confident transformed them into statesmen, glares out at the reader. To what extent does this reflect the true personality of the man? Before venturing any analysis it must be stressed that unfortunately there is very little evidence about his personal life. During the Confederate occupation of Greeneville many of Johnson's papers were stolen and destroyed,[3] and perhaps the heavy hand of the family censor has obliterated virtually all correspondence between Johnson and his wife.[4]

Despite the tentative conclusions that can be drawn from the scraps of evidence, according to reports of some contemporaries, Johnson emerges as a Jekyll and Hyde character. R. M. Barton, who was born in Greeneville and whose parents were friends of the Johnson family,

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[1]Other southerners included in the group portrait were Howell Cobb, Jefferson Davis, James L. Orr, Sam Houston, Robert M. T. Hunter, James H. Hammond, and Robert Toombs.

[2]*Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, April 21, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 342.

[3]A letter of April, 1854, to his son Robert, was endorsed by an unknown author on February 13, 1863: "This letter is written by the notorious traitor, Andy Johnson, whilst Governor of Tennessee--I got it from a number of others contained in a trunk of his, which was captured by our troops at Greeneville where Johnson resided--This letter is a fair specimen of Johnson's grammar & orthography and good hard sense." Johnson to Robert Johnson, April 16, 1854, in *ibid.*, II, 232n.

[4]In a letter to his son the senator ended by writing, "Tell your mother I have this moment received her letter and will write So[o]n[.]" Neither letter has been found. Johnson to Robert Johnson, December 21, 1858, in *ibid.*, III, 201.

recalled a kindly Dr. Jekyll: "a good and kindly man, a true and devoted husband and father, a good neighbour, and true and steadfast friend, liberal, kind and forgiving, a defender of the helpless and oppressed."[5] In this defense Judge Barton was carried away by his enthusiasm.[6]

Many others described a character that resembled Mr. Hyde. Certainly, most of Johnson's associates would not recognize the man described by the judge. Parson Brownlow not only speculated that the Greeneville plebeian was the illegitimate son of Dallas Haywood[7] but he also noticed that Johnson's forehead was "low and flat, having the marks of a roguish negro." Not content with these dark speculations about ancestry, he also asserted that Johnson whipped his wife and because of his dalliance in the brothels of Nashville, had contracted venereal disease.[8]

The Whig editor's son, John Bell Brownlow, inherited his father's dislike for their Greeneville opponent. Several decades later, in a lengthy correspondence with Oliver P. Temple, John sought to denigrate Johnson's influence and stature both as a local and national politician.[9] He also

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[5]St. Petersburg [Florida] *Times*, February 23, 1927.

[6]Barton's article was a rebuttal of George Creel's attack on Johnson published in *Collier's Magazine*, November 27, 1926.

[7]Jonesboro *Whig*, March 29, 1843.

[8]*Ibid.*, August 29, 1843; see also Ralph W. Haskins, "Internecine Strife in Tennessee: Andrew Johnson Versus Parson Brownlow," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XXIV (1965), 321-40.

[9]"No class of people has as much ground for despising the man," as Tennessee Republicans, wrote John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple,

referred to Johnson's unhappy home life, reporting that,

> R. R. Butler told me Johnson had never had any affection for his wife and children, that he did not eat at the same table with them, that wife and children stood in constant fear of him, that he was the biggest tyrant in his family he ever heard of. W. D. Williams says the same.[10]

Were these merely the scandalous attacks of embittered opponents? There is no proof that Johnson whipped his wife and certainly none that he was syphilitic, but there is evidence that it was not a happy family. Married at the age of nineteen to the seventeen-year-old daughter of a local cobbler, Johnson assumed parental responsibility within fifteen months of the nuptials. Following the birth of his beloved daughter Martha, he was father to three more children, Charles, Mary, and Robert, by the time he was twenty-six. The year following Robert's birth in February 22, 1834, Johnson was elected to the Tennessee legislature. There were no additional members until the year he was threatened with political oblivion when he was gerrymandered out of his congressional district by the Whigs. The birth of the last child, affectionately called "Frank," on August 5, 1852,[11] may have been pure coincidence. It may also be coincidental that four of the five Johnson children were conceived prior to their father's entrance into the political arena and the last when he was apparently due to leave it. However, it is possible that the ambitious mayor of Greeneville found his wife was

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July 4, 1846. See also Brownlow to Temple, August 22, 1892, and January 21, 1894, Temple Papers.

[10]Brownlow to Temple, February 3, 1894, in *ibid.*

[11]Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, Appendix I, 634-35.

a political liability and certainly not socially acceptable to the elite with whom he was now associating. Whatever young Eliza may have done to educate her husband,[12] it seems that her horizons were bounded by the town of Greeneville and East Tennessee. Consciousness of Eliza's lack of education and social graces may explain why Johnson took Martha with him to Washington and ensured that she had a sound education including music, drawing, French, and Latin.[13] He was concerned also that Martha should move in the right social set and acquire refinement--as much as Washington could permit a congressman's daughter. He was prepared even to sink his feelings against James K. Polk for Martha's sake, reminding his fellow Tennessean, "You must say to Mrs. Polk I Shall expect the attention She promised to my daughter at the Georgetown--She will confer a favor of by giving som little attention to a green Tennessee Sprout--"[14] It was Martha, not Eliza, who was hostess when Johnson moved into the White House.[15] Eliza had stayed in Greeneville when her husband went to the legislature. And while Andy was in Nashville, claimed Parson Brownlow, he sported in the brothels of Water Street.[16] After his election to Congress, his wife remained in

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[12]Speech at Dalton, Georgia, [August 18, 1858], in *ibid.*, II, 320.

[13]Account with Miss English's Female Seminary, February 12, 1845, in *ibid.*, I, 410.

[14]Johnson to James K. Polk, April 9, 1845, in *ibid.*, 213.

[15]Margarita Spalding Gerry, "Andrew Johnson in the White House: Being the Reminiscences of William H. Crook," *Century Magazine*, LXXVI, 1908), 655-66. Crook was responsible for collecting all Johnson's letters and for keeping scrap-books for the president.

[16]Jonesboro *Whig*, August 17, 1842.

East Tennessee, did not move to Nashville during his two terms as governor of the state, and did not join him during his time in the Senate. But Mrs. Johnson was not the only wife who did not go to Washington with her husband. Abraham Lincoln, on the other hand, upon his election to Congress in 1846, decided to take Mary Todd with him and after leasing his home on October 23, 1847, he, with his wife and two sons, Robert and Eddie, set out for the nation's capital.

Whatever may have been the architect's dreams, Washington in 1847 was a collection of pseudo-classical buildings side by side with squalid huts. Damp and cold in the winter, the city, half-built on the low-lying marshy lands on the Potomac River, was humid and malarial in summer during which time it became a town of poor folks and slaves who could not afford to flee the disease--a disease which was one of many encouraged by the human and animal excrement of the streets. It is not surprising that few women wanted to live in Washington or that Mary Todd decided that it was best for her and the children to stay with her family in Lexington, Kentucky.

Lincoln may not have been sorry to see their departure, which enabled him to concentrate on his congressional business and which removed a sometimes unsettling influence. A modern biographer has well defined their relationship:

> Her whole nature took on a sort of instability as time went on. Devoted, even possessive towards her husband, she was eager to make him happy. But small matters upset her and brought on fits of temper. . . . She suffered violent headaches, known to have been warnings of mental illness, and these sometimes made her utterly unreasonable. Lincoln bore it all as best he could, taking her tongue-lashings, yielding to her whims whenever possible, offering

> excuses to the neighbors, trying to make allowances for the affectionate wife and mother he knew she was at heart.[17]

That Lincoln loved his wife is evident from his letters, as is his concern about her health and behavior. After she left Washington Lincoln wrote to Lexington saying how much he missed her and the children. But then he queried, "are you entirely free from head-ache? That is good--good--considering it is the first spring you have been free from it since we were acquainted."[18] Later when she wanted to rejoin him he asked, "Will you be a *good girl* in all things if I consent? Then come along, and that as *soon* as possible."[19]

Although they were generally happy together, there was an important darker side to the marriage which was influential in shaping Lincoln's character. This has been best summed up in the following manner: "For over the slow fires of misery that he learned to keep banked and under heavy pressure deep within him, his innate qualities of patience, tolerance, forbearance, and forgiveness were tempered and refined."[20] But even Lincoln's "patience, tolerance, forbearance, and forgiveness" were not always enough and the couple were seen to battle in public. Springfield residents must have been shocked at the sight

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[17]Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln*, 90-91. See also Herndon, *Life of Lincoln*, 348-51.

[18]Lincoln to Mary Todd Lincoln, April 16, 1848, in Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 466.

[19]Lincoln to Mary Todd Lincoln, June 12, 1848, in *ibid* , 477.

[20]Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln*, 91.

of Mary Todd chasing her husband with a knife or Lincoln throwing his wife out into the street.[21]

The personal relationship of Andrew and Eliza is more veiled. However, there is a great deal of evidence that although Eliza did not cause Johnson the same problems as Mary caused Lincoln, the Plebeian's oldest son Charles more than made up for this. Charles, and later Robert, sought to emulate their father's formidable drinking capacity.[22] Tragically neither of them could. William D. Williams, son of the "Grand Duke of Lick Creek," was not simply being malicious when he recalled that he "found Charles on the street late at night, dead drunk, & warmed him up & kept him all night, he would have *frozen to death*."[23] In 1858 a desperate father wrote to his son Robert, "I do

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[21]David Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered* (New York, 1956), 54-55.

[22]Johnson once explained to an old friend that he, with three associates, "all got on a *Kinder* of a '*bust*,'--not a big '*drunk*'. . . ." After a visit to the theater and an oyster dinner, "we retired to our 'virtuous couches,'" sleeping until six a.m. "Then rose, and *after* we had taken a drink, felt like *giants refreshed with new wine*.'" Johnson to Blackston McDannel, November 24, 1848, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 464-65. The son of a tailor, who worked for Andrew Johnson from 1838 to 1842, later recalled that his father had defended the ex-president, informing him that Johnson "drunk or Sober . . . never forgot a friend. . . ." When Johnson was president he made his old journeyman-postmaster of Greeneville. J. R. (Dick) Self to Fay W. Brabson, April 12, 1913, Brabson Papers. As governor he refused to support the Tennessee temperance movement's efforts to pass a Maine law and with dry good humor explained that such a law was "in conflict with the spirit, if not the very letter of the Constitution. . . ." To Committee of State Temperance Convention, Nashville, April 20, 1855, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, II, 267. See also John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, September 8, 1892, August 14, [1893?], December 15, 1893, Temple Papers. According to William Crook, Johnson was not a heavy drinker. Gerry, "Johnson in the White House," 654. Lincoln is reported to have said, "Andy ain't a drunkard," Hugh McCullogh, *Men and Measures of Half a Century* (New York, 1888), 373.

[23]W. D. Williams to O. P. Temple, April 5, 1892, Temple Papers.

hope, hope [*sic*] that Charles is at his business and Sober."[24] Just over a month later, he wrote again, "I of Course was pained to hear how your brother was demeaning himself-- . . . I have done my duty and feel that I have nothing more incumbet on me as a father--God knows I have done all that I could to induce him to make a man of him self and have failed so far--"[25] Two years later Robert and Charles attended the Charleston convention and while Robert worked for his father's nomination Charles went on a drinking spree. After finding his brother by "mere accident," they both set out for Tennessee. Proud of his ability to set Charles "about straight" before reaching Greeneville, Robert was to be disappointed: "for no sooner had he got home, than he went to drinking and is still at it, and I presume will not quit until it compels him to--"[26]

Robert, who suffered from hemorrhaging of the lungs,[27] was also fond of a drink. Later John Bell Brownlow would complain about the fatherly affection which made Johnson retain Robert as a colonel although he was "always in the rear of the army--drunk." Brownlow believed

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[24]Johnson to Robert Johnson, December 26, 1858, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 204.

[25]Johnson to Robert Johnson, February 3, 1859, in *ibid.*, 247. Charles was a self-confessed hedonist. Charles Johnson to Johnson, February 19, 1860, in *ibid.*, 435-36.

[26]Robert Johnson to Johnson, May 8, 1860, in *ibid.*, 589. Contrast these family worries with his intimate friendship with Pennsylvanian Rachael Burr and which continued after her marriage. Johnson to Rae Burr, January 3, 1858, Rae Burr Batten to Johnson, November 23, 1859, April 20, 30, 1860, in *ibid.*, 3-4, 307-8, 568-69, 580.

[27]Johnson to Martha Johnson Patterson, June 25, 1856, in *ibid.*, II, 383-84.

that the military governor displayed "selfishness" in allowing his "Sottish son" to hold the rank for three years.[28]

Johnson obviously wanted his sons to have a better opportunity in life than he had had and was genuinely concerned about their education.[29] Both felt the pressure to emulate their father. He warned Robert that he and Charles should do well in their studies because they would have to rely on their professions. "Our little family have no ancestral honors to rely on nor fortunes to Sustain her, hence the importance of the more effort on our part-- " The newly-elected governor told his son that "You and your broth[er] have it in your power to do much more than your father has ever done. . . ."[30] Evidently it was too much for them. When Robert was a member of the legislature, his father's concern for his success is reflected in a letter advising him how to vote. He warned him, "Bank democrats and democrats who have Banks to control are very much like putting virtuous females in houses of illfame to protect their honesty and purity of character-- They may enter virtuous women: but they never fail to come out prostitutes of the most accomplished order--"[31] But ill health and drink resulted in Robert's committal to a lunatic asylum and his premature death in 1869. His father, who was seeking public office yet again,

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[28]John Bell Brownlow to Temple, June 26, 1893, Temple Papers.

[29]Johnson to A. O. P. Nicholson, September 8, 1845, to Mary Johnson, December 7, 1850, January 8, 1851, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 218-19, 592, 596.

[30]Johnson to Robert Johnson, April 16, 1854, in *ibid.*, II, 230.

[31]Johnson to Robert Johnson, October 20, 1859, in *ibid.*, III, 303.

briefly interrupted his campaign on hearing of his son's death.[32]

The advice Johnson gave was influenced by the distrust he had for fellow politicians[33] and by his determination that his children have opportunities which had been denied him. When his younger daughter was a student in the Rogersville Female Academy, her father urged her to "Learn how to write a good hand and good composition--" and warned

> in making up your acquaintance among strangers, be careful who you make intermit friends--have but few if any secret keepers or in other words have no secrets to keep. To day persons are friendly to morrow they burst into as many pieces as a touchmenot--The true policy is to be friendly with all and too friendly with none--[34]

A letter written to his older daughter, Martha, in 1856, sheds further light on the family. Johnson had hoped that Charles had "reached a turning point in his history and that he will yet do well." He had taken some trouble to help his son, perhaps setting him up in the pharmaceutical business.[35] The obvious love for his youngest son, Andrew, was combined

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[32]By 1868 Robert was incarcerated in the Washington lunatic asylum and in his diary noted he could not "return home--for I have none." Robert Johnson's diary from 7th July 1868-[December 14, 1868], Johnson Papers. (For particularly poignant entries, see Thursday, July 23, Sunday, July 26, Thursday, October 27, Sunday, December 6, Monday, December 14, 1868.) See also Winston, *Andrew Johnson*, 494. Charles had been killed six years earlier in an accident falling off his horse in Nashville.

[33]He was not known for his affection by his fellow politicians, who would have agreed with Johnson's Democratic rival, Isham Harris, who told John Bell Brownlow "I do not believe he ever forgave any man whom he once disliked." John Bell Brownlow to Temple, January 1, 1896, Temple Papers; David M. DeWitt, "Vice-President Andrew Johnson," Southern Historical Society *Publications*, IX (1905), 8-9.

[34]Johnson to Mary Johnson, December 7, 1850, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 592-93.

[35]Jones, *Life of Andrew Johnson*, 398.

with typical discipline: "Kiss him for his father and tell him he must be a good boy and to love his mother and obey her in all things-- He must be broke of his Conducct at the table and now is the time to do it. . . ." He advised his daughter to buy some land near her mother and offered help in providing a good house on it. Perhaps one of the reasons he wanted Martha to be close by was a concern about his wife reflected in the instruction, "Tell mother She must not neglect that pet of ours, for we must raise him if we can--" The letter reveals affection for all the family and a deep concern for young Andrew who, unlike Charles and Robert, was to be "a very considerable man." This dream was never fulfilled because of the boy's ill health.[36]

Despite the failure of his sons to fulfill his ambition and the apparent lack of support from his wife, Johnson had enough driving ambition to compensate for the family. Perhaps his thirst for political and social recognition was such that no matter what his sons had done they would not have satisfied their father.[37] Although Johnson was a senator and had great influence in the Democratic party in Tennessee, he had often aspired for national office. He realized that Stephen A. Douglas was the greatest stumbling-block in his drive for the White House because both had similar programs and appeal--particularly in

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[36]Johnson to Martha Johnson Patterson, June 25, 1856, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, II, 383-84. He died two years after his father in 1877 at the age of twenty-seven.

[37]Unlike his sons, Johnson used "This blessed American freedom to go straight to the top of the tree, if you are built for climbing." Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary From Dixie*, ed. Ben Ames Williams (Boston, 1949), 15.

the northwest, New York, and Pennsylvania--because of their support for Homestead. Johnson rather hopefully predicted as early as 1851 that "Senator Douglas has had his run and that his Presidential store is now calminating--"His growth has been entirely too rappid, altogether of the hot lead order and at this moment is going down as fast as it went up."[38] The senator from Illinois, he wrote in 1852, was "the candidate of the *cormorants* of our party."[39] Not only was he concerned about Douglas's popularity but he was equally worried over the mounting southern attacks on free soil. He accurately assessed the dangers in a letter to his future son-in-law, David T. Patterson, "Too[m]bs & other speeches made by Southern M.C. will do as much more harm to the North & North West than they will do us good in the South--they may increase our majorities some in the South where we will not need it and diminish it at the other points where we'll need it most--"[40] These observations do not reflect the inept politician that recent revisionist biographers have portrayed.

Johnson was conscious that the South and its peculiar institution could only be protected so long as the alliance with the northwest was maintained. He saw himself as the bond between the sections. However, his first efforts were characterized by failure. He hoped that

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[38]Johnson to A. O. P. Nicholson, December 13, 1851, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, I, 630.

[39]Johnson to David T. Patterson, April 4, 1852, in *ibid.*, II, 30.

[40]Johnson to David T. Patterson, July 15, 1852, in *ibid.*, 65-66. Later, on October 15, 1856, while speaking in Knoxville, Toombs again threatened secession if Buchanan was not elected. Knoxville *Whig*, October 18, 1856.

the 1856 Tennessee Democratic convention would nominate him as a favorite son. To achieve this goal the governor looked to his political associate, A. O. P. Nicholson, but the convention failed to name anyone. Nicholson in fact supported the re-nomination of Pierce, but when he saw that that would not be possible he worked with Aaron V. Brown, a Buchanan supporter and anti-Johnson Democrat, for an unpledged delegation. Johnson told his son that Nicholson "was desirous of ha[v]ing an expression for Mr. Pierce and Brown wanted one for himself and found they Could not obtain it, they both concluded it was *most judicious* to have *no expression atall*."[41] It has been suggested that Nicholson actually tried to work on Johnson's behalf but there is no evidence for this,[42] and the "over zealous" Johnson supporters who did cause "considerable excitement," in their efforts to force his nomination, have never been identified.[43] Johnson alluded to these doubts about Nicholson while campaigning in Nashville stating, "the arrow that has sunk deepest into my bosom has been sped by an archer in my own camp. There let it remain, poisoned and barbed as it is, I can endure it until a sense of returning justice shall extract it and heal

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[41]Johnson to Robert Johnson, January 15, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 382-84.

[42]Patricia P. Clark, A. O. P. Nicholson: Editor, Statesman, and Jurist (M.A. thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1965), 97, 100-101.

[43]Herschel Gower and Jack Allen, eds., *Pen and Sword: The Life and Journals of Randal W. McGavock* (Nashville, 1959), 345-46. Sam Milligan went to the national convention in Cincinnati to promote Johnson's presidential cause. Johnson to Robert Johnson, April 8, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 518.

the wound that has been unjustly inflicted."[44]

The same year, 1856, saw the birth of the new Republican party, a motley coalition of "wooly-head" anti-slavery Whigs, Anti-Nebraska Democrats, and some Know-Nothings. Such a coalition had been made possible by fear, a fear of a slave power which was not content to protect slavery in those states where it existed but sought to extend its tentacles into the free states, the territories,[45] and even to establish a Latin American empire.[46] However, fear of a distant threat would not have been sufficient to build a strong party in all the northern states in a few years. The new party had its own positive alternative which was the benefits of a capitalist, free labor, free farming society. As has been pointed out,

> The free labor assault upon slavery and southern society, coupled with the idea that an aggressive Slave Power was threatening the most fundamental values and interests of the free states, hammered the slavery issue home to the northern public more emphatically than an appeal to morality alone could ever have done.[47]

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[44]Speech at Nashville, July 15, 1856, in *ibid.*, II, 433.

[45]According to one northerner, the Slave Power prevented a high protective tariff. "The Financial Flurry," *Atlantic Monthly*, I (1857-58), 119-20. For other attacks, see "A Brief Review of the Kansas Situation," *ibid.*, 492-500; "A Plea for the Fijians: Or Can Nothing be Said in Favor of Roasting One's Equals," *ibid.*, III (1859), 342-50; Henry R. Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America* (3 vols., Boston, 1875-77), II, 167; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 73-102; Speech at Bloomington, Illinois, May 19, 1856, Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 341.

[46]It has been argued that southern need for a Latin American empire was the greatest influence in shaping southern policy in the ante-bellum period. See William L. Barney, *The Road to Secession: A New Perspective of the Old South* (New York, 1972), 6-21, 65-84.

[47]Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 309.

An early believer in the new party was Abraham Lincoln, although he had previously politely declined an attempt by Illinois abolitionists, who were forming a Republican or Fusionist party, to incorporate him as a central committee member during the 1854 campaign. He was willing to cooperate, but he would not join the party.[48] He attended the formation of the new Republican party in Illinois in 1856 and at that convention made his famous "Lost Speech" which established his leadership in the state party.[49] He was not, however, a delegate to the June 6 national convention in Philadelphia but hoped that the party would nominate Judge John McLean because it would ensure that "a good many whigs of conservative feelings, and slight pro-slavery proclivities" would vote Republican. They would accept Francis P. Blair or Fremont as a vice-president.[50] There is no evidence that Lincoln considered himself for this latter post but he was nominated by the Illinois delegation and received one hundred and ten votes, his main support coming from Indiana, Illinois, and Massachusetts. On the second ballot William L. Dayton of New Jersey, who led in the first ballot, was unanimously nominated.[51]

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[48]Lincoln to Ichabod Codding, November 27, 1852, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 288.

[49]Nicolay and Hay, *Lincoln*, II, 30.

[50]Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull, June 7, 1856, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 342.

[51]"What would have been the consequences to America and humanity had the Rebellion, even then being devised by Southern Hotspurs, burst upon the nation in the winter of 1856, with the nation's sword of commander-in-chief in the hand of the impulsive Frémont, and Lincoln, inheriting the patient wariness and cool blood of three-generations of

Like Johnson, Lincoln was not happy with the ticket but campaigned for it anyway.[52] He not only campaigned throughout Illinois but also in Michigan where he appealed to Democrats to leave the party that had deserted them.[53] As Lincoln feared, a ticket headed by the "Pathfinder" scared many old Whigs who voted for Fillmore and Donelson. These defections also ensured Buchanan's election. But the signs of Democratic defeat were present on the day of victory. Frémont carried key states such as Iowa, Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin and the Democrats failed to poll a majority in the important states of Indiana and Pennsylvania.[54] As Johnson had forewarned, the party had gained votes in the South but was losing them in the northwest.

As the Democrats prepared to meet in convention in 1860, nothing had made matters better for the party. The battle over Bleeding Kansas,

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pioneers and Indian-fighters, wielding only the powerless gavel of Vice-President?" Nicolay and Hay, *Lincoln*, II, 35-36.

[52]Lincoln to John Van Dyke, June 27, 1856, in Basler, *Collected Works*, II, 346. Van Dyke's father, an old Whig congressman from New Jersey, had praised Lincoln at the convention.

[53]Speech at Kalamazoo, Michigan, August 27, 1856, in *ibid*, III, 361-66.

[54]Schlesinger, Jr., *History of American Presidential Elections*, II, 1094. Johnson had predicted the Republicans would do well. Johnson to Robert Johnson, July 11, 1856, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, II, 394. The atmosphere of conflict and no compromise is well expressed in Julian, *Political Recollections*, 158-80. The activities of the pro-slavery party, he claimed in revivalist terminology, had made even the Know-Nothings and Silver-Grey Whigs come "up to the anxious seat, under the enlightening influence and saving-grace of slaveholding madness and crime." *Ibid.*, 174; Clark, A. O. P. Nicholson, 112-13. The sectional imbalance in the Democratic party was evident by 1854. Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 238-41. For a typical expression of southern nationalism, see D. P. Braden to Andrew Johnson, January 19, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 373-75.

the Lecompton Constitution, the Dred Scott decision, John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry, and the southern attack on popular or "squatter" sovereignty helped transform sectionalism into southern nationalism. And the northern Democrats were equally determined not to give way to southern demands to reopen the African slave trade. They also opposed a congressional slave code for the territories. Northerners wished to confine the platform to support of popular sovereignty, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the 1856 Cincinnati platform.[55] By late 1859 a Tennessee Democrat was certain that slavery would destroy the country. "I am entirely at a loss--clear and out to Sea--in politics--I don't even know what *democrat* means now." He bewailed the absence of "unanimity of Sentiment amongst the members of the party called by that name, either North or South--and I don't comprehend what *is* to be if *any* thing."[56]

Earlier the Little Giant from Illinois confessed that the Democratic party was divided over the issue of slavery. It was, however, "a unit in its irreconcilable opposition to the doctrines of the Republican party, there are radical differences of opinion in respect to the powers and duties of Congress, and the rights and immunities of the people of the Territories under the Federal Constitution, which seriously disturb its harmony and threaten its integrity." He defined these differences as among those who believed in popular sovereignty,

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[55]Allan Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln* (2 vols., New York, 1950), II, 43-44.

[56]James B. Lamb to Johnson, December 21, 1859, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 360.

those who believed that slavery was established in territories by the Constitution and that if a territory failed to pass the necessary laws to protect it then Congress had to act, and finally those who believed it was a matter to be settled by the courts.[57] The last position[58] he dismissed because it was impossible for a court to enforce slavery without passage of legislation. As for the argument that a territory was a creature of Congress, it was "as plausible as it was fallacious."[59]

It was because the British had had such attitudes that the American colonies rebelled, and, according to the Illinois senator, the revolution was simply a demand for local government. He did not win friends in Virginia by reminding them that their first complaint against British rule in 1772 was due to the refusal of the Crown to limit the slave trade to the colony and that on June 12, 1776, they ratified as a part of their constitution a complaint that the British had prevented the exclusion of slavery by law. Moreover, Virginians had included and approved this statement in their revised constitutions of 1830 and 1850. Neither did he win southern Democrats to his cause by repeating his dispute with Jefferson Davis during the debates on the legislation over the issues known as the Compromise of 1850, nor by reminding Buchanan that he had endorsed popular sovereignty when he

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[57]Stephen A. Douglas, "The Dividing Line Between Federal and Local Authority: Popular Sovereignty in the Territories," *Harper's Monthly*, XIX (1859), 519-20. For Johnson's views, see Speech on Popular Sovereignty and the Right of Instruction, February 23, 1858, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 43-73.

[58]Smith, *Presidency of James Buchanan*, 24-29.

[59]Douglas, "The Dividing Line," 520.

accepted the nomination in 1856. Douglas stoutly defended the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Cincinnati platform.[60]

Johnson agreed with Douglas that the South should take its "chances as to this institution of slavery as the people may determine."[61] However, he supported Jefferson Davis's resolutions attacking personal liberty laws and demanding additional guarantees for slave property.[62] Johnson and Douglas also agreed that recognition of the Republican party was impossible so long as that party insisted that there was "an irrepressible conflict" between free and slave labor,[63] or so long as Republicans believed that the Union could not endure half slave and half free.

The Plebeian realized that because of his agreements with Douglas it was essential that the Illinoisan should not be a candidate if he (Johnson) was to have any chance of nomination. Early in 1858, as many politicians' dreams were already crowded by visions of the White House, Johnson was in a hopeful mood. One contender, Henry A. Wise, the

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[60] *Ibid.*, 533-37. Buchanan ordered his attorney general, Jeremiah S. Black, to publish a refutation of Douglas's views. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 711-13. For Lincoln's reply to Douglas's article, see his Speech at Columbus, Ohio, September 16, 1859, in Basler, *Collected Works*, III, 400-25.

[61] Speech on Popular Sovereignty and the Right of Instruction, February 15, 1858, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 56.

[62] *Cong. Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 Sess. 2343-52; Washington *Constitution*, June 19, 1860, in T. A. R. Nelson Scrapbook, IX, 79-80, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville.

[63] For Johnson's attack on Seward, see Speech on Harper's Ferry Incident, December 12, 1859, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 333-38.

Virginia governor, had ruled himself out with his anti-Lecompton stand,[64] and the same was true, Johnson believed, for Douglas. The Tennessee senator explained to his son that the Little Giant's vote on the Kansas constitution was dictated by an effort to win all anti-slavery votes in the North while at the same time retaining his strength in the South. If so, he had failed, "for he has lost the confidence of the South while he has gained none north, So in the effort to gain both he has lost both and at present is perfectly flat and might be considered a dead cock in the pit-- " He added carefully that, "It may be that he may recupirate after a While time must determine--" If it was Douglas's intention to bolt the party this was the ideal time. Naturally, the Plebeian was in favor of Douglas's leaving.[65]

Later that year Johnson continued to worry about Douglas and he asked his political associate A. O. P. Nicholson what course the party would take if the Little Giant was the nominee in 1860. Would they be forced to support a man who had voted with John Bell and John J. Crittenden against the Lecompton Constitution and in so doing repudiate legislative instructions and the state congressional action? It was his view that "Douglas' fixed purpose is at this time to force himself upon the party as the nominee or to be an independent Candidate[.]" Douglas and Seward had an arrangement "either express or implied," by

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[64]The unauthorized publication of attacks on Douglas in private correspondence with a New York supporter, Bernard Donnelly, finished the governor's presidential aspirations and increased hostility and divisiveness in the party. See David F. Caldwell to Johnson, October 18, 1859, in *ibid.*, 300.

[65]Johnson to Robert Johnson, January 23, 1858, in *ibid.*, 6-7.

which they would publicize their names. Seward would argue that he was the only candidate capable of uniting the free states. "Douglas on the other hand making the impression that he is the only man who can carry any of the free states against Seward. . . ." The Greeneville tailor wanted to know if "we in Tennessee [are] prepared to submit to a state of things as humiliating as this--"[66] Johnson tempered his attacks on Douglas when the Little Giant's control of the northern states became increasingly evident.

Johnson was fond also of accusing his opponents of seeking votes in the North and the South in order to further their presidential ambitions,[67] but he did the same thing. In New York, speaking to his land reform supporters, he attacked southern fire-eaters' ambitions to annex Cuba,[68] but used the rhetoric of a southern fire-eater. He told the Senate in 1858, "I think it is time for the North and the South to abandon compromise." The South was united in the defense of slavery, he informed his colleagues. "Compromise! I almost wish the term was stricken out of the English language," the senator declaimed, "Conservatism! It is the argument of despots and tyrants, one that entails an existing institution in its present form, whether it be right or

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[66]Johnson to A. O. P. Nicholson, November 22, 1858, in *ibid.*, 196.

[67]See this argument used against John Bell in Speech on Popular Sovereignty and the Right of Instruction, February 15, 1858, in *ibid.*, 58-59, and against Jefferson Davis in his Speech on Transcontinental Railroads, January 25, 1859, in *ibid.*, 242-43.

[68]Speech to New York Land Reformers, May 27, 1852, in *ibid.*, 60.

wrong." He could even hint at dissolution of the Union.[69]

Not only did he find his fellow politicians guilty of the duplicity that he practiced, but he also accused them of presidential aspirations while constantly denying that he had any himself.[70] "I am no aspirant for anything on the face of God Almighty's earth. I have reached the summit of my ambition," he told the senators in 1858. It is doubtful that his audience believed him and their skepticism would not have been assuaged by Johnson's declamations that he would rather be "an honest representative of the states or the people;" this post "when contrasted with being President of the United States, I say damn the Presidency . . . ! Warming to his task he assailed the executive office. "The Presidency! I would rather be an honest man, an honest representative, than be President of the United States forty times." Aware that his chances of gaining the nomination were slim because his radical policies, particularly on Homestead, had alienated the southern planter elite, and aware that these gentlemen would never acquiesce to leadership from an artisan, he demanded,

> Confer the great privilege, the constitutional right, upon the poeple to make their own Presidents, and not have them made by national conventions or by Congress; let the people make them themselves; and we shall have better Presidents,

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[69]Speech on Transcontinental Railroads, January 25, 1859, in *ibid.*, III, 235. A typical local display of pyrotechnics was put on in his Speech at Nashville, July 15, 1856, in *ibid.*, II, 413-14.

[70]Speech on Transcontinental Railroads, January 25, 1859, in *ibid.*, III, 242.

[71]Speech on Homestead Bill, May 20, 1858, in *ibid.*, 159.

> better Administrations, more economy, more honesty, more of every thing that tends to constitute an upright and correct Government.[72]

Whatever cynical reaction Davis and his fellow senators may have had to these impassioned denials, that of his old Whig opponent, Parson Brownlow, was scathing. He summarized a Johnson speech at Bristol:

> Fellow-Citizens of the Good Old Dimocratic County of Swillivan! Be it known unto you and each one of you; that I Andrew Johnson; U.S.S. from Tennessee, and Ex Gov. of the State aforesaid; and who has the honor this day to address you, am undeniably and unmistakably, *the* greatest man (in my opinion) that ever walked terra firma: and further, the Charleston Convention will find in me the only suitable man for the Presidential nomination, &c., &c; *ad infinitum*.[73]

It would have amused the blunt-speaking cleric if he had seen a letter Johnson wrote a few days later to the Boston print-publisher, Charles H. Brainard, complaining about the portrait he had commissioned.[74]

The Whig editor's worst fears would have been confirmed had he read a strictly confidential communication from Johnson to a Chattanooga editor. After laughing at the senator's assertion that he had never been and did not expect to be a candidate for the presidency, Brownlow would have seen through his old enemy's thinly disguised attack on Douglas. "I know however that there are Some who consider the presidency

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[72]Speech on Transcontinental Railroads, January 25, 1859, in *ibid.*, 243; Johnson continued coyly to insist that he did "not care one fig" if the Tennessee Democratic convention of January 18, 1860, nominated him as a presidential candidate. All the same, he was working very hard to ensure that the convention remembered him. Johnson to Robert Johnson, January 12, 1860, in *ibid.*, 380.

[73]Knoxville *Tri-Weekly Whig*, May 26, 1859.

[74]Johnson to Brainard, June 1, 1859, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 281.

the Summit of all human greatness and honor," Johnson wrote, "and who have pursued it as the leading object of their ambition without regard to the first principles of the Government or measures that were consonant to them; in fact abandoning every thing to policy and mere questions of expediency." The presidency should be awarded "as an incident" to the man who had followed correct principles and sound measures which were best for government and the people. No other way would suffice. "*If*," he emphasised, "I *were* an aspirant upon the principles herein indicated, I feel well assured that I could not be nominated upon them by the Charleston convention, as parties now stand, and if nominated, Could not be elected in my opinion." Aware that the North must change its attitude on slavery if the South were to win, he still rejected the idea of a northern candidate, i.e. Douglas. "The idea that the South to Secure strength to the north must run a northern man is utopian." Obviously Johnson was thinking of himself and the Little Giant when he asserted that a southerner could get as many votes in the free states as any northerner "who entertains the same opinions and sentiments--"[75]

Johnson's stance became more radical as he wrote. If the party was to be defeated it was far better that the leader be a southerner. His unwillingness to compromise was shared with greater vehemence by many southerners who, following the presidencies of doughfaces such as Pierce and Buchanan, were determined that the next president must come from south of the Mason-Dixon line. Johnson himself wrote, "let the

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[75]Johnson to [Harvey T. Phillips], August 15, 1859, in *ibid.*, 290.

Consequences by what they may--the South will lose nothing even in defeat, if She is only united, and if not united She will find out who are her enemies at home as well as in the nonslaveholding states. . . ." The time had ended for evasion over slavery and if the government was inoperable under the Constitution it was better the people should know it. But he concluded the passage on a sanguine note and reaffirmed his confidence "in their [the people's] wisdom and descretion and in their determination to preserve the principles of this Government as develped in the Constitution of the United States."[76]

Despite press reports and encouraging letters, he lied, "*I have never for one moment permitted* myself to entertain the *bewildering idea* of being an aspirant for presidential honors--" And although he did not share de Tocqueville's skepticism about democracy, he echoed the Frenchman's distrust of politicians who sought the presidency as men who were eager to abandon principle. He reiterated his attack on the convention system because it would not let "the people" have their real choice for president, which when translated simply meant that Johnson was not confident that he could win the nomination. Others, not he, would have to place his name in nomination and, "If presidential honors ever *beset* my *path* it must be upon the principles laid down in the foregoing part of this letter *and none other*--"[77] As will be seen, Johnson was no different from any other politician in his willingness to compromise principles for power.

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[76] *Ibid.*, 291

[77] *Ibid.*, 292-93.

A month later Robert, who was one of his campaign organizers, warned him that James Knox Walker and the Memphis *Appeal* were battling the pro-Johnson organ, the Nashville *Union and American*. He informed his father that these Douglas supporters "are working hard to get an entering wedge in--how successful they may be is uncertain. . . ."[78] Four months later John Crozier Ramsey persuaded the Knoxville Democrats, meeting to select delegates for the state convention, to pass a resolution favoring Andrew Johnson for president. The only opposition, at the meeting came from a Democrat who was a Know-Nothing, and doubtless remembered Johnson's swingeing attacks on that organization during the 1855 gubernatorial campaign.[79] But he was not the only one apparently to disapprove of the senator's candidacy. The Knoxville *Register*, which was to be a source of constant embarrassment to Johnson, reported that this resolution had been defeated because the resolutions committee believed that, "Gov. Johnson had received too many substantial tokens of public confidence at the hands of the people of East Tennessee to require, or even be flattered by the adoption of an *empty resolution*."[80]

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[78]Robert Johnson to Johnson, October 14, 1859, in *ibid.*, 294. See also Johnson to Robert Johnson, January 12, 1860, in *ibid.*, 380.

[79]J. G. M. Ramsey to Johnson, December 7, 1859, in *ibid.*, 310; Nashville *Union and American*, December 14, 1859.

[80]Knoxville *Register*, quoted in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 315n. The editor of the *Register*, George Bradfield, continued his attacks on Johnson, much to the despair of the senator's friends. Charles W. Charlton to Johnson, March 15, April 10, 1860, in *ibid.*, 468-69, 520-21. See also John Crozier Ramsey to Johnson, March 30 [1860], in *ibid.*, 505.

But a correspondent of the *Union and American* wrote Johnson to assure him that any suggestion that he was not the choice of Knox County Democrats was false: the editorial had been inspired by a local politico "whose insignificanse to the party is only equalled by his insignificanse to the community. . . .[81]

Johnson also had problems with Middle and West Tennessee Democrats. Many delegates to the Democratic convention in January were supporters of Indiana's Joseph Lane and Tennessee's governor Isham Harris. The latter's partisans were eager that he should be nominated vice-president and their organ was the Memphis *Appeal*. In what was perhaps an effort to blunt this drive, the *Union and American* advocated Harris for vice-president only if Johnson was not nominated.[82] Despite assurances from supporters, it was evident that even in the early days of what Johnson hoped would be a well-orchestrated campaign, there were discordant notes.[83] Following his speech condemning the Harper's Ferry incident, abolitionists, and disunionists of all stripes,[84] Johnson gained support for national executive office from outside his

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[81]John E. Helms to Johnson, December 9, 1859, in *ibid.*, 314.

[82]Memphis *Daily Appeal*, December 24, 1859; Nashville *Union and American*, January 20, 1869; Cave Johnson to Johnson, January 8, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 370.

[83]One of the campaign managers informed Johnson that local Democrats were in favor of Horatio Seymour as his running mate. William M. Lowry to Johnson, December 9, 1859, in *ibid.*, 316.

[84]Speech on Harper's Ferry Incident, December 12, 1859, in *ibid.*, 318-52. Johnson was warned that southerners were in danger of making Brown a martyr. Thomas A. Devyr to Johnson, January 8, 1860, in *ibid*., 368.

own state.[85] Yet dark clouds not only loomed over Johnson's state campaign, but a far greater storm threatened the Democratic party. Just before the campaign year dawned, Johnson received a letter from his New York land reform associate John Commerford.[86] In it Commerford expressed the disillusionment of many northern Democrats. Congratulating the senator on his reintroduction of the Homestead Bill, the veteran agitator noted that he was pleased that at least one southern senator was interested still in "his white fellow Citisens[.]" He could not understand southern reluctance in support of this measure, particularly at a time when the South desperately needed political allies. He denied Republican claims that their success was due to issues other than land reform; on the contrary he maintained,

> their victories have proceeded from the supposition that it was to the free representatives of the North to which the working men were to hereafter look for the accomplishment of their wishes[.] By our correspondence with the people of the States & Territories, we are furnished with the amplest evidence that it has not been the question of Slavery, but that with them the greater consideration, is how and by what means they are to realise permanent happiness by the obtaining [of] the guarentee of future and enduring industry[.][87]

That the South should have every guarantee provided by the Constitution Commerford admitted, but he was disillusioned with southern

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[85]J. K. P. Pritchard to Johnson, December 24, 1859, in *ibid.*, 361. Pritchard, an old East Tennessee resident, was editor of the Little Rock *Old Line Democrat* and advocated Johnson for vice-president.

[86]For Commerford, see Zahler, *Eastern Workingmen*, 25-27, 30, 42, 71, 85, 104, 154.

[87]John Commerford to Johnson, December 17, 1859, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 356-57.

Democrats. He had voted for Buchanan thinking he supported homestead legislation "but I now believe I made a serious mistake[.]" For twenty years he had supported candidates only if they supported land reform and in 1860 he expected to vote Republican in "the interest of the laboring White population of this Continent. . . ." The president of the National Reform Association informed his Tennessee associate "that the Northern Conservative interest is with us, and we are sick of the repetition that the Southern Oligarchy will never consent to the passage of any kind of Homestead Bill[.]" If southern representatives dropped their opposition to the measure, thousands who had been inactive, in the belief that the planter elite of the South were "the determined enemies of the progress of the White race," would spring to the Democratic standard.[88]

However, Johnson soon had to contend with another crisis in his own state. The man who threatened him was the man for whom Johnson had used his power to win a United States Senate seat--A. O. P. Nicholson.[89] Warning his father that the junior senator had written to an associate that Johnson did not want the state convention to nominate him for the presidency, Robert and his fellow managers wanted the matter cleared up because they felt the convention should act.[90] Replying

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[88]*Ibid.*, 357-58. See also similar warnings to Johnson from Thomas A. Devyr, January 1, 1860, and Anthony Ten Eyck, February 20, 1860, in *ibid.*, 364, 437-38.

[89]Gower and Allen, *Pen and Sword*, 438-39.

[90]Robert Johnson to Johnson, January 10, 22, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 377, 391. Johnson's speech on the Harper's Ferry Incident had impressed some delegates. Michael Burns to Johnson, January 10, 1860, in *ibid.*, 376.

to his son's letter, Johnson was clearly angry. Admittedly he had told Nicholson he was not a candidate, but he had said that he favored a southern man and that the state convention should state a preference. Aware that critics were talking about a bargain--a deal in which Johnson ensured Nicholson's election in return for support in any presidential bid--Johnson told Nicholson that he had no obligation. Divisions in the Democratic party had to be avoided but Johnson favored the convention's nominating someone. According to Johnson's account, Nicholson agreed because the senior senator would be nominated and also would defeat the Douglasites. The Plebeian claimed that he was not interested in support simply because he could weaken the Illinoisan. He had enough enemies already. Bluntly he reminded Nicholson of his activities in the 1856 convention, and informed the latter that "a nomination by the convention would be a source of some personal gratification if nothing more. . . ."

Directly queried, Nicholson denied having written to anyone in Tennessee about a possible nomination. But Johnson reported, "It seems that his letter was there in Nashville before the 10th and this [conversation] took place on the 13th--" In fact Johnson felt that Nicholson should have pressed for the senior senator's nomination but perhaps, he speculated, Nicholson had been carried away when his own name had been mentioned in a Knoxville paper as a presidential possibility. It may have "inspired him with the beleif that he was the Choice of the people of the State for the Presidency--and that *perhaps* by this course he could procure a nomination himself--" The East Tennessean

bluntly added, "*I fear Nicholson is by nature treacherous and by practice a liar*--"[91]

The junior senator's efforts to sabotage his fellow Democrat failed, and the Tennessee convention on January 18, 1860, endorsed a resolution that the state delegation support Johnson for the presidency. However, Johnson was warned by his friends that all was not well. An East Tennessee delegate informed him "I suppose it is a waste of time for me to stop & tell you that there is a strong party opposed to you in Tennessee & *yet* alive--"[92]

His old enemies were crawling out of the woodwork and Johnson was eager for support. J. Knox Walker assured him that Douglas sympathizers would support him,[93] not even putting their candidate up for nomination. The canny politician from Greeneville realized that although the Tennessee Douglasites would support him if it was to be a southern president, they expected Johnson to support Douglas if the

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[91]Johnson to Robert Johnson, January 15, 1860, in *ibid.*, 382-83. Robert confirmed that Nicholson's supporters tried to remove Johnson's name from the ballot and nominate their man. A detailed account is given in Johnson to Robert Johnson, January 22, 1860, in *ibid.*, 391; see also Clark, A. O. P. Nicholson, 117.

[92]William Henry Maxwell to Johnson, February 20, 1860. For similar assessments see John K. Howard, February 5, 1860, Sam Milligan to Johnson, February 8, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 414, 419-20. According to Randal McGavock, "The delegates to Charleston are upon the whole very good--much better than usual, although not so good as could be wished." Gower and Allen, *Pen and Sword*, 553.

[93]J. Knox Walker carried out his pledge and apparently believed that "Douglas will throw his strength for you in the Convention and thereby secure your nomination--". Robert Johnson to Johnson, January 22, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 390. See also Washington C. Whitthorne, January 19, 1860, and William Henry Maxwell to Johnson, February 2, 1860, in *ibid.*, 358, 410. For a skeptical view of Walker's activities, see F. C. Dunnington to Johnson, February 13, 1860, in *ibid.*, 425.

Charleston convention chose a northerner. Douglas supporters knew that they could make this concession at their state convention because they were aware that the Little Giant was not the "dead cock in the pit" that Johnson had pictured but rather a fine fighting bantam determined to win what he had been striving for since 1851. And unlike most southern politicians Johnson was conscious of the northern Democrat's determination to win the nomination. He cautioned his son early in the election year "not to say any hard things [about Douglas] at present for it might So turn out that he might be the nominee and as against a B. Republican we might be Compelled to go for him, for at present he is the Strong man in the free States and will go into the convention the strong man of the party[.]"[94] Although Johnson had outmaneuvered his enemies and won the state's endorsement, there was still a long way to go before his party nominated him in Charleston.

In his bid for the presidency Johnson had to overcome his enemies in the Tennessee Democratic party and to neutralize the supporters of Stephen A. Douglas. Similar problems faced Abraham Lincoln in Illinois. His Senate bid against the Little Giant in 1858 meant that he had achieved national prominence in the Republican party.[95] But divisions between Old Whigs and anti-Nebraska Democrats remained. Some of Lincoln's

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[94]Johnson to Robert Johnson, January 12, 1860, in *ibid.*, 380.

[95]A Democratic paper in Iowa, the Council Bluffs *Bugle*, August 17, 1859, reporting a Lincoln speech, concluded, "He was listened to with much attention, for his Waterloo defeat by Douglas has magnified him into quite a lion there." Report of Speech at Council Bluffs, Iowa, August 13, 1859, in Basler, *Collected Works*, III, 396.

ex-Whig colleagues were convinced that he did not win the 1858 Senate race because of the duplicity of Lyman Trumbull and his fellow ex-Democrats.[96]

Not all party members shared Lincoln's concern for party unity. Norman B. Judd was tired of "Long John" Wentworth's attacks and slanders on him which would make the uninitiated believe that in the 1858 Senate campaign Judd had cheated Lincoln when Trumbull was elected, and that he was "now conspiring to advance Trumbull on the Presidential ticket at your expense--" He was annoyed that Lincoln had not rebutted Wentworth's charges. He was convinced that the only hope for party unity was to kick John Wentworth and his "lying associates into the kennel with the other curs."[97] Under pressure and eager to end the feud, Lincoln affirmed his faith in Judd and added, "I have been and still am very anxious to take no part between the many friends, all good and true, who are mentioned as candidates for a Republican gubernatorial nomination."[98] Illinois Democrats were delighted by this turn of events. Judd sued Wentworth for libel.

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[96]Lincoln to George W. Dole, Gordon S. Hubbard, and William H. Brown, December 14, 1859, in *ibid.*, 507-9. And he assured Trumbull that he would support him in his reelection efforts. Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull, February 3, 1859; Lincoln to Norman B. Judd, December 9, 1859, in *ibid.*, 355-56, 505.

[97]Norman B. Judd to Lincoln, December 1, 1859, Robert Todd Lincoln Collection. For "Long John" Wentworth's opinion of Judd, see David Davis to Lincoln, January 1, 1859, in *ibid.*

[98]Lincoln to George W. Dole, S. Hubbard, and William H. Brown, December 14, 1859, in Basler, *Collected Works*, III, 508. For a detailed study of this dispute which "was symptomatic of the factionalism among Illinois Republicans in the Civil War era," see Don E. Fehrenbacher,

Earlier, in April 1859, Lincoln had discouraged a newspaper editor from promoting him as a Republican candidate and had confessed confidentially that he did not think himself fit to be president. Although flattered by the suggestion, Lincoln had felt that nothing should be done in this regard.[99] He repeated his doubts three months later[100] in a letter which also expressed concern about the Ohio Republican convention. He opposed the plank which wanted repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law and was worried that the Republicans would accept "*popular sovereignty*." His objections were: first, that the party would not be respected if it supported a policy in 1859 which it had opposed in 1858; second, that endorsement of this doctrine gave Douglas "(who is the most dangerous enemy of liberty, because the most insidious one)," support he did not deserve; and third, that acceptance of such a policy "by the public mind, as a just principle nationalizes slavery, and revives the African Slave-trade inevitably." According to Lincoln, "Taking slaves into new territories, and buying slaves in Africa, are identical things--identical *rights* or identical *wrongs*--and the argument which establishes one will establish the

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"The Judd-Wentworth Feud," *Journal of the Illinois Historical Society*, XLV (1951-52), 197-211 (The quotation may be found on page 211); Willard L. King, *Lincoln's Manager: David Davis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 127-33.

[99]Lincoln to Thomas J. Pickett, April 16, 1859, in Basler, *Collected Works*, III, 377.

[100]As late as December, 1859, he wrote, "I would rather have a full term in the Senate than in the Presidency." Lincoln to Norman P. Judd, December 9, 1859, in *ibid.*, 505. Five weeks earlier he had intimated that on the contrary he was interested in the presidency. Lincoln to William E. Frazier, November 1, 1859, in *ibid.*, 491.

other."[101] By associating popular sovereignty with slavery in the territories and the reopening of the African slave trade, Lincoln consciously sought to destroy the middle ground that the senior senator from Illinois had established. If Douglas was successful, as indicated in Ohio, then there was no hope of a Republican victory in the coming election.

Another key to his strategy was to contrast Jefferson's party with the present Democratic party. Aided by the speeches of the planter-elite, he assured the Republican mayor of Boston that "The democracy of to-day hold the *liberty* of one man to be absolutely nothing, when in conflict with another man's right of *property*. Republicans, on the contrary, are for both the *man* and the *dollar*; but in cases of conflict, the man *before* the dollar." Political parties, he opined, were like two half-drunk men fighting in their great-coats and "after a long, and rather harmless conflict, ended in each having fought himself *out* of his own coat, and *into* that of the other." If the Republican and Democratic parties were identical to those of Jefferson and Adams, then they had performed the same feat as the intoxicated men.[102]

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[101]Lincoln to Samuel Gallaway, July 28, 1859, in *ibid.*, 394-95. With reference to his possible nomination, Lincoln wrote, "I must say I do not think myself fit for the Presidency." *Ibid.*, 395. Lincoln had these Ohio speeches published to assist his bid for the Republican nomination. Lincoln to James W. Sheehan, January 24, 1860, in *ibid.*, 515. See also Lincoln to Abraham Jonas, February 4, 1860, in *ibid.*, 516.

[102]Lincoln to Henry L. Pierce and Others, April 6, 1859, in *ibid.*, 375. For a typical effort to win the ethnic vote, Lincoln to Theodore Canissius, May 17, 1859, in *ibid.*, 380. Canissius was the proprietor and editor of a Springfield Republican German-language newspaper. See Lincoln to Whom it May Concern, April 14, 1860, in *ibid.*, IV, 44.

For a man who considered himself unfit for the presidency, he remained nonetheless active in the political arena not only in Illinois but also in other states. Certainly his lecture series on "Discoveries and Inventions," undertaken in April, 1858 and February, 1859 had been a dismal failure and he must have been pleased to return to the political scene. First he spoke in Iowa and then followed this up with an effective campaign in Ohio. In Columbus, Lincoln scornfully attacked Douglas's popular sovereignty proposal. The purpose of the Republican party, he told his Buckeye audience, was "eminently conservative." Their main aim was "to restore this government to its original tone in regard to this element of slavery, and there to maintain it. . . ." This ambition was not threatened by a revival of the African slave trade, a congressional slave code, or another Dred Scott decision making slavery lawful in all the states, but "the most imminent danger that now threatens that purpose is that of Douglas Popular Sovereignty. This is the miner and sapper."[103] He then proceeded to prop up the sagging walls of Ohio Republicanism by mocking Stephen A. Douglas's literary efforts for *Harper's Monthly*.[104] Lincoln reiterated his Unionism but affirmed again his belief that the Union

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[103]Speech at Columbus, Ohio, September 16, 1859, in *ibid.*, III, 404-5.

[104]Commenting on Douglas's *Harper's Monthly* article, Lincoln said he did not propose "to enter into a minute examination of his historical statements. I avoid doing this upon principle--that if it were important for me to pass out of this lot in the least period of time possible and I came to that fence and saw by calculation of my known [own?] strength and ability that I could clear it at a bound, it would be folly for me to stop and consider whether I could or [could?] not crawl through a crack." Speech at Columbus, Ohio, September 16, 1859, in *ibid.*, 413.

would become all slave or all free states. It was the responsibility of the Republican party to ensure the latter.

Lincoln kept up his assault on Douglas and popular sovereignty in speeches at Dayton and Cincinnati.[105] In the latter he not only attacked the doctrine but also endorsed its leading proponent as the best candidate for the Democratic party. Although this was done to show that popular sovereignty was a pro-slavery argument that could win free states, the Railsplitter must have known that an endorsement of Douglas by a Black Republican would increase southern hostility to the Little Giant.[106]

Despite his protestations Lincoln was hardly acting like a non-candidate. In the same month he gave major speeches in Indiana[107] and in Wisconsin.[108] Within two weeks of his return to Illinois he was on the stump again celebrating Republican victories in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Minnesota.[109]

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[105]Speech at Dayton, Ohio, and Speech at Cincinnati, Ohio, September 17, 1859, in *ibid.*, 436-37, 438-62.

[106]*Ibid.*, 440-41.

[107]Speech at Indianapolis, Indiana, September 19, 1859, in *ibid.*, 463-70.

[108]He attacked Hammond's mud-sill theory in his Address before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, September 30, 1859, in *ibid.*, 477-81. He also attacked Douglas in a Speech at Beloit, Wisconsin, and in a Speech at Janesville, Wisconsin, October 1, 1859, in *ibid.*, 482-84, 484-86.

[109]Speech at Clinton, Illinois, October 14, 1859, and Speech at Springfield, Illinois, October 15, 1859, in *ibid.*, 487-88, 489. Later he spoke in Kansas. Speech at Elwood, Kansas, December 1, 1859, Speech at Leavenworth, Kansas, December 3, December 5, 1859, in *ibid.*, 495-96, 497-502, 502-4.

As a result of these activities Lincoln was approached by supporters of Senator Simon Cameron, who was actively seeking the presidential nomination. Lincoln's reply is the first indication that he had his own ambitions. While recognizing the importance of Pennsylvania, it was also imperative that Republicans win Illinois. He would heartily support a Cameron-Lincoln ticket "*after* it shall have been nominated by a Republican national convention; and I can not be committed to it *before*." He would labor in the ranks "unless, as I think not probable, the judgement of the party shall assign me a different position." While he was willing to praise Cameron and extol his virtues, he did not want "the *public* to know, so I would not like *myself* to know I had entered a combination with any man, to the prejudice of all others whose friends respectively may consider them preferable[.]"[110] And although as late as December 9, 1859,[111] he lamely protested he was not interested in the presidency, he took the time to send a campaign biography to Jesse W. Fell which was later used in the Pennsylvania *Chester County Times* and widely copied in Republican papers.[112]

Realizing that he had power in the party--enough to be wooed by Cameron and Chase for the vice-presidency--Lincoln finally committed

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[110]Lincoln to William E. Frazier, November 1, 1859, in *ibid.*, 491; King, *Lincoln's Manager*, 129.

[111]Lincoln to Norman B. Judd, December 9, 1859, in Basler, *Collected Works*, III, 505.

[112]Lincoln to Jesse W. Fell, Enclosing Autobiography, December 20, 1859, in *ibid.*, 511-12. For biographical information on Fell, see Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln*, 194.

himself to gaining the state's nomination. Now he was able to cash in the chips he had won in his careful arbitration of the Judd-Wentworth dispute. Earlier in the new year he informed Norman Judd in his customary double negative manner, "I am not in a position where it would hurt much for me to not be nominated on the national ticket; but I am where it would hurt some for me to not get the Illinois delegates." Because he had defended Judd, enemies in the party would encourage the candidacy of Edward Bates in Little Egypt and that of Seward in northern Illinois, meaning that Lincoln would be squeezed "out in the middle with nothing." What could Judd do to help in his "end of the vineyard?" Seven days later the Chicago *Tribune* championed Lincoln as a presidential candidate and Judd inquired if that was satisfactory.[113]

Apart from marshaling his forces in Illinois, Lincoln began a second speaking engagement which was a greater success than his previous trip to Ohio. The first and major speech was at the Cooper Institute in New York City.[114] He told the crowded audience that there was a basic conflict between Democrats and Republicans in their interpretation of the Constitution; whereas Democrats denied the power of Congress to control slavery in the federal territories, Republicans were positive that it could. After tracing the history of congressional action over territories and the attitudes of the founding fathers, he argued that none of them questioned the authority of Congress or the Constitution.

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[113]Norman B. Judd to Lincoln, February 21, 1860, Robert Todd Lincoln Collection.

[114]After his nomination it was re-issued as a pamphlet and used in the campaign.

to limit slavery. All Republicans sought to do was to emulate the founding fathers and while considering slavery an evil not to be extended, they were prepared to tolerate and protect it "*only because of and so far as its actual presence among us makes that toleration and protection necessary.*"[115]

Cleverly he pleaded with his southern brethren to listen to Republican arguments. His party was sectional only because southerners refused to listen to its position. Lincoln admitted that Washington had warned against sectional parties but, he asked rhetorically, which was the sectional party in 1860, the Democrats or the Republicans? Those who followed Washington's belief in limiting slavery or those who repudiated these policies? It was the southerners who were revolutionary, not the Republicans, who were conservatives in that their policies were those of the founding fathers. It was the Democrats who, by rejecting established precedents, had made slavery an issue. Moreover, it was sheer nonsense to blame his party for John Brown's activities or slave insurrections. He demanded to know what evidence the southerners had connecting these events to Republicans because he knew there was none. But southerners must realize that there was "a judgment and feeling" against the peculiar institution which could not be destroyed "by breaking up the political organization which rallies round it." Despite the errors of southerners and the justices of the Supreme Court, Republicans should calmly review southern demands and

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[115]Address at Cooper Institute, New York City, February 27, 1860, in *ibid.*, 522-35. (Quotation on page 535.)

accept them where possible. Although slavery was wrong it could be left where it already existed so long as its extension into the territories and free states was prohibited. He concluded, "LET US HAVE FAITH THAT RIGHT MAKES MIGHT, AND IN THAT FAITH, LET US, TO THE END, DARE TO DO OUR DUTY AS WE UNDERSTAND IT."[116]

It was a brilliant speech. Anti-slavery was wrapped in the folds of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the American flag. The Republican party was the party of the founding fathers, of Washington and Jefferson. Conservative yet progressive, Lincoln's party was battling to preserve American values and the American government. Thus he moved the Republicans from defense to attack, from revolution to sober conservatism, and he brought himself closer to the nomination.[117]

Lincoln's success in New York and in his later tour of New England increased his determination to win the nomination. Meanwhile he was paying a delegate's travel expenses,[118] pleased to hear that the party in Ohio, divided over Chase's candidacy, "could unite more

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[116]*Ibid.* (Quotations on pages 542, 550.) A typical southern view of the Republican party was expressed by a Tennessee farmer: "What is the Sovregn power of the Black Republican[?] Lying negro Stealing and murder in the first degree[.] what are its attributes[?] Whigism Nonothin[g]ism and Oppisitionism." J. H. C. Basham to Johnson, March 12, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 464-65.

[117]His New England tour included stops in Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Connecticut. While in New Hampshire he worried about the problem of making nine speeches "before reading audiences who had already seen all my ideas in print." Lincoln to Mary Todd Lincoln, March 4, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, III, 555; Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness*, 154.

[118]Lincoln to Mark W. Delahay, March 16, April 14, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 31, 44; Herndon, *Life of Lincoln*, 371-72.

votes on you than on Seward,"[119] and quietly enjoying "the close vote in Conn. & the quasi defeat in R. I." because they were "a drawback upon the prospects of Gov. Seward. . . ."[120] But it was not until the end of April that he coyly confessed to Lyman Trumbull, "The taste *is* in my mouth a little. . . ." and he tried to persuade the junior senator that Seward not only had no chance in Illinois but would damage the party's hopes of winning the state legislature.[121] Lincoln had delayed his reply to Trumbull because he was waiting for news from the Democratic convention in Charleston. It was while that convention was in session that he was unanimously selected by the Illinois Republicans as their presidential nominee.[122]

Prior to the Charleston meeting, southern aspirants for the presidency did their utmost to join Lincoln in the attacks on popular sovereignty and its champion Stephen A. Douglas. South Carolina and Mississippi tried to inaugurate a move for a southern convention. In January, Alabama Democrats drew up a platform which excluded popular sovereignty, demanded adherence to the Dred Scott decision, and claimed that a Republican victory justified secession. By May five states had

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[119]Richard M. Corwine to Lincoln, March 24, 1860, Robert Todd Lincoln Collection; Lincoln to Corwine, April 6, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 36.

[120]Lincoln to Mark W. Delahay, April 14, 1860, in *ibid.*, 44.

[121]Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull, April 29, 1860, in *ibid.*, 45.

[122]Remarks to Republican State Convention, Decatur, Illinois, May 9, 1860, in *ibid.*, 48-49; New York *Tribune*, May 22, 1860.

adopted the Alabama platform--South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, Texas, and Arkansas.[123]

In Congress on January 18, Albert G. Brown of Mississippi introduced resolutions on the territories and slavery. Similar resolutions, introduced two weeks later by Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, condemned any interference with slavery and sought endorsement of the peculiar institution in fifteen states. After parliamentary maneuvers, Davis's resolutions, similar to those first introduced by Brown, were approved.[124] Johnson's assessment was accurate when he wrote,"I can see no good is to Come out of them at this time, except divission and distruction of the democratice party--" He denied the right of the Senate resolution to make a party platform; if that were the case, there was no need for a convention.[125] It is scarcely surprising, however, that he voted for the resolution because such a vote would not alienate the South and yet his continued support for Homestead would ensure his popularity in the northwest and in New York. But a Johnson strategist did not like the action of the Senate.

> Their adoption by the Charleston Convention of necessity makes the democratic party Sectional, and at once burdens our Northern and N. Western friends with Sentiments which will do the south no good, and which the N & N. W. can not

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[123]Dwight L. Dumond, *The Secession Movement, 1860-61* (New York, 1931), 22-38. It has been denied that secession was the result of a well-planned conspiracy. William L. Barney, *The Secessionist Impulse: Alabama and Mississippi in 1860* (Princeton, 1974), 107-10.

[124]*Cong. Globe.*, 36 Cong., 1 Sess., 494, 658, 2344-52.

[125]Johnson to George W. Jones, March 13, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 466.

> defend--We must not drive off the north, nor must We offend Douglass if it can possibly be avoided.[126]

While politicians North and South sniped at Douglas, Johnson and his supporters were playing a more cautious game. Aware of the strong support for the Illinois senator, they were confident that his delegates would readily see that the southern states would deny him the required two-thirds vote.[127] The Tennessee supporters were also confident that because of the action of the South, aspirants such as Toombs of Georgia, Davis of Mississippi, and Slidell of Louisiana would also be denied the vote.[128] Knowing that Johnson was the second choice of the majority of the northwestern delegates[129] because of his fight for homestead legislation,[130] and hoping southern delegates would remember his many defenses of slavery and his vote for the Lecompton Constitution, Johnson's managers, although worried, showed increasing confidence as the convention approached. Their strategy was outlined

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[126]George W. Jones to Johnson, August 15, 1860, in *ibid.*, III, 656-57. For a discussion of these resolutions and southern dissenters, see Nevins, *Emergence of Lincoln*, II, 179-80.

[127]Sam Milligan to Johnson, March 4, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 452-53.

[128]For northern determination to have Douglas, see Anthony Ten Eyck to Johnson, February 21, 1860, in *ibid.*, 437-39; Hu Douglas to Johnson, March 11, 1860, in *ibid.*, 460-61. For southern ambitions, see Johnson to George W. Jones, March 13, 1860, in *ibid.*, 467.

[129]See, for example, Indiana delegate William W. Wick to Johnson, February 8, 1860, in *ibid.*, 421, and Johnson manager William M. Lowry to Johnson, February 9, 24, 1860, in *ibid.*, 422, 446-47; Sam Milligan to Johnson, March 4, 1860, in *ibid.*, 453; Tazewell W. Newman to Johnson, March 8, 1860, in *ibid.*, 459.

[130]For a typical southern reaction to Johnson's Homestead Bill, "Alabama" to Johnson, February 29, 1860, in *ibid.*, 449-50.

by Sam Milligan, "I think it would be the policy of your friends to hold your name back, and offend neither side, until they wear themselves out, and as a compromise present your name."[131]

Delegates slowly moved into the city of Charleston and many complained about the poor accommodation and high prices.[132] According to Murat Halstead, a Republican journalist, the delegates were "great portly fellows with protuberent stomachs and puffy cheeks, red foreheads, thin and grisly hair. . . ." Smartly dressed, they rushed from group to group "perspiring and smoking, and engaged in mysterious conversations concerning caucus strategems of intense interest to themselves." Douglas delegates proclaimed that "the universal world is for the Little Giant." Southern ultras accused the Illinoisan of collusion with Seward and the Black Republicans because of his vote against Lecompton, reminding their Illinois colleagues that Douglas had lost the popular vote to Lincoln in his reelection to the Senate.

Johnson forewarned Robert that the Douglas supporters were convinced their candidate would win; but he remained cautiously optimistic that when they saw the impossibility of their task they would support

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[131]Sam Milligan to Johnson, February 8, 1860, in *ibid.*, 420. See also Robert D. Powel to Johnson, March 24, 1860, in *ibid.*, 487-88. The increased confidence is reflected in the letters of Sam Milligan, March 4, 1860, and Robert Johnson to Johnson, April 10, 1860, in *ibid.*, 452, 523.

[132]For example, William M. Lowry to Johnson, March 29, 1860, in *ibid.*, 498-99; William B. Hesseltine, ed., *Three Against Lincoln: Murat Halstead Reports the Caucuses of 1860* (Baton Rouge, 1960), 7.

[133]*Ibid.*, 9.

a candidate who held similar views.[134] The day before the convention met he reassessed his situation. Writing to Robert at the convention he was positive that Douglas would be nominated. As a result, "There Could be [no] Safer positin to Secure the first place four years hence than Second place on the ticket now--" If the Tennessee delegation enabled him to get the vice-presidency, then the nation would elevate the second man to the top spot in 1864, and would have "passed one of her Citizens through all the gradations of office from lowest to highest which would be a very remarkable fact to record in history--" The party would suffer great harm if Douglas was not nominated, but if Robert felt there was hope for his father then the Tennessee delegation should remain firm. After stressing that Robert should say nothing of this ambition, the father urged his son to woo the northwestern delegates where he had "evy assurance that it is of the most favorable character--"[135] The same day Halstead reported that delegations from Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, Arkansas, and Texas would withdraw if Douglas was nominated, and the Illinoisan's delegates made things worse with their brash confidence.[136]

The convention began in confusion. An inoffensive Pennsylvania delegate made several efforts to complete his speech but "several heartless wretches said to the little old dapper gentleman: 'G---d---you,

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[134]Johnson to Robert Johnson, April 8, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 517-18.

[135]Johnson to Robert Johnson, April 22, 1860, in *ibid.*, 573.

[136]Hesseltine, *Three Against Lincoln*, 11. For similar extremism on the part of ultra southerners, see *ibid.*, 20-21.

sit down'--and such questions were put to him as, 'What the hell do you want to talk for?'"[137] Seven days later delegates from Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, South Carolina, Florida, Texas, and Arkansas withdrew from the convention because their demand for federal protection for slavery in the territories had been rejected.[138] Denouncing the extreme demand of William Lowndes Yancey, George E. Pugh of Ohio said that although northerners were in the minority, southerners should not expect them to "put their hands on their mouths and their mouths in the dust. 'Gentlemen of the South,' said Mr. Pugh, 'you mistake us--you mistake us--we will not do it.'"[139]

Douglas and his managers were content to affirm the Cincinnati platform and the Dred Scott decision, but this was not enough for the protesting states. As Halstead recalled, "The convention was under the frown of King Cotton, and his displeasure was upon it like a blight or deadly nightshade." The blight even affected the Tennessee delegation,[141] but they stayed in the convention and faithfully[142] supported their favorite son for thirty-six ballots. The northwest, with the exception of one delegate, failed to leave its hero, Douglas, for Johnson as the latter had calculated and hoped. On the thirty-seventh ballot,

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[137] *Ibid.*, 23.

[138] *Ibid.*, 45-47.

[139] *Ibid.*, 54-55.

[140] *Ibid.*, 82.

[141] Hu Douglas, April 16, 1860, Robert Johnson, May 8, 1860, and Washington C. Whitthorne to Johnson, May 8, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 577, 586-88, 589, 590-92.

[142] For a more jaundiced view of the behavior of Tennessee's delegates, see William B. Jones to Johnson, May 15, 1860, in *ibid.*, 599-600.

Tennessee's twenty-four delegates, each having a half ballot, divided their votes between Guthrie (19), Johnson (3), and Douglas (2). On May 2, a Tennessee Douglas supporter telegraphed Johnson "We have withdrawn you. Douglas has the majority ought we to support him."[143] Johnson cryptically replied, "The delegation present, with all the facts before them are better prepared to determine what course to pursue than I am."[144]

Any hope that Johnson would be considered for vice-president dimmed as the battle intensified. According to Halstead, many northern delegates openly threatened to join the Republican party and he noted, "Our Northwestern friends use language about the South, her institutions, and particularly her politicians, that is not fit for publication. . . . They say they do not care a d--n where the South goes, or what becomes of her."[145] But either at the Charleston convention, or shortly after it adjourned, the Douglas managers approached a Johnson supporter and editor with the promise that Johnson would be nominated vice-president on the first vote if only he agreed--and, presumably, if he persuaded the Tennessee delegation--to support Douglas. They hoped that the vote of the Volunteer state would swing over southern votes and thus give Douglas his required two-thirds majority. The editor assessed the situation well, arguing that a Douglas-Johnson ticket, even on the minority

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[143]Hesseltine, *Three Against Lincoln*, 98-104; Nashville *Union and American*, May 6, 1860; William H. Carroll to Johnson, May 2, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 582.

[144]Johnson to William H. Carroll, May 3, 1860, in *ibid.*, 583.

[145]Hesseltine, *Three Against Lincoln*, 101.

platform adopted at Charleston, would ensure a Democratic victory. Any other nomination would be disastrous, he predicted. It has been suggested that Johnson refused this offer but this is unlikely considering the opinions he had expressed to his son. More significant than Johnson's interest was his inability to deliver the vote of the Tennessee delegation.[146]

Later, at the reconvened Democratic convention in Baltimore, most of the Tennessee delegates joined their fellow southerners and withdrew, leaving the northwest to win its Pyrrhic victory by nominating the Little Giant. The senator from Illinois had not contemplated withdrawing his candidacy until June, 1860,[147] by which time the Democratic party was in ruins.[148] The seceding states met two weeks later in the same city and nominated Breckinridge.[149] With the collapse of

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[146]Damon Wells, *Stephen Douglas: The Last Years, 1851-61* (Austin, 1971), 230; Jeptha Fowlkes to Johnson, May 19, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 601-2; Albert G. Graham to Johnson, May 23, 1860, in *ibid.*, 604-5.

[147]Hesseltine, *Three Against Lincoln*, 179. For the reasons Douglas was determined to keep his name before the convention, see Wells, *Stephen Douglas*, 230-31.

[148]Partial responsibility for the travesty must be attributed to James Buchanan, who did everything possible to block the Little Giant's nomination and who hoped to be renominated by a deadlocked convention. David M. Currin to Johnson, February 21, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 440-41; Nevins, *Emergence of Lincoln*, II, 201-2; Smith, *Presidency of James Buchanan*, 19-21, 53-54, 84-85, 103-13. For report of the proceedings of the Baltimore National Democratic convention, see Hesseltine, *Three Against Lincoln*, 259; Wells, *Stephen Douglas*, 230.

[149]Hesseltine, *Three Against Lincoln*, 265-77. Sam Milligan and Frank C. Dunnington wanted to put Johnson's name before the Baltimore seceders convention. Sam Milligan and Frank C. Dunnington to Johnson, [June 23, 1860], in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 626. There

the party went Johnson's dreams of the presidency. He was a dark horse that never left the starting gate.

Republicans were delighted by the intraparty battles in Charleston, little realizing this lovely city would be the site of the first battle in the Civil War. As supporters of the new party assembled in Chicago for their second national convention, the politicos were optimistic and the most cheerful were the supporters of William H. Seward of New York.[150] The senator was expected to be the nominee, not only by his own party but by Democrats as well, and whatever doubts he may have had were not sufficient to stop him from preparing his resignation speech as a senator.[151] As the delegates wined and dined it became apparent that despite strong Seward support in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, there was vociferous opposition as well. Needless to say, the supporters of Chase, Cameron, McLean, and Lincoln did their utmost to weaken the ex-governor and senator. Seward had offended conservatives with his speech claiming that there was an irrepressible

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is no evidence that Johnson supported this or that he encouraged a land reformer and editor who tried to promote his candidacy as late as August. Theophilus Fiske to Johnson, August 1, 1860, in *ibid.*, 653-54.

[150]Lincoln and Seward's management of their campaigns is contrasted in Herndon, *Life of Lincoln*, 370-71.

[151]Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *William Henry Seward* (New York, 1967), 220-22.

conflict between free and slave labor.[152] Certainly southerners viewed him as a dangerous man.[153]

A large element in the party were ex-Know Nothings who were scandalized by Seward's defense of aliens when governor of New York, and by his proposal to give state funds to parochial schools, particularly Catholic.[154] Lincoln on the other hand, while denouncing nativist excesses and careful to woo the German vote, had not aroused the ire of these super patriots. Similarly his attacks on slavery were always accompanied with words of conciliation to the slaveholder. Apparent hints at disunion were joined with denials that the South would ever be allowed to secede. Condemnation of Hinton Rowan Helper and John Brown were linked to warnings to southern ultras. Typical of these balancing acts was a Kansas speech in which he gave notice to southern fire-eaters that the North would not tolerate secession:

> Old John Brown has just been executed for treason against a state. We cannot object, even though he agreed with us in thinking slavery wrong. It could avail him nothing that he might think himself right. So, if constitutionally we elect a President, and therefore you undertake to destroy the Union, it will be our duty to deal with you as old John Brown has been dealt with. We shall try to do our duty. We

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[152]A typical concern of delegates was to nominate someone, who, unlike Seward, was inoffensive to the South. Orville H. Browning supported Edward Bates of Missouri for this reason. Theodore C. Pease and James G. Randolph, eds., *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning* (2 vols., Springfield, 1925), I, 407-8.

[153]Van Deusen, *Seward*, 210, 226.

[154]*Ibid.*, 67-71. This was an important factor in states such as Indiana and Pennsylvania where Know Nothings were a powerful force. McClure, *Recollections*, 216-18.

> hope and believe that in no section will a majority so act as to render such extreme measures necessary.[155]

Who better to represent the motley coalition that made up the Republican party? The platform vaguely referred to the peaceful and constitutional resolution of the causes which had originated the party--mainly slavery. After demanding government based on the equality of man as expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the continuity of the Union, they agreed that rights of states would not be violated so that each could "control its own domestic institutions [slavery] according to its own judgement exclusively. . . ." It attacked administration efforts to foist slavery on Kansas, to extend the peculiar institution into the territories, and to reopen the African slave trade. Popular sovereignty was denounced in a separate plank. A modest proposal for a protective tariff,[156] a demand for passage of Homestead legislation, an innocuous defense of aliens, and a demand for internal inprovements constituted the proposed policies of the party.[157]

Following the drafting of the platform, Seward's forces won a major victory in defeating efforts to impose a two-thirds rule on the convention. Halstead was convinced that if the ballot had been taken on the first day, Seward would have been nominated. The New York

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[155]Speech at Leavenworth, Kansas, December 3, 1859, in Basler, *Collected Works*, III, 502.

[156]The protective tariff plank was written so that it could be endorsed by old high tariff Whigs and former free trade Democrats. James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress: From Lincoln to Garfield* (2 vols., Norwich, Conn., 1884), I, 198-99. For Lincoln's views on the tariff plank, see Lincoln to Richard W. Corwine, May 2, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 47.

[157]Hesseltine, *Three Against Lincoln*, 156-58.

delegates fascinated him: "They can drink as much whiskey, swear as loud and long, sing as bad songs, and 'get up and howl' as ferociously as any crowd of Democrats you ever heard, or heard of." The journalist recalled: "They hoot at the idea that Seward could not sweep all the Northern States, and swear that he would have a party in every slave State in less than a year that would clean out the disunionists from shore to shore."[158] This overconfidence assisted Lincoln's manager, David Davis. According to Herndon, the Springfield lawyer sent a message via the editor of the Springfield *Republican* to the convention. Scrawled on a copy of the Missouri *Democrat* Lincoln had written, "I agree with Seward in his 'Irrepressible Conflict,' but I do not endorse his 'Higher Law' doctrine. *Make no contracts that will bind me.*"[159] Although the latter phrase was heavily underscored, it was not wholly agreed to by the portly judge. But the latter was not guilty of excessive promises as was later claimed.[160]

The New York delegates were not hooting after the first ballot but rather drinking their whiskey and swearing more loudly than usual. Although Seward topped the poll with 173 1/2 votes, Lincoln was second with 102. If the latter's votes were combined with those given to Edward Bates and Simon Cameron, they would defeat the New Yorker.[161]

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[158] *Ibid.*, 159.

[159] Herndon, *Life of Lincoln*, 373-74.

[160] For an excellent brief account of the convention, King, *Lincoln's Manager*, 135-41.

[161] Hesseltine, *Three Against Lincoln*, 167.

It was on the second ballot that defections took place and notably from New England, where Seward supposedly was the favorite. On the third ballot Seward's previous lead of 3 1/2 votes (184 1/2 to 181) was turned into a deficit. Lincoln, thanks to Seward's supporters not needing two-thirds, required only one and a half votes for the nomination when Mr. Carter of Ohio rose: "I rise (eh), Mr. Chairman (eh), to announce the change of four votes of Ohio from Mr. Chase to Mr. Lincoln." While thousands cheered "with the energy of insanity,"[162] the small brass cannon that had been brought next to Seward's home to boom out his victory, was quietly towed away. A few hours later, it was booming out victory for Lincoln.[163]

Lincoln, Breckinridge, and Douglas were not the only nominees. Many old southern Whigs and conservatives, north and south, opposed the southern ultras and Black Republicans, but knew that Douglas could not win if his party was divided. As early as December, 1858, Whigs and Know-Nothings from thirteen states had met in convention to canvass the idea of a conservative party. In their February, 1860 convention in Tennessee, members of the Constitutional Union party nominated John Bell for president.[164] The existence of another Tennessee presidential aspirant must have damaged seriously Johnson's chances in the Democratic convention. When Bell was later nominated, the Greeneville

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[162] *Ibid.*, 168-71.

[163] Van Deusen, *Seward*, 224.

[164] Cole, *Whig Party in the South*, 331-32; Johnson to Robert Johnson, February 22, 1859; Robert Johnson to Johnson, February 22, [1860], in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 257, 442.

tailor's loathing of the man he considered a stuffed-shirt aristocrat increased. It is hardly surprising that in the election campaign he reserved his most violent attacks for his old opponent.[165]

What is more surprising than Johnson's dislike of Bell, is his decision to campaign for Breckinridge. Contrary to the assertion of John Bell Brownlow that Johnson had been an extreme states' rights supporter until December, 1860,[166] the Plebeian "supported Breckinridge because he believed he was the strongest man South."[167] Johnson's decision was criticized by his closest political associate, George W. Jones, who defended an East Tennessee editor's attacks on Johnson Jones argued that Douglas had been consistent in his policies; but now he feared that the division of the party had ensured Lincoln's election. Johnson's critics could not understand why he had voted for the Davis resolutions which repudiated popular sovereignty. Glumly Jones gave his assessment: "The Democratic party is in ruins, and the Government tending to disunion and revolution."[168]

Although Johnson may have been concerned about possible reelection to the Senate in 1863, he was an able enough politician to realize that Lincoln's election would lead to secession by at least some states.

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[165]Speech at Winchester, September 29, 1860, Speech at Fayeteville, October 1, 1860, Speech at Memphis, October 16, 1860, in *ibid.*, 662-63, 664-66, 670-71.

[166]John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, April 21, 1894, Temple Papers.

[167]Speech at Memphis [Two Versions], October 16, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 670.

[168]George W. Jones to Johnson, August 15, 1860, in *ibid.*, 656-57.

Aware of the danger, he proceeded to conduct the most extraordinary campaign of his career. At first the senator was strangely quiescent and complained that his poor health prevented him from campaigning.[169] Whatever the mysterious illness may have been, it possibly reflected the depression which Johnson must have suffered. He had fought for and lost the presidential nomination, the party which had brought him power and authority was now in a shambles, Jacob's Ladder had been knocked over, and to top his woes the old Public Functionary had vetoed the Homestead Bill--a measure for which the Plebeian had struggled and pleaded for fourteen years. The planter aristocracy, lacking the courage to vote against the bill had used the pliant Pennsylvanian to kill it. For Johnson the Homestead Bill had encapsulated his belief in the American utopia. It is hardly surprising that he took to his bed.

Yet the dreamer was a realist. He had to be in his struggle from artisan to United States senator. The southern ultras, led by Yancey, were not going to succeed if he could prevent it. To weaken the disunionists, it was essential that the Bell forces be neutralized, particularly in the border states. The senator did not spare his fellow Tennessean when he hit the campaign trail.

Johnson's first reported speech was on September 21, at Mount Pleasant, Tennessee, where he shared the platform with Governor Isham Harris. According to a Nashville report, Harris "pitched into Lincoln and Douglas, and denounced both of them *equally* as bad and obnoxious

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[169]Johnson to Abraham L. Gammon, July 31, 1860, to Nashville Democrats, August 28, 1860, in *ibid.*, 652-63, 660.

to the South." Johnson, however, assured the crowd that a good southern Douglas man could support Breckinridge, and that a good northern Breckinridge man could support Douglas. In this way, with the whole South supporting Breckinridge, the Douglas electors in the North would switch to their fellow Democrat and ensure the party's victory. "The course he took was so unexpected, after such anti-Douglas speeches, that it filled the democrats of the crowd with horror." Swept away by enthusiasm the reporter gloated, "Every intelligent man could see through Andy's demagoguery, and the Bell men were in such high spirits on account of the victory Andrew had gained for Bell that the already dying Democracy dropped on the spot, dead! dead!! dead!!!"[170]

The reaction of Bell supporters to Johnson's efforts to keep the Breckinridge party unionist, was scathing. Southerners had been told that the break in the party was over a great principle; however, editor H. K. Walker exclaimed:

> But lo! a new light dawned suddenly. Descending from the mountains of the East upon the ladder of JACOB, comes the illustrious Andrew. All other allurements having failed to draw him down from his mountain fastness, the lank senator from Maury has succeeded in unearthing him. But he refuses to bear the banner of his party. He has adopted a new shibboleth. He comes not alone, but accompanied with the accommodating BRITTON, a whilom Douglas elector, whom he has induced to sell out cheap.[171]

The same paper commented on his September 27 speech in Nashville, in which he repeated the same arguments. Walker was puzzled by the

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[170]Nashville *Republican Banner*, October 2, 1860.

[171]*Ibid.* Walker's description of "the lank senator from Maury" was a reference to A. O. P. Nicholson, Johnson's long-time friend and present colleague in the Senate. James Britton was a Greene County Democrat, and at this time a state representative.

endorsement of the *Union and American* and wanted to know why, if Douglas was so unexceptionable, the Democratic party had split? The *Republican Banner* reported his third foray into the political arena, relying on Arthur S. Colyar, a Bell supporter, for its report. On the Democratic party split, Johnson was quoted as saying, "*I am proud to say I have no hand in it--the blood is not upon my skirts.*" Johnson defended James Britton's proposal that there should be a fusion of the Douglas and Breckinridge tickets in Tennessee to ensure Bell's defeat.[172] Walker was not the only one to accuse Johnson of being the man who pulled the strings of the Greeneville Douglas elector.[173] The Plebeian's endorsement of fusion was ascribed to his desire "not to go down in the Breckinridge boat. Though at present a sort of way passenger, his baggage is not checked through, and," Walker believed, "he evidently intends to jump off in time to save his own bacon."[174] Fusion would save not only his bacon but the Democratic party, and throughout the campaign Johnson begged southerners to vote for Breckinridge, defended Douglas, and hurled abuse at Yancey and the seceders. Speaking in Memphis, he concluded his address by saying that "he for one would never follow Yancey out of the Union, but intended to fight for the South and her rights *within its limits* " However, the Douglasite paper carried an editorial critical of Johnson for being "too anxious to

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[172]*Ibid.*; Gower and Allen, *Pen and Sword*, 579-80.

[173]Nashville *Republican Banner*, October 2, 1860; Nashville *Patriot*, September 25, 1860; Nashville *Union and American*, September 20, 1860.

[174]Nashville *Republican Banner*, October 2, 1860.

redeem Tennessee from the hands of the Opposition at the utter sac[r]i-fice of principle." Acceptance of the Britton proposal would mean that "the national wing of the Democratic party" would be completely stultified and it would require "a gross abandonment of their already assumed attitudes."[175]

Johnson's strategy may have been dictated partially by a desire to abandon ship and an apparent loss of principle. This is a harsh judgment. Certainly although his tactics appeared unusual they were thought through carefully with an abiding principle behind them. Johnson, like so many Americans before him, believed passionately in the unique qualities of the American experiment in democratic government. The Union was the ark of the covenant and if he could save it, and with it the party of the people, Johnson would have played Faustus and signed his soul to the devil. If he could collaborate with the hated Whigs in crucial congressional elections, it was simple for him to endorse Stephen A. Douglas and John C. Breckinridge. And after all, the Johnson-Britton proposal was the only hope that Jacob's Ladder would be restored.

The creed of unionism which motivated Johnson's campaign was not so deeply shared by other southerners and many had abandoned it. Why remain in a Union where abolitionists and anti-slavery spokesmen continually attacked the institution of slavery, an institution that

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[175]Memphis *Daily Appeal*, October 17, 1860; Missouri *Republican* [n.d.] reprinted in *ibid.*

they deemed moral and good?[176] How could the South stay in a Union in which the major opposition party sought the eventual elimination of their economic and social system?

While Democrats were in disarray, the Republican party was united. This state of the parties was dramatized by the desperate campaign of the sickly Senator Douglas who stumped the nation from Chicago to Mobile. Preaching the virtues of the Union and the desirability of the impossible--a Democratic victory--he denounced the inevitable, the secession of some southern states. In contrast Lincoln preferred to say nothing but replied to assurances of support from his old opponents.[177] Lincoln's strategy was to preserve this unity by saying nothing. His secretary, John G. Nicolay, drew up a form reply to letters seeking the candidate's views; in it the correspondent was told that while his was one of many letters seeking information, there were just as many demanding that Lincoln say nothing, arguing that his positions were already well known. The form letter concluded: "He regrets that he can not oblige all, but you perceive it is impossible for him to do so."[178] He cautiously prefaced a denial that he had been a Know Nothing by observing, "I suppose as good, or even better men than I may have been

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[176]For a typical attack on slavery and the southern responses, see *Cong. Globe*, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., Appen, 203-7.

[177]Salmon P. Chase to Lincoln [May 9, 1860], Robert Todd Lincoln Collection; Thurlow Weed, Seward's manager, visited Lincoln on May 24. Lincoln to Leonard Swett, May 30, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 57. See also Lincoln to Salmon P. Chase, May 26, 1860, to Schuyler Colfax, May 31, 1860, and to Carl Schurz, June 18, 1860, in *ibid.*, 53, 57, 78.

[178]Form Reply to Requests for Political Opinions in *ibid.*, 60.

in American, or Know-Nothing lodges. . . ."[179] United, the Republicans were confident of victory by the beginning of September. Simon Cameron wrote Lincoln, "You may as well be getting your inaugural address ready, so as to have plenty of time to make it short. If possible we are daily becoming stronger in Pennsylvania, and in New-Jersey all is right."[180] Such confidence was based on the frantic efforts being made by surrogates such as the southern abolitionist Cassius M. Clay and the conservative Edward Bates.[181]

By the end of October even the most hopeful Democrats realized that Lincoln's election was inevitable. Now for many in the South, the problem was how to stem the emotional reaction to such an event. A Kentucky editor wrote to Lincoln informing him that while he opposed the Railsplitter, he wanted a letter from Lincoln in which he would spell out his conservative opinions. The editor was confident that this was necessary to reassure southerners "and . . . take from the disunionists every excuse or pretext for treason."[182] Although he refused to rule out such a possibility, Lincoln was reluctant to do so because there were many bad men, in the North as well as the South,

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[179]Lincoln to Abram Jonas, July 21, 1860, in *ibid.*, 85.

[180]Cameron to Lincoln, August 29, 1860, quoted in Lincoln to Joseph Medill, September 4, 1860, in *ibid.*, 110. In fact Hannibal Hamlin had written as early as July 23, "*All* is well in New England. . . ." Hamlin to Lincoln, July 23, 1860, Robert Todd Lincoln Collection.

[181]Lincoln to William H. Seward, October 12, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 126.

[182]George D. Prentice to Lincoln, October 26, 1860, Robert Todd Lincoln Collection.

who "would seize upon almost any letter I could write, as being an 'awful coming down.'" He had no intention of unnecessarily putting "any weapons in their hands."[183] They did not need weapons from Lincoln because Bell, Douglas and Breckinridge supporters were demolishing each other in the North and the South.

The Little Giant had been the only candidate with widespread national appeal, but Lincoln, with his support in the North, received less than half a million votes more than Douglas but one million more than Breckinridge. Douglas had gained substantial votes from all states in the Union, excepting Florida (367 votes), and South Carolina and Texas, where he was not on the ballot. Despite this the Electoral College, which Johnson disliked so much, gave Douglas twelve votes and he carried only one state, Missouri. John Bell's Constitutional Union party carried the three border states of Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia for thirty-nine electoral votes. The sectional candidates won their regions as expected and as expected Abraham Lincoln was duly declared elected.[184]

An air of despondency hung over the South, where only the fire-eaters had cause for celebration. But southern conservatives "were at all times handicapped by the negative character of their argument . . . Not so the radicals. Emotion was on their side."[185] It was with

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[183]Lincoln to George D. Prentice, October 19, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 134-35.

[184]Schlesinger, Jr., *History of Presidential Elections*, II, 1152.

[185]Avery O. Craven, *The Growth of Southern Nationalism, 1848-1861* (Baton Rouge, 1953), 356-57.

similar emotion that the poet and editor, William Cullen Bryant, hailed the important moral and political victory and told a New York jubilee meeting:

> We now stand upon the battle field of the great contest, while around us and before us lie the carcasses of the slain. At you feet, conquered, lies that great oligarchy which has so long held the South through submission and fear, and has ruled the North through the treachery of Northern men; and has tyrannized equally over both.[186]

Bryant was correct when he forecast that many of the younger members of the audience would never see such an important election again. They were to be the carcasses that littered the battlefields of Bull Run, Shiloh, Vicksburg, and the Wilderness. The southern oligarchy was far from dead.

But now the nation waited while the partisans cheered and Lincoln and Johnson watched to see what would happen. Meanwhile President Buchanan "sat in the White House like a bread & milk poultice drawing the rebellion to a head."[187]

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[186]Quoted in Emerson D. Fite, *The Presidential Campaign of 1860* (New York, 1911), 234.

[187]This was John Van Buren's vivid description as reported by John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, January 20, 1895, Temple Papers.

CHAPTER V

LINCOLN AND JOHNSON: DISSOLUTION AND RECONSTRUCTION

> I therefore think it certain if some part of the Union wished to separate from the rest, not only would it be able to do so, but there would be no one to prevent this. The present Union will only last as long as all states comprising it continue to wish to remain a part thereof.
>
> If there ever are great revolutions there, they will be caused by the presence of the blacks upon American soil. That is to say it will not be the equality of social conditions but rather their inequality which may give rise thereto.
>
> Alexis de Tocqueville*

The nation waited. Would the South leave the Union and what would President James Buchanan do? Waiting with them was Vice-President John C. Breckinridge. Then an announcement came in the second week of December--the chief executive granted his Vice-President his first personal meeting since the start of their administration. No doubt Breckinridge assumed that because of the crisis and because this was their first consultation, the Pennsylvanian wished to discuss the state of the Union and what could be done to save it. After he was ushered into the President's office the secretary was dismissed and Buchanan unlocked a drawer in his desk from which he took a manuscript. Gravely he addressed his Vice-President: "I have sent for you for the purpose of consulting with you, as the second officer in the government, upon the expediency, in the present lamentable condition of the

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*_Democracy in America_, 339, 614.

country, of issuing a Proclamation appointing a day of *Humiliation & Prayer*. What would you advise?"[1]

"Shock," "anger," and "frustration" are terms that have been used to describe the Vice-President's private reaction; for the "old Public Functionary," however, Breckinridge had only smiles and polite words before bowing out of the office. A modern biographer has observed: "it was but one more example of the stupidity and dis-arranged priorities on all sides that had led the country into its difficulty, and a hallmark of Buchanan's singular incapacity for office."[2] This assessment confirms the view Thomas Hart Benton is reported to have held. At Buchanan's inauguration, Benton told Montgomery Blair, "I predict, Sir, that calamity will come upon our country before that man's term expires. My God, Sir, he has no blood in his veins, his veins are filled with milk."[3]

Buchanan was hardly the only one who agreed with de Tocqueville that states could not be coerced to stay in the Union, and his faith that the solution to the crisis created by Lincoln's election lay in a day of humiliation and prayer was shared by thousands. This latter view was also to be supported by the elders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, in their 1861 general assembly. On

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[1]Quoted in William C. Davis, *Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier Symbol* (Baton Rouge, 1974), 250. For General Scott's impressions of Buchanan at this time, see Winfield Scott to Lincoln, March 30, 1861, Robert Todd Lincoln Collection.

[2]Davis, *Breckinridge*, 251.

[3]John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, January 20, 1859, Temple Papers.

Wednesday afternoon of May 29, the elders, while rejecting a resolution which included support for Lincoln's administration, agreed to set aside July 1 as a day when ministers and people could be "called on humbly to confess and bewail our national sins"; to thank God for America's wealth; to seek God's blessing for their rulers; "and to implore him, in the name of Jesus Christ, the great High Priest of the Christian profession, to turn away his anger from us, and speedily restore to us the blessings of an honourable peace." Secondly, they resolved to support the Constitution and federal government, the elders cautiously adding that their defense of the latter was not meant to uphold any particular administration or promote the cause of any political party.[4] Apparently many Americans did turn to religion in their hour of need and the elders reported that the presbyteries of Sangamon, in Lincoln's Illinois, and of Knoxville, in Johnson's Tennessee, were among several that had recorded "special manifestations of God's spirit."[5]

The sense of helplessness--of awaiting the inevitable--affected not only Buchanan but also many other Americans and particularly the southern Unionists.[6] Sitting at home in Knoxville, the wife of a

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[4]*Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1861), 329-30.

[5]*Ibid.*, 352.

[6]The Arkansas cousin of a Tennessee Unionist claimed: "I am for the union and I believe four fifths in Arkansas are, but whether the union men can be brought to act when it becomes necessary, is a dubious question, it seems that the public mind of Arks cannot be thoroughly aroused. The union men seem not to realize the danger. I think sicession [*sic*] is one of the most insane moves that a set of

Tennessee congressman wrote to a Massachusetts newspaper editor. She was disappointed that more northerners had not voted against Lincoln; had they done so, it would have strengthened those who opposed the disunionists. "You ought to know that in the gulf or cotton states," she wrote, "there has been for years a large number of educated & pretty influential men, who have been laboring to effect a dissolution of the Union. . . ." Despite their diligence, they had failed to persuade the majority of southerners, but "The Republican party was a God-send to them. John Brown & Helper most efficient coworkers. By their efforts the Democratic party was disrupted as the Whig Party was & as the American party was crushed out." Secession, she argued, would easily be achieved because with the majority now favoring it, each state would issue a declaration of independence, hold constitutional conventions, and elect officers. "And," she asserted, "once done, always done. There will be no re-union." Laura Maynard agreed with the President that "Any attempt at coercion will be madness and wickedness. Every man in the South is a soldier, & even the negros would fight, as they did in the Revolution." Any attempt to blockade the South would mean war with Britain and France; besides, discrimination in favor of foreign shipping in the transportation of cotton would seriously hurt the commercial interests of the North.

Northerners would have to grant favored treatment to the border states to keep them in the Union. This did not mean places in Lincoln's cabinet, a suggestion which had cost southern Unionists

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men were embarked upon in the world." Newton J. Temple to O. P. Temple, December 29, 1860; see also Rolfe S. Sanders to O. P. Temple, January 4, 1861, Temple Papers.

thousands of votes. Further the North had to change its attitude toward the South. The failure of the people in the two sections to understand each other was, in her opinion, simple to explain.

> The truth is that there is a very prominent element of the Southern character, which Northern people generally can neither appreciate nor understand, simply because they do not have it themselves--I mean the *sense of honor*. I have no better word for it & yet it will hardly convey the exact idea--perhaps *sensibility to insult* will do better. This is unfortunate in two respects--it leads them to submit to insults to the disparagement of their own character, in the estimation of Southern people, & it does not restrain them from giving gross and wanton insults, which, without doing any good, are more offensive than positive injuries.[7]

Andrew Johnson also waited. His address to a Unionist rally in Greeneville on November 24, 1860, reflected Mrs. Maynard's alarm at the growing secessionist movement. He was even prepared to share the platform with his Whig opponent Thomas A. R. Nelson, who had so eloquently defended the Union eleven months before.[8] Johnson demanded equal rights for the South and reiterated his belief that the section could only be certain of its constitutional privileges if it stayed in the Union.[9] He attacked resolutions offered by Thomas D. Arnold, in support of Lincoln's administration.[10] After much debate, the

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[7]Laura Maynard to George L. Hillard, November 16, 1860, Maynard Papers.

[8]*Cong. Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 Sess., 46-48. Reporting Nelson's speech the next day, a New York paper proclaimed, "The old Jackson spirit is not yet dead in Tennessee. It lives and breathes and burns again in the heart of Thomas A. R. Nelson." New York *Herald*, December 8, 1860.

[9]Speech at Union Meeting, Greeneville, November 24, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 673.

[10]Greeneville *Democrat*, November 27, 1860.

Greeneville Unionists passed fourteen resolutions stating that Congress could not control slavery in the territories, that the Supreme Court was to arbitrate all cases involving slavery, that slave property in the territories must have government protection, and that popular sovereignty was to be upheld. On the one hand, the gathering approved resolutions deploring the sectional nature of the election and the existence of personal liberty laws; on the other hand, it denounced the right of secession, equating it with revolution. Republicans were only a temporary party and the friends in the North must not be deserted. Finally the Greeneville Unionists expressed their faith in the Constitution.[11]

Despite this apparent agreement, southern Unionists were badly divided. Horace Maynard suggested to a fellow East Tennessean that the six New England states should be united to form one, thus reducing the voice of New England in the Senate. He had corresponded with a friend employed by the Boston *Courier*, who in turn had published articles on the scheme.[12] Oliver P. Temple was encouraged by a Kentucky Unionist to continue to advocate his proposition for a border state confederacy. Both men realized that pressure was needed to get the South back into the Union, "even little pestilent S. Car." The Kentuckian was concerned about the strength of the secessionists. With Mississippi copying the action of South Carolina and Louisiana, they would "soon become a foreign power and *we* shall have difficulty about

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[11]Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 673-74n.

[12]Horace Maynard to O. P. Temple, January 8, 1861, Temple Papers.

the navigation of the river."[13] Despite encouraging letters from northern well-wishers,[14] southern Unionists by February, 1861, were desperate--a feeling captured by a Memphian writing to a Knoxville friend. "If Tenn. does go out--(which I do not believe & may God forbid!) and you secede from the State of T *count me in* for I will move there *instanter*."[15] With such confusion among the Unionists in these months, it is hardly surprising that men like Johnson said little and waited.

This confusion was in sharp contrast with the feelings of the southern nationalists. Prior to the election, as early as October 5, Governor William H. Gist of South Carolina had written to other cotton state governors informing them that when Lincoln was elected, a state convention would be called and asking whether they were prepared either to follow or to lead the secession movement. If they decided to call an election he wanted to know when so that

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[13]C. S. Todd to O. P. Temple, January [17?], 1861, *ibid.* Andrew Johnson's friend Sam Milligan proposed that a similar border state confederacy, made of conservative southern and northern states, should be set up. The government would have the same constitution but with additional guarantees for slavery. Milligan to Johnson, December 13, 1860, Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 690-91. Johnson threw out for consideration a similar proposal during his Speech on Secession, December 18-19, 1860, in *ibid.*, IV, 34. By January, however, Johnson had repudiated the idea. See Johnson to Sam Milligan, January 13, 1861, in *ibid.*, 161. Fellow Tennessee Senator A. O. P. Nicholson had proposed a border state confederacy on December 24, 1860. *Cong. Globe*, 36th Cong., 2 Sess., 185-89. Three weeks later Johnson denounced him as "a kind of between'ty and would like to pass through the Crisis without touching any body or b[e]ing touched by any body--" Johnson to Sam Milligan, January 13, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 161.

[14]H. K. Wilson to O. P. Temple, January 17; S. Holland to O. P. Temple, January 25, 1861, Temple Papers.

[15]Rolfe S. Sanders to O. P. Temple, February 6, 1861, *ibid.*

their action could be coordinated.[16] By late February, 1861, a Memphis lawyer informed a fellow attorney, "I think it much more probable that I will be in the harness of war, than the harness of matrimony before four months."[17] Maynard's assessment that the secessionists wanted rapid action to forestall compromise efforts may have been accurate, but there were few signs of compromise from the Republicans to dampen the secessionists' ardor.[18] In Indiana, reported a correspondent, Republicans refused to vote support for the Crittenden resolutions, and although the writer was confident that time would remedy all evils, time was fast running out.[19]

In these crucial days, what was the President-elect doing to calm the jangling nerves of the nation? He too was waiting. A typical Lincoln pronouncement--and his first--was issued three days after his election.

> I find Mr. Lincoln is not insensible to any uneasiness in the minds of candid men, nor to any commercial, or financial, depression, or disturbance, in the country if there be such; still he does not, so far as present advised, deem it necessary, or proper for him to make, or authorize, any public declaration. He thinks candid men need only to examine his views already before the public.[20]

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[16]Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln*, II, 306-7; Bruce Catton, *The Coming Fury* (New York, 1961), 105-9.

[17]W. Y. C. Humes to O. P. Temple, February 27, 1861, Temple Papers.

[18]Horace Maynard to O. P. Temple, January 29, 1861, *ibid.*

[19]H. K. Wilson to O. P. Temple, January 17, 1861, *ibid.*

[20]Views on Commercial and Financial Uneasiness [November 9, 1861], in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 138. This was Lincoln's only response to the commercial panic that had set in a few days prior to the election. *Harper's Weekly*, November 24, 1860.

Lincoln was convinced that there was nothing he could say or do to avert the financial and political crisis. In a private and confidential communication with Truman Smith, a Connecticut politician, he wrote that it was useless for him to repeat his views for those who knew them, and a waste of time and a loss of self-respect to try to persuade those who had never bothered to read reports of his speeches. Any effort on his part would create contempt among good men and encourage bad men to clamor even louder. He was aware of the financial depression but he added, "nothing is to be gained by fawning around the '*respectable scoundrels*' who got it up. Let them go to work and repair the mischief of their own making; and then perhaps they will be less greedy to do the like again."[21] And one day prior to the South Carolina legislature's unanimously adopting an ordinance of secession, Lincoln rejected a proposal by the Democratic editor of the *Missouri Republican* that he should publish, in condensed form, all Lincoln's speeches made in the last three years. The editor was certain that this would keep Missouri in the Union. In his reply, Lincoln acidly noted: "Please pardon me for suggesting that if the papers, like yours, which heretofore have persistently garbled, and misrepresented what I have said, will now fully and fairly place it before their readers, there can be no further misunderstanding." He concluded that it was out of the question that he change his policy. "If I thought *repitition* would do any good I would make it. But my judgement is that it would do positive harm. The secessionists,

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[21]Lincoln to Truman Smith, November 10, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 138.

per se believing they had alarmed me, would clamor all the louder."[22]

He had to act following the unanimous adoption of an ordinance of secession by South Carolina on November 19, 1860, followed by the resignation of all federal officials in the state. But Lincoln still did not want to say anything. The solution struck upon was to write a speech which would be given by a fellow Republican from Illinois, Senator Lyman Trumbull. Using this medium, the President-elect assured the nation that all states would be left to control their own affairs, protect their property, and preserve peace. Secessionists were acting rapidly because they realized that they could succeed only if they played on misplaced southern fears.[23] Trumbull went further than Lincoln wanted in attempting to allay these fears, flatly denying charges that Republicans would interfere with slavery in the states, or that they were "advocates of negro-equality or amalgamation," and adding that when southerners understood this the two sections would be reunited as in the past, when they had fought for a common cause and against a common enemy.[24] In addition, he left out a paragraph of Lincoln's statement, which read: "I am rather glad of this military preparation in the South. It will enable the people the more easily to suppress any uprisings there, which their misrepresentations of purposes may have encouraged."[25]

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[22]Lincoln to Nathan P. Paschall, November 16, 1860, in *ibid.*, 140.

[23]Passage Written for Lyman Trumbull's Speech at Springfield, Illinois, November 20, 1860, in *ibid.*, 141-42.

[24]*Illinois State Journal*, November 21, 1860, quoted in *ibid.*, 142n.

[25]Passage Written for Lyman Trumbull's Speech at Springfield, Illinois, November 20, 1860, in *ibid.*, 142.

Lincoln's opinion that issuing a message to reassure the public would do nothing to halt secessionist activities or to win support in the North proved correct. Trumbull's speech was widely criticized even though he had censored the last paragraph as too offensive to the South, exploited racism to calm national fears, and made commitments not approved by Lincoln. In a letter to the editor of the New York *Times*, Lincoln asked what purpose would be served by a statement. He wanted to know if the editor had read Senator Trumbull's speech; if so, why had no newspaper used it to quieten public anxiety? "On the contrary the Boston Courier and its' class, hold me responsible for the speech," Lincoln expostulated, "and endeavor to inflame the North with the belief that it foreshadows an abandonment of Republican ground by the incoming administration; while the Washington Constitution and its' class hold the same speech up to the South as an open declaration of war against them."[26] And Raymond soon realized that Lincoln was right. On December 14, 1860, he forwarded a letter he had received from William C. Smedes, a member of the Mississippi legislature, vowing that he "would regard death by a stroke of lightning to Mr. Lincoln

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[26]Lincoln to Henry J. Raymond, November 28, 1860, in *ibid.*, 146; Smith, *Presidency of James Buchanan*, 155-56; William E. Baringer, *A House Divided: Lincoln as President Elect* (Springfield, 1945), 33-38. According to Baringer, 28-58, Lincoln was confused by the vast amount of conflicting advice. For newspaper pressure from the northwest to keep open the navigation of the Mississippi, see Chicago *Daily Tribune*, December 18, Buffalo *Morning Express*, December 24, 1860, Cincinnati *Daily Gazette*, January 14, Milwaukee *Daily Wisconsin*, January 18, and Cincinnati *Daily Commercial*, January 25, 1861, reprinted in Howard Cecil Perkins, ed., *Northern Editorials on Secession* (2 vols., New York, 1942), II, 539, 540-41, 542-44, 544-45, 547-49.

as but a just punishment from an offended deity. . . ."[27] He who was so offensive to God informed Raymond that the Mississippian was a "mad-man" and, resorting again to the use of the royal third person, told the editor: "Mr. Lincoln is not pledged to the ultimate extinctinction [*sic*] of slavery; does not hold the black man to be the equal of the white, unqualifiedly as Mr. S. states it; and never did stigmatize their white people as immoral and unchristian. . . ."[28]

He continued to refuse numerous requests that he issue a policy statement, including one from his old Whig colleague in Congress, Alexander H. Stephens. The Georgian maintained that "A word fitly spoken by you now would be like 'apples of gold in pictures of silver.'"[29] Lincoln underestimated the fears of the South, and had asked the Georgian, with apparent incredulity, if the people of his section really believed that the Republicans would "*directly*, or *indirectly*" interfere with slavery. If so, he wished to reassure Stephens that such fears were not justified. Then he succinctly summed up the whole crisis: "You think slavery is *right* and ought to be extended; while we think it is *wrong* and ought to be restricted. That I suppose is the rub. It certainly is the only substantial difference between us."[30]

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[27]Quoted in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 156n.

[28]Lincoln to Henry J. Raymond, December 18, 1860, in *ibid.*, 156.

[29]Alexander H. Stephens to Lincoln, December 30, 1860, quoted in Myrta L. Avary, ed., *Recollections of Alexander H. Stephens* (New York, 1910), 60.

[30]Lincoln to Alexander H. Stephens, December 22, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 160.

The difference was substantial, so much so that the delicate system of checks and balances in the Constitution was no solution. Political associationism, which de Tocqueville had seen as a dangerous but healthy contribution to American democracy, had collapsed with the rise of the Republican party, which many Americans, and the vast majority of southerners, saw as a revolutionary threat to the existence of slavery and the southern way of life. Cooper's gloomy forebodings about political parties had been confirmed. A sectional party had won the presidency--an office that had acquired enormous symbolic power since the presidency of Andrew Jackson. In their struggle against the Black Republicans--"abolitionists and amalgamationists"--the Democrats not only wrecked their own party, but had in their internecine strife added to the atmosphere of hate and suspicion which was to plunge the nation into its bloodiest war.

Secession was seen by most southerners as a defensive move to protect the Constitution and even then not all were eager to join South Carolina.[31] Significantly it was the newer, richer states of the South--many populated by natives of the Palmetto state--who were the first to join the secession movement. Alexander Stephens, future vice president of the Confederacy, had defended the Union,[32] but

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[31]South Carolina's action was defended by Robert B. Rhett in "The Address of the People of South Carolina, Assembled in Convention, to the People of the Slaveholding States of the United States" and by C. G Memminger, "Declaration of the Immediate Causes which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union," in McPherson, *History of the Rebellion*, 12-16.

[32]For Unionist speeches by Stephens before the Georgia legislature, November 4, 1860, and the state convention in January, 1861, see *ibid.*, 20-26.

warned, "When men come under the influence of fanaticism, there is no telling where their impulses or passions may drive them." This was the cause of southern fears which were not unreasonable, particularly in light of the failure of the Republicans to condemn John Brown's raid.[33]

Although he was busy forming his cabinet, appeasing Seward and struggling to please the Pennsylvania Republicans,[34] Lincoln in his correspondence never lost sight of the national issues. Informed by a Republican representative that he was a member of the Committee of Thirty Three appointed by the House to consider Buchanan's message on secession, Lincoln instructed him not to compromise on the extension of slavery. Any such compromise would be disastrous for the party and would only delay the inevitable. "Douglas is sure to be again trying to bring up his 'Pop. Sov.' Have none of it. The tug has come & better now than later." His only positive proposal was that the Fugitive Slave law should be enforced, and even this was qualified "--to put it in its mildest form, ought not to be resisted."[35] Lincoln was

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[33]Avary, *Recollections of Alexander H. Stephens*, I, 60.

[34]Lincoln to William H. Seward, December 8, to Lyman Trumbull, December 8, Memorandum on the Appointment of Simon Cameron [*c* December 31, 1860], to Simon Cameron, December 31, 1860, to Simon Cameron, January 3, to Lyman Trumbull, January 7 and to Simon Cameron, January 13, to William H. Seward, January 19, 1861, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 148, 149, 166-67, 168, 169-70, 171, 174, 180. For Seward's warning not to offend Cameron's Pennsylvania friends, see William H. Seward to Lincoln, January 15, 1861, Robert Todd Lincoln Collection.

[35]Lincoln to William Kellogg, December 11, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 150. He expressed similar views to Elihu Washburne, December 13, to John A. Gilmer, December 15, to Lyman Trumbull, December 17, and to John D. Defrees, December 18, 1860, in *ibid.*, 151, 152, 155.

determined that the extension of slavery should be halted and that Republican fears of secession should not make them forget why they had won the election.

Ironically, he faced a crisis in his own party. On the same day of the Greeneville Unionist meeting, Thurlow Weed, Seward's campaign manager, published an editorial in his Albany *Evening Journal* on November 24 in which he proposed strengthening the Fugitive Slave law and restoring the Missouri Compromise line. He later claimed that the editorial was designed to persuade the border states to stay in the Union and that his attack on radical abolitionists, for encouraging southern extremists, was intended to separate radical and conservative Republicans.[36] Later he maintained that his efforts had prevented "a disastrous division" of the North.

> I believed then, as I know now, that by insisting that the war was prosecuted to maintain the government and preserve the Union, the Democratic masses, with some of their leaders, would remain loyal; while on the other hand, if the whole Republican party proclaimed it a war for abolition of slavery, a united South, would prove too strong for a divided North.[37]

Weed later recalled a private meeting with Lincoln in Springfield on November 25, during which the President-elect had told him that his editorial would either do good or result in much mischief, but "that these views, views which had not occurred to him, opened a new channel for his thoughts, and that while he should watch the progress of popular sentiment, he hoped to find my apprehensions unfounded." Apparently

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[36]Seward opposed the position taken by Weed. Van Deusen, *Seward*, 239.

[37]Harriet A. Weed, ed., *Autobiography of Thurlow Weed* (2 vols., Boston, 1883), I, 603-4.

Lincoln was confident that secession could be averted.[38] Contrary to Weed's later assertions the reaction to his editorial "was sharply adverse." If intended as a trial balloon then it was shot down quickly.[39]

Whatever may have transpired between Lincoln and Weed in late November, there is no evidence that by mid-December he supported the compromise as proposed by the editor. Perhaps he had watched the progress of public sentiment which was distinctly hostile toward the scheme. He informed Weed that if a proposed governors' conference was held in New York, he was to inform them that Lincoln was "inflexible on the territorial question," and that the extension of the Missouri Compromise line or the adoption of Douglas's popular sovereignty would destroy the party. The Fugitive Slave law must be enforced. As for secession, he was of the opinion that no state could leave the Union without the consent of the other states and that the President and his government officials should "run the machine as it is."[40]

Lincoln insisted that the party should stand by its pledge to halt the spread of slavery into the territories. He knew that it was

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[38] *Ibid.*, 605. In these crucial weeks, "The tone of the Republican press had indicated a bellicose spirit in some quarters, a fatuous tendency to toy with the fictitious alternative of voluntary separation in others, a serious effort to grasp the problem and achieve a solution in almost none." David M. Potter, *Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis* (New Haven, 1942), 74; Smith, *Presidency of James Buchanan*, 156.

[39] Potter, *Lincoln and His Party*, 72-74.

[40] Lincoln to Thurlow Weed, December 17, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 154. Lincoln rebuffed border state efforts for a similar compromise. See Lincoln to James T. Hale, January 11, 1861, in *ibid.*, 172.

this issue which had catapulted the fledgling party into power in many northern states and had won the presidency for him. Retreat would mean certain defeat without any assurance that it would prevent secession. An Ohio Republican warned him not to humble himself before the South because if he did, he would lose his best friends.[41] But it was Buchanan, not Lincoln, who would preside over the country until the inauguration in March, 1861. The "old Public Functionary," advised by southern Democrats, even permitted administration patronage to subsidize the secessionist Washington *Constitution* until the end of January, 1861. Therefore, it was hardly surprising that in his annual message of December 3, 1860, Buchanan ignored the northern side of the argument and blamed the crisis on the anti-slavery crusade. Continuation of the agitation would ensure the demise of the Union. This could be averted if the South was left alone.

He agreed with the South's overt reasons for secession and then declared Lincoln's election was not a threat to the South. But northern states, he argued, should repeal their personal liberty laws. If this was not done nothing would save the Union. "In that event, injured States, after having first used all peaceful means to obtain redress, would be justified in revolutionary resistance to the government of the Union."[42] Revolution, not secession, was permitted. This did not please southerners who wanted to portray themselves as

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[41]G. F. Lewis to Lincoln, December 5, 1860, in David C. Mearns, ed., *The Lincoln Papers* (2 vols., New York, 1948), II, 340.

[42]Quoted in Smith, *Presidency of James Buchanan*, 150.

defenders of the Constitution and not as revolutionaries. And all except Buchanan knew that not all northern states would repeal these laws.

The President had to obey his oath of office to uphold the Constitution, but he failed to say how he would enforce the laws in South Carolina where all the federal officers had resigned from office. The federal government did not have the power either to recognize secession or to coerce a state into the Union.[43]

His only remedy totally ignored the issues which had created the Republican party and which were central for an understanding of the crisis. A national convention called by Congress would pass a constitutional amendment granting southerners federal protection for their slave property. In effect he was asking the North not only to guarantee rights but also to concede to the southern demand that slavery was morally right. Northern support for Lincoln and Douglas provided enough evidence that there was no hope that such a proposal would or could be taken seriously.[44]

In the last weeks of December, in a secret meeting with a Buchanan emissary, Lincoln refused to support the proposal for a national convention to pass a constitutional amendment. The Constitution, he argued, provided the necessary machinery and if the people

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[43]Buchanan's concept of national sovereignty was well defined by a southern Unionist: "It seems conceded now that each state has the right to secede and if so our federal government is hardly the shadow of a shade--we have no country." A. A. Doak to O. P. Temple, November 16, 1860, Temple Papers.

[44]Smith, *Presidency of James Buchanan*, 148-52.

of the states wished to amend, then he would not oppose their desires. He reassured the President that he was opposed to the invasion of one state by another and agreed to issue the following statement if six of the twelve United States senators from Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Texas co-signed it: "We recommend to the people of the States we represent respectively, to suspend all action for dismemberment of the Union, at least, until some act, deemed to violate our rights, shall be done by the incoming administration."[45] For obvious reasons, the statement was never published.

Using Representative William Kellogg of Illinois, Lincoln made what was equivalent to a public pronouncement[46] in late January, 1861, in which he said that he would not oppose a national convention if it was the will of Congress. However, he prefaced this remark with statements which did not encourage the search for compromise and which stiffened Republican opposition. Lincoln was quoted as saying: "I will suffer death before I will consent or will advise my friends to consent to any concession or compromise which looks like buying the privilege of taking possession of this government to which we have a constitutional right. . . ." Regardless of the merits of numerous compromise proposals under consideration, concessions in the face of threats would reduce the United States to "the existing disorganized state of affairs in Mexico."[47]

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[45]Lincoln to Duff Green, December 28, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 162.

[46]*Ibid.*, 176n.

[47]Remarks Concerning Concessions to Secession, January 19-21, 1861, in *ibid.*, 175-76.

Lincoln could not stop the Balkanizing of America because he had not been inaugurated and the man who crouched in the White House denied the power of the federal government to maintain the Union.[48] Lincoln's policy with regard to the forts was more aggressive than Buchanan's. The latter protested only South Carolina's seizure of federal arsenals and would not send reinforcements to Major Anderson who had withdrawn to Fort Sumter. On Christmas Eve Lincoln informed Lyman Trumbull that for two days he had received despatches saying that the lame-duck President would order the surrender of the forts. "I can hardly believe this," Lincoln wrote, "but if it prove true, I will, if your friends at Washington concur, announce publicly at once that they are to be retaken after the inauguration. This will give the Union men a rallying cry and preparation will proceed somewhat on their side, as well as on the other."[49] The references to "a rallying cry" and "preparation" indicate that Lincoln was aware of the need for action and for rallying northern opinion. If there was a showdown with South Carolina, there was a danger that border states such as Virginia and Kentucky would also leave the Union.

From his home in Springfield, Lincoln counselled members of his party to stand firm. An equal determination was reflected in the new

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[48]This belief, shared by South Carolina commissioners, was denied by Buchanan. Correspondence between President Buchanan and the "Commissioners" of South Carolina, December 28, 30, 1860, in McPherson, *History of the Rebellion*, 29-32.

[49]Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull, December 24, 1860, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 162; see also Lincoln to David F. Hunter and to Peter H. Silvester, December 22, 1860, in *ibid.*, 159, 160.

South. A recent biographer of Louis T. Wigfall, commenting on the senator's home county meeting of November 24 which unanimously voted for resistance to Black Republicanism, observes that these Texans reflected the sentiments in other deep South states. "The disunionists had lost a fair election, but they would not accept the results. Wigfall, and even more moderate southern leaders, refused to fill a minority role behind the Republicans."[50] They were not prepared to be a loyal opposition. How could they be when, according to Wigfall, the aim of the Black Republicans was to bring an irrepressible conflict to the South, burn the towns, and make Texas a free state?[51] Georgian Robert Toombs spoke for many southerners when he pleaded with the South: "Never permit this federal government to pass into the traitorous hands of the Black Republican party. . . . Listen to 'no vain babblings,' to no treacherous jargon about 'overt acts'; they have already been committed. Defend yourselves." The Republican enemy should be met at the doorsill not the hearthstone and driven from the

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[50]Alvy L. King, *Louis T. Wigfall: Southern Fire-Eater* (Baton Rouge, 1970), 101. An Ohio congressman ascribed Wigfall's secessionist vehemence to the Texan's fondness for liquor. Samuel S. Cox, *Eight Years in Congress, from 1857 to 1865: Memoir and Speeches* (New York, 1865), 19-20. Andrew Johnson's brother, then residing in Texas, suggested that the local secessionists should "get their necks cracked" and that "these dear fellows that has made the rumpus should try the strength of hemp and live Oake limbs." William P. Johnson to Johnson, December 2, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, III, 682.

[51]*Cong. Globe*, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., 74. Texans panicked in 1860, and numerous fires were blamed on anti-slavery agitators. Some state residents went to great lengths to have notarized letters assuring local vigilantes that they were not abolitionists. See John A. Corby to O. P. Temple, August 13, 1860, Temple Papers.

"temple of liberty" or its pillars should be pulled down and everyone should be ruined.[52] In contrast, Jefferson Davis, writing to Franklin Pierce[53] was more reflective and somber as he announced "the hour is at hand which closes my connection with the United States. . . ." Davis hoped a collision between the sections could be avoided, but he believed that "When Lincoln comes in, he will have to continue on the path of his predecessor to inaugurate a civil war. . . ." The idea of such a war horrified him but he would do his duty and he hoped Pierce would not be ashamed of their former relationship or cease to be a friend.[54]

Were Lincoln, Wigfall, and Toombs correct in their assessment that compromise was out of the question in November or December, 1860?[55] Certainly, Lincoln was right in his judgment that a repudiation of their principles would have undermined the new Republican party and

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[52] *Cong. Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 93.

[53] Davis had hoped the Democratic party would support Pierce in 1860. Jefferson Davis to Franklin Pierce, June 13, 1860, "Some Papers of Franklin Pierce, 1852-1862," *American Historical Review*, X (1904-5), 364.

[54] Jefferson Davis to Franklin Pierce, January 20, 1861, *ibid.*, 366-67. For Pierce's view see Franklin Pierce to Bishop Carlton Chase, May 6, 1861, *ibid.*, 367-68. On Davis's reluctance to secede, see Cox, *Eight Years in Congress*, 19.

[55] According to Smith, *Presidency of James Buchanan*, 154, there was no hope of a compromise. The rapidity with which many southerners abandoned faith in the Union is seen in the letters of the mayor of Savannah, Charles C. Jones, Jr. See Charles C. Jones, Jr. to Rev. C. C. Jones, October 18, to Mrs. C. C. Jones, November 17, and to Mrs. Mary Jones, November 13, 1860, in Myers, *The Children of Pride*, 621, 626, 627. As early as January, 1858, Parson Brownlow reported from Mobile, Alabama: "The truth is, there is but little talked of here, but a dissolution of the Union, and all parties are for it. It is so in Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Alabama, where I have been. The tendency of things is that way." W. G. Brownlow to O. P. Temple, January 26, 1858, Temple Papers.

there was little that could be done with the precipitate action of South Carolina and the extraordinary inactivity of the President. The situation was not improved by the instability of the cabinet. There were three Secretaries of State in five days. First to leave was Michigander Lewis Cass who resigned on December 12 because Buchanan refused to reinforce the South Carolina forts. He was replaced by Jeremiah S. Black. The Pennsylvanian asked to be relieved of the post on December 17 and was succeeded by Edwin M. Stanton. As secessionist fervor mounted in Georgia, Howell Cobb resigned as Secretary of the Treasury on December 10 and his successor, Phillip F. Thomas resigned January 11. Prior to Thomas's departure, Virginian John B. Floyd, Secretary of War, left the cabinet because the President would not remove the troops in Fort Sumter and because of incompetence--if not fraud--in dealings with army and public building contracts.[56] Such instability would have hampered enforcement of policy decisions even if the President had been prepared to make any, and he was singularly reluctant to do so.

Many of the cabinet members remained in office so that they could inform their disunionist colleagues what Buchanan intended to do and thwart it if possible. Secretary of War Floyd assured Governor William H. Gist of South Carolina that he would cut off his right arm

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[56]Philip S. Klein, *President James Buchanan: A Biography* (University Park, Pa., 1962), 377-78. Under the belief that troops were being sent on board the "Star of the West," the Secretary of the Interior, Jacob Thompson, submitted his resignation on January 8. South Carolinians were warned by Louis T. Wigfall that Sumter was to be reinforced. Wigfall to Governor F. W. Pickens, February 20, 1861, in *The War of Rebellion: A Compilation of Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (170 vols., Washington, 1880-1901), Ser. 1, I, 257. Hereinafter cited as *Official Records*.

before he would agree to send troops to Charleston.[57] Interior Secretary Jacob Thompson warned South Carolinians that General Scott had sent the "Star of the West" to reprovision Anderson at Sumter. Although a United States ship was fired on and was forced to withdraw, Buchanan did nothing.[58]

A lame duck president was hampered by a disloyal and unstable cabinet. Lincoln was not in office and Senator Alfred Iverson of Georgia was warning his colleagues that if the South was not permitted to leave peacefully "we will welcome you with bloody hands to hospitable graves."[59] But despite these obstacles there were some who hoped for compromise and according to Ohio Congressman Samuel S. Cox, even Republicans such as Corwin, Adams, and Edward J. Morris in the House and Cameron, Baker, Dixon, Foster, and Collamer in the Senate, were prepared for a compromise--one which would "at least retain the border States, if it did not stop the movement of the Gulf States."[60]

Andrew Johnson was one of those senators who sought a compromise.[61] At first it seemed to many contemporaries that the senator's unionism

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[57]Smith, *Presidency of James Buchanan*, 171; McPherson, *History of the Rebellion*, 28. Anderson moved from Moultrie to Sumter on December 25, *Official Records*, Ser. 1, II, 2. A recent study suggests that Anderson's removal from Moultrie to Sumter was "a maneuver that postponed war" but that it "may at the same time have made war ultimately more unavoidable." Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 541. If war was unavoidable, I fail to see how it could be made more so.

[58]Nevins, *Emergence of Lincoln*, II, 379-80.

[59]*Cong. Globe*, 36th Cong., 2 Sess., 12.

[60]Cox, *Eight Years in Congress*, 18.

[61]Efforts to mediate the dispute outside the halls of Congress included the Washington Peace Conference chaired by John Tyler. The

was a radical break with his political past, and he was to be accused of betrayal by secessionists and even southern Unionists.[62] But examination of Johnson's early career shows that his stand in 1860 was totally consistent with his earlier pronouncements. Like his hero, Andrew Jackson, the Tennessee senator was an ardent defender of the Union. As a southerner he believed that his section could only protect itself against the onslaught of abolitionism by clinging to the Constitution.[63] However, his hopes for a united South within the Union were fast fading, and now this was the time for action. So long as he believed his section would remain loyal to the most perfect form of government devised by man, he had opposed compromise. "I was no compromise man then [in 1850]. I was for each of those measures which I sustained because I believed it to be right," he told his fellow senators in 1858: "I think it is time for the North and the South to abandon the idea of compromise. You have a Constitution which guarantees certain rights to all the States composing the Confederacy. Stand by the Constitution." He almost wished that "compromise" as a word "was stricken out of the English language."[64]

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lengthy, futile disputes were documented by a delegate. Lucius E. Chittenden, ed., *A Report of the Debates and Proceedings in the Secret Sessions of the Conference Convention for Proposing Amendments to the Constitution of the United States* (New York, 1864), *passim.*

[62]John Bell Brownlow to W. G. McAdoo, February 4, 1890, Temple Papers.

[63]For just two of many expressions of this view, see Speech at Nashville, July 15, 1856, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, II, 419, and Speech on Harper's Ferry Incident, December 12, 1859, in *ibid.*, III, 340.

[64]Speech on Popular Sovereignty and the Right of Instruction, February 23, 1858, in *ibid.*, 64-65.

Two years later, in an attempt to save the Constitution, Johnson was eager to compromise.[65] His first suggestion was a repetition of proposals first introduced in the House in 1851 and reiterated in his gubernatorial messages of 1853 and 1855. The constitutional amendments of December 13, 1860, reflected his long-held faith that greater democracy was the solution to society's ills.[66] They included the now familiar "Andy Johnsonisms": popular election of president, vice-president, and senators as well as limiting the terms of judges to twelve years, terms on a staggered basis with vacancies filled equally between slave and free states. The latter proposal reflected his deep distrust of the American aristocracy--lawyers.[67] But the amendments were revised also in that the two executive offices, like the judgeships, would be held alternately by a southerner and a northerner.[68]

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[65]He was willing to accept a "consolidated Government" rather than see the destruction of "this splendid, this magnificent, this stupendous fabric of human government, the most perfect that the world ever saw, and which has succeeded thus far without a parallel in the history of the world." Speech on Secession, December 18-19, 1860, in *ibid.*, IV, 34.

[66]He explained six days later, "I have an abiding faith, I have an unshaken confidence in man's capability to govern himself." *Ibid.*, 44.

[67]Johnson revealed his dislike of the legal profession when he attacked the secession movement. "Though I am not a lawyer, though I have not made the legal profession my study and my pursuit, I claim to have some little common sense and understanding as to the application of general principles." *Ibid.*, 15. He denounced Judah P. Benjamin's defense of secession as "a complete lawyer's speech, and the authorities were summed up simply to make out the case on his side; and he left out all those that would disprove his position." Speech on the Seceding States, February 5-6, 1861, *ibid.*, 211.

[68]Joint Resolution for Amendments on Presidential, Senatorial, and Judicial Selection, December 13, 1860, in *ibid.*, III, 692-95.

The editors of Johnson's papers have pointed out that "The idea of protecting a minority from the tyranny of a majority and the proposition of alternating between North and South are reminiscent of Calhoun's 'concurrent voice.'" But as they stress, "Johnson, the tribune of the people, was concerned above all with the guarantee of southern rights."[69] On the same day he submitted five unamendable amendments relating to slavery. The territory of the United States was to be divided between free and slave states. The Constitution was to include an explicit declaration that all states should return fugitive slaves; failure to comply meant that a state had to pay double the value of the slave. Slavery was to be permitted in shipyards and arsenals where it already existed and the "peculiar institution" could not be abolished in the District of Columbia without the approval of Maryland, the consent of the local inhabitants, and compensation for the owners. Finally, Congress could not interfere with the three-fifths' representation proviso or the interstate slave trade.[70]

These resolutions, along with two hundred similar amendments, were referred to the Committee of Thirteen which had been set up by the Senate to find a solution to the secession crisis. The committee had had an inauspicious start when it was first proposed. "I shall vote for the resolution," said Senator James M. Mason of Virginia, "but without an idea that it is possible for anything that Congress can do

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[69] *Ibid*, IV, xxv.

[70] Resolution Proposing "Unamendable" Amendments Affecting Slavery, December 13, 1860, in *ibid.*, III, 696-97.

to reach the dangers with which we are threatened."[71] The committee's adoption of Jefferson Davis's motion that no action should be taken unless there are a dual majority among the five Republicans and eight Democrats, guaranteed failure. Whatever the merits of Calhoun's theory of a "concurrent majority," it must be remembered that the compromises of 1820 and 1850 would not have been passed under this rule.[72] It is hardly surprising that the Committee of Thirteen failed to agree on any compromise. And efforts by the unwieldy House Committee of Thirty Three were equally fruitless.[73]

While members of Congress wrangled and northerners doubted southern commitment to secession,[74] Johnson, like Lincoln, gradually became more alarmed. Initially, like Lincoln, he worked from behind the scenes. Using a list of southern voters provided by the director of the census, Johnson assisted government clerks in dispatching unionist speeches throughout the region.[75] Meanwhile, the strong Unionist sentiment evident in East Tennessee must have influenced him to make his important speech of December 18 and 19.[76] Graf and

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[71] *Cong. Globe*, 36th Cong., 2 Sess., 35.

[72] Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 530-31; Nevins, *Emergence of Lincoln*, II, 390-94.

[73] Horace Maynard to O. P. Temple, January 8, 1861, Temple Papers.

[74] Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 522-27. [75] Graf, "Andrew Johnson," 219.

[76] According to John Bell Brownlow, "the real battle which saved East Tennessee [for the Union, was] made in the contest of 1860 and later immediately after the election of Lincoln," and this struggle was led by Thomas A. R. Nelson. Brownlow unjustly considered Johnson an extreme states' rights supporter until this speech in December. "And I now have no idea that Johnson would have made that speech but for

Haskins have noted that while the speech "marked a turning point in Johnson's career and enhanced his popularity North, it neither swept the country nor necessarily astounded the sections . . ."--despite claims by his biographers.[77] There is no evidence to support the opinion of Johnson's old Whig rival, Oliver P. Temple, that the speech made Johnson "the most popular man in the North, excepting Lincoln."[78] The speech was in fact virtually ignored by the northern press.

Essentially it was a rehash of his arguments on behalf of Breckinridge during the election campaign. Denouncing secession, he still identified himself with southern interests. Southerners had many just complaints but his solution was the same as the one he had offered in 1856--a united South in the Union. He criticized personal liberty laws and failure to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act. Once again he opposed big government, but insisted that the right of secession could not be conceded, citing Madison, Jefferson, Marshall, and Jackson to support the latter contention. During his lengthy address to the Senate, Johnson warned the border states that they should not allow

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the position East Tenn. took." John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, November 24, 1890. He reiterated these views in a letter of April 21, 1894. However, it must be emphasized that Brownlow, unlike Temple, sought to denigrate Johnson's influence in East Tennessee because "Such an accumulation of proof will be regarded by men of all parties as conclusive, and will strip Andrew Johnson of about the only credit the Northern people have given him." Brownlow to Temple, no date, Box 16, Appendix II, Temple Papers.

[77]Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, xxvii.

[78]Temple, *Notable Men*, 396; see also Savage, *Life and Public Services*, 213. According to one panegyric, "Nowhere in the North was there a stronger voice speaking for the Union. In the South, Johnson stood single-handed as its champion." Lloyd Paul Stryker, *Andrew Johnson: A Study in Courage* (New York, 1929), 61.

the South to secede because there would be no way of ensuring free navigation of the Mississippi, regardless of promises that might be made by secessionists.[79]

Ironically, it was during this pro-South, moderate speech that Johnson defined what would become the Radical Republican stance on Reconstruction. A state that withdrew from the Union, he contended, reverted to the status of a province or territory. Kansas had been denied admission to the Union and what was its status? He reminded the Senate that Kansas was held "as a territory; you hold her as a province." Congress prescribed the election of its legislature whose members were paid by the federal government. All laws were made in conformity to the acts of Congress. California, Louisiana, and Florida had been acquired by the federal government at vast expense in blood and money, and if they left the Union they reverted to their original status as territories. Citing the Ostend Manifesto, which had asserted that "the great law of self-preservation" required the annexation of Cuba, Johnson argued that by the same law Congress had the right to protect the navigation of the Mississippi. The federal government could seize Louisiana and hold it as a province subject to United States laws. The same was true even of South Carolina if its independent status endangered the United States or if the state sought alliances with foreign powers. However, he stressed that "there are circumstances and conditions under which the remaining States, parties

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[79]Speech on Secession, December 18-19, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 3-26.

to the compact might tolerate secession of one State; and there are other circumstances and other conditions under which they dare not do it. . . ."[80] In this the President-elect and the senator from Tennessee shared the same opinion; although Lincoln had not committed himself about the status of a seceded state.

Apparent concessions to the South, combined with criticisms of the North, may account for the muted reception the speech received in the press. Ironically, Johnson was not only the first to extrapolate a theory of reconstruction but also was the only southern senator who articulated the result of dissolution. "I avow here, today, that if I were an Abolitionist, and wanted to accomplish the overthrow and abolition of the institution of slavery in the southern states," declared the slaveholder, "the first step that I would take would be to break the bonds of this Union, and dissolve this Government." He was certain that secession would eventually "overthrow the institution of slavery."[81] And he knew that one of the main aims of the new confederacy was not solely to destroy the Union, but that it was also a conspiracy by a small group of southern leaders who hated democracy and republicanism, preferring constitutional or absolute monarchy.[82]

Abolitionism and monarchy would not threaten the Union if Breckinridge had been elected and the senator pointed out the failure

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[80] *Ibid.*, 27-31; Herman Belz, *Reconstructing the Union: Theory and Policy During the Civil War* (Ithaca, 1969), 10.

[81] Speech on Secession, December 18-19, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 33.

[82] *Ibid.*, 36-38. He repeated these views again in his Speech in Support of Presidential War Program, July 27, 1861, in *ibid.*, 613.

of the Democratic party to act as a loyal opposition. "Then what is the issue?" Johnson asked. "It is because we have not got our man. If we had got our man, we should not have been for breaking up the Union," he exclaimed, "but as Mr. Lincoln is elected, we are for breaking up the Union! Let us show ourselves men, and men of courage." It must have given him some satisfaction when he pointed out that Lincoln would have been defeated if the Senate had adopted his constitutional amendment for election of the president by districts. But the election had been held according to constitutional requirements and he was for abiding by the Constitution. There was no cause for alarm because Democrats controlled the Senate; Lincoln could not appoint a cabinet, an ambassador, or even a post-master without their approval.[83] Southerners should not forget the millions of northerners who had stood by them, and if they were united "in four years from this day, Lincoln and his administration will be turned out, the worst-defeated and broken-down party that ever came into power." He reminded his listeners that "I voted against him," said he, "but still I love my country; I love the Constitution; I intend to insist upon its guarantees."[84] Ending his two-day speech, Johnson declaimed in ringing tones, "Then, let us stand by the Constitution; and in preserving the Constitution we shall save the Union; and in saving

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[83]Speech on Secession, December 18-19, 1860, in *ibid.*, 42-43. Later a correspondent claimed that Lincoln had not been legally elected because Negroes voted in Ohio and Massachusetts despite the Supreme Court's ruling denying blacks citizenship. N. M. Ellis to Johnson, December 2, 1860, in *ibid.*, 99.

[84]He even suggested that one advantage of the Union was the opportunity to quarrel with the North without whose presence disputes would result between southern states. *Ibid.*, 43-44.

the Union, we save this, the greatest Government on earth."[85]

What was the reaction to the speech which was to mark the watershed of his political career? It was ignored by most papers, North and South. The southern view is summed up by an Arkansas editor who called Johnson "a scurrillous old puppy" and who was certain that "hanging is far too good for such a degraded old wretch." A fitting death for the senator he believed would be to make him "eat Yankee nutmeg graters, until his life was grated out; and then he should be taken to a 'soap-factory' and rendered up into soap-grease, with which . . . to wash the feet of Horace Greeley." Modestly the editor claimed to know "that God had no hand in concocting such men."[86] But while the press and politicians may not have sympathized with the artisan's efforts on behalf of the Union, it is evident that he struck a responsive chord among millions. He was deluged with mail. Neither his efforts to spread democracy, nor his struggle to win homestead legislation, had won him national acclaim, but his conservative defense of the Union won him applause from "all parts of the nation . . . and from all segments of society--the great and the small, the rich and the poor, the cultured and the illiterate."[87] Old Whigs, Republicans, Democrats, manufacturers and labor organizers, friends and strangers, praised his efforts.[88] As has been noted, "His heart must have been gladdened,

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[85] *Ibid.*, 46.

[86] Turner's *Southern Star* (Camden, Ark.) reprinted in Memphis *Daily Appeal*, January 27, 1861, in *ibid.*, xxix; full text opp. 174.

[87] *Ibid.*, xxix.

[88] For a small sample of the letters illustrating this, see the

his conviction of rectitude strongly reinforced, and his dreams of higher office made more vivid. . . ."[89] The note from Salmon P. Chase which read, "Andrew Johnson is Andrew Jackson differently spelled . . ." must have been particularly pleasing to the disciple of the Hero of New Orleans.[90] No doubt if the Union was preserved and if the handful of southern hotheads, as Johnson believed, could be prevented from destroying the nation, the Democratic party would look to the man who had championed southern rights in the Union, who had struggled for northern rights for homesteads, and who had averted the crisis--Andrew Johnson. When Lincoln was defeated in 1864, who better to lead the Democratic hosts than the voice of democracy himself? As a friend wrote from New York, "I always confidently looked forward to your occupying the White House, and I know you would never leave it desolate and the country on the brink of dissolution."[91] A Missourian assured

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letters from "A Citizen of New York City," "A Southerner and a Lover of His Country," December 19, Thomas N. Haskell, Amos A. Lawrence, December 20, Charles D. Smith, Ebenezer J. Peniman, December 21, Edward H. East, A. Waldo Putnam, December 22, Levi P. Knerr, Henry G. Smith, December 23, Alfred Williams, December 24, Reuben F. Alexander, December 25, 1860, Joseph W. Stokes, January 16, 1861, in *ibid.*, 53, 55, 59, 61, 69-70, 69, 72-73, 73-74, 75-76, 79-81, 88, 88, 175. Typical anti-Johnson letters were from an Alabamian who described the senator as a "*traitor to your country*," and a Mississippian who thought he would humiliate an impudent mulatto slave by sending him to Washington to thrash Johnson with a cowhide whip. Hiram S. Smith, December 26, 1860 and "Grand Junction" to Johnson, February 3, 1861, in *ibid.*, 92-93, 196.

[89] *Ibid.*, xxix.

[90] Salmon P. Chase to Johnson, January 11, 1861, in *ibid.*, 152.

[91] Thomas Shankland to Johnson, December 20, 1860, in *ibid.*, 63. For a similar view from a Michigan Republican, see Ebenezer J. Peniman to Johnson, December 21, 1860, in *ibid.*, 69.

him that if he stood fast he had a "through ticket" to the White House in 1864.[92]

Whatever dreams Johnson may have had about the executive mansion, were rudely shattered by the secession of the cotton states throughout January, 1861. The overwhelmingly favorable response to his Unionist speech confirmed for Johnson the idea that secession was the act of his old enemies--the planter elite. The old ruling class were deluding the people but such was his confidence in the masses during these early months[93] that his old friend George W. Jones recalled later that Johnson "did not realize what was coming. South Carolina, and some others, might 'kick up a dust,' but certainly Tennessee would never secede."[94] According to one Johnson critic, the artisan's hostility for the "'Cotton-Bale' Lords" explained his "*apparent* devotion to the Union."[95] There is no doubt that Johnson hated the southern elite but there was nothing "apparent" about his life-long devotion to the Union. With the plots of Yancey, Rhett, Wigfall, Davis, and their ilk, Johnson was convinced that the Union was endangered by a minority of fanatics from the South and the North. Such a belief was bolstered

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[92]Richard K. Morris to Johnson, December 27, 1860, in *ibid.*, 93.

[93]For a typical letter which helped shape this response, see William R. Hurley to Johnson, January 14, 1861, in *ibid.*, 167-68.

[94]John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, January 17, 1894, Temple Papers. This conviction was shared by most of his correspondents, including his son Charles who, however, did not share his father's faith in the masses. Charles Johnson to Johnson, January 16, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 173-74.

[95]John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, January 16, 1894, Temple Papers.

not only by his political allies but even by old enemies. John Lellyett, who admitted that he had always opposed Johnson, believed that there were two types of southern politicians--" one set . . . who want to save the Union *on the Sly*, and another who wish to destroy it in the same way."[96] The first set, the cooperationists, met with early reverses in Georgia and Alabama;[97] this was because "They were *afraid*--overawed by the reign of intolerance and terror. They tried to compromise with treason." The people of the cotton states were subject "to a most hateful and intolerable despotism." Tennessee would be saved from a similar fate if opponents of secession would "denounce treason by its proper name. . . ."[98]

Two weeks later, Johnson renewed his attack on secession and with greater virulence. His speech in early February was frequently interrupted with applause from the sympathetic audience in the galleries. Rebutting arguments advanced the previous day by Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana, the Tennessee senator spoke in favor of the Crittenden proposals as a means to end the slavery agitation. But he argued, as did Lincoln, that there were those who did not wish to seek reconciliation "before this diabolical work of secession could be consummated." Such men had used Lincoln's election to ensure the destruction of the government.[99] He warned the South that although

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[96]John Lellyett to Johnson, December 20, 1860, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 62.

[97]Dumond, *Secession Movement*, 201-7.

[98]John Lellyett to Johnson, January 23, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 184.

[99]Speech on the Seceding States, February 5-6, 1861, in *ibid.*, 210.

the federal government could not coerce a state, it could coerce individual citizens of a state.[100] Reminding the crowded Senate of the Hartford Convention, he quoted the Richmond *Examiner* of 1814 which had denounced the Federalists as traitors, and he went on to define the law of treason. His insistence that, "If there were any such in the United States they ought to be punished according to law and the Constitution," was greeted by applause from the gallery.[101]

Who were these traitors, these men who had for years, prior to the recent arguments over slavery, been seeking to destroy the Union? "There are some who have got tired of a government of the people. They fear the people." Using South Carolina as an example, Johnson, while admitting that some of her senators had "acted a portion of the time with the Democratic party," suggested that there was in the state "an ancient and fixed opposition to a government by the people." To illustrate his opinion he reminded the Senate that the freemen of South Carolina had never voted for a president or vice-president.[102] These opinions were supported by a South Carolinian in the Charleston *Mercury* who argued that the conflict was between two distinct societies. "The one embodies in its structure the principle that equality is the right of men; the other that it is the right of equals only." This meant that one society has moved toward pure democracy. The other society has moved toward the "rounded form of a social aristocracy" where the power of government was vested in the upper class. A confederacy founded on slavery would, he suggested, "stand aloft and

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[100] *Ibid.*, 215. [101] *Ibid.*, 217. [102] *Ibid.*

serene for ages amid the anarchy of democracies that will reel around it."[103] Johnson, however, would have agreed with the opinion of the *Saturday Review* editorialist that a nation "with a free working-class of white men . . . will be the one to go on and prosper, and become the leader of the New World."[104]

The creation of an aristocratic confederacy based on slavery was, Johnson told the Senate, the result of a deep conspiracy and he quoted from speeches in the South Carolina convention describing secession as the consummation of thirty or forty years' work. Thus slavery was a mere "pretense to destroy the Union." Those states most responsible for the present crisis, Massachusetts and South Carolina, should be chained together like Siamese twins, dragged out to a remote spot on the ocean, and left until the rest of the country were willing to take them back.

Johnson was particularly eager to rebut the attacks of Senator Joseph Lane of Oregon, an avowed secessionist from a state that would not secede. After grossly exaggerating his efforts on Lane's behalf in Tennessee during the last election campaign,[105] Johnson angrily refuted the Senator's personal attack on him. He denied Lane's charge that he had threatened to march against South Carolina. Why, Johnson wanted to know, did the senator from Oregon vote against protection

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[103] L. W. Spratt to John Perkins, Charleston *Mercury*, February 13, 1861, reprinted in *Littell's Living Age*, LXVIII (1861), 802-5.

[104] *Saturday Review*, March 2, 1861, reprinted in *ibid.*, LXIX (1861), 108.

[105] Lane was vice-presidential candidate on the Breckinridge ticket.

for slavery in the territories? To laughter and applause from the gallery, he jibed Lane: "When we are candidates for the Presidency, we feel more like brothers; but when we have made the experiment, and signally failed, I suppose the enemy's line begins just at the line where our defeat was consummated."[106]

Resuming his attack the next day, Johnson denied that the Breckinridge campaign had ever favored secession. He reiterated his belief that disunionists were like the madman who insisted on shearing a wolf because he assumed man had dominion over the forest beasts. South Carolina had gained nothing by leaving the Union except higher taxes and a standing army. "But still she has the right to tax her people; she has the right to institute a reign of terror," and, he claimed, "she has the right to exclude her people from the ballot-box; and she has exercised the right, and these are the consequences."[107] Earlier he had written to his old friend Sam Milligan: "It is not the free men of the north they are fearing most; but the free men South and now desire to have a goment so organized as to put the institution of Slavry beyond the reach or vote of the nonslave holder at the ballot box."[108]

Johnson warned the Senate that there were also conspirators north of the Mason-Dixon line who were responsible for the present crisis. According to the senator, "The Abolitionists, and those who

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[106]Speech on the Seceding States, February 5-6, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 222-30.

[107]*Ibid.*, 234-35.

[108]Johnson to Sam Milligan, January 13, [1861], in *ibid.*, 160.

entertain their sentiments, abuse men of the South, and men of the South abuse them in return. They do not fight each other; but they both become offended and enraged." Their answer was, he claimed, "to seek revenge, to gratify themselves, they both agree to make war upon the Union that never offended or injured either." Such small bands of co-conspirators would be defeated if the debate was removed from Congress and entrusted "to the great mass of the intelligent voting population of the United States. . . ." After the appluse died away, he reiterated his belief that if "the great mass of the American people could be assembled in an amphitheater" in Washington, excluding the politicians, the people would demand justice for all sections.[109] Unlike some politicians, Johnson had represented the people of Tennessee faithfully and the people had never deserted him. And he would not desert or betray the Union. Others had said the Union was dead; if so, he wanted "no more honorable winding sheet than that brave old flag, and no more glorious grave than to be interred in the tomb of the Union." After the applause subsided, he called out, "God preserve my country from the desolation that is threatening her, from treason and traitors!"[110]

Johnson saw himself as a "faithful sentinel upon the watchtower" who sought to "notify the people and sound the tocsin of alarm." Certainly the tocsin was heard and appreciated. The Tennessee voters on February 10 overwhelmingly were opposed to secession. But the

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[109]Speech on the Seceding States, February 5-6, 1861, in *ibid.*, 236-37; see also *ibid.*, 241-45.

[110]*Ibid.*, 254.

status of this border state was uncertain and coercion would be sufficient to drive it into the newly formed Confederate States of America. Johnson, however, had committed himself and had denounced secession as treason. There was no retreat. As for coercion, that was not the policy of Buchanan whose only wish was to leave the White House and all its problems to Abraham Lincoln.

Andrew Johnson's hope, in early January, that secession could be avoided, was shared by Lincoln who informed Seward "that the secessionists are already in danger of reaction."[111] But he was sufficiently aware of the gravity of the situation that he did not rebuke Seward for his compromise efforts. The future Secretary of State, who had called Johnson "the noble senator from Tennessee," had proposed a constitutional amendment ensuring non-interference with slavery in the states where it existed; the remaining territory, after the admission of Kansas, was to be divided into states of equal size and admitted into the Union with or without slavery, according to their constitutions.[112] For Johnson the speech was "Conciliatory" even though "it seemed not to satisfy the extreme Southern men[.]"[113] Lincoln's reaction was more guarded. He informed the New Yorker that his speech had been "well received here" and he thought it was "doing good all over the country."[114]

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[111]Lincoln to William H. Seward, January 19, 1861, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 176.

[112]*Cong. Globe*, 36th Cong., 2 Sess., 341-44.

[113]Johnson to Sam Milligan, January 13, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 161.

[114]Lincoln to William H. Seward, January 19, 1861, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 176.

He was either unaware of the extent of Seward's concessions or angered by the secession of the cotton states because twelve days later he repeated his refusal to compromise over slavery in the territories. "I am inflexible. I am for no compromise which *assists* or *permits* the extension of the institution on soil owned by the nation." The object of all compromise proposals was merely to put the country "on the high-road to a slave empire. . . ." However, concerning fugitive slaves in the District of Columbia, slave trade between the states "and whatever springs of necessity from the fact that the institution is amongst us, I care but little, so that what is done be comely, and not altogether outrageous." He did not care if New Mexico had slavery so long as further extension was prevented.[115] But the cotton states had left the Union and concessions which their representatives would consider crumbs from the Republican table would not persuade them to return.

On February 11, 1861, Lincoln left Springfield for his inauguration. In the numerous whistle-stop speeches along the way, there is inevitably much repetition because he did not wish to make any proposals about the crisis facing the Union. At times he even went so far as to suggest that there was no crisis. Addressing an enthusiastic crowd in Pittsburgh, Lincoln told them, "In plain words, there is really no crisis except an *artificial one*." He agreed with Andrew Johnson when he claimed, "*there is no crisis*, excepting such a one

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[115]Lincoln to William H. Seward, February 1, 1861, in *ibid.*, 183.

as may be gotten up at any time by designing politicians."[116]

Although there was no amphitheater in Washington which could hold the American people as Johnson wished, Lincoln made up the deficiency by traveling to Washington via Indiana, Ohio, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, seeking to counter secessionist arguments and rally support for the Union.[117] His appeal to the people that they were the only ones who could save the Union, echoed Johnson's views. "If the politicians and leaders of parties were as true as the PEOPLE, there would be little fear that the peace of the country would be disturbed."[118] At Indianapolis, replying to Governor Oliver P. Morton, Lincoln said "his reliance would be placed upon you and the people of the United States--" The Union and the liberties it preserved would be lost if everything was left to a fifty-two-year-old man, but they could be saved by the thirty millions citizens. "It is your business to rise up and preserve the Union and liberty, for yourselves, and not for me. I desire they shall be constitutionally preserved."[119]

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[116]Speech at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, February 15, 1861, in *ibid.*, 211; see also Speech at Cleveland, Ohio, February 15, and Reply to Mayor Alexander Henry at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, February 21, 1861, in *ibid.*, 215-16, 238.

[117]It ended somewhat ignominiously for the President-elect, who was smuggled into Washington in disguise after reports that an assassination attempt would be made in Baltimore. Lord Charnwood, *Abraham Lincoln* (London, 1921), 203-5. Only an English aristocrat could write of Lincoln's visit to the opera in New York that "history deplores that this misguided man went there and sat there with his large hands in black kid gloves." *Ibid.*, 204.

[118]Remarks at Lawrenceburg, Indiana, February 12, 1861, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 197.

[119]Reply to Oliver P. Morton at Indianapolis, Indiana, February 11, 1860, in *ibid.*, 243, 245.

What about talk of coercion and invasion? Lincoln assured his Indiana audience that marching an army into South Carolina would be invasion and coercion and he was opposed to both. Enthusiastic cheering greeted his assertion that retaking federal forts, collecting certain duties and maintaining a mail service could not be considered either invasion or coercion. Of the disunionists, he said: "In their view, the Union, as a family relation, would not be anything like a regular marriage at all, but only a sort of free-love arrangement,--[laughter]--to be maintained on what that sect calls passionate attraction. [Continued Laughter.]"[120] Later, while addressing the New Jersey General Assembly, he assured the legislators that he would be just to all sections and would do everything to ensure a peaceful solution to the crisis. "But," he added, "it may be necessary to put the foot down firmly." At this, the New York *Tribune* reported, "the audience broke into cheers so loud and long that for some moments it was impossible to hear Mr. L.'s voice."[121]

Coercion, invasion and secession, he argued, provided no solution. If the Republican party endangered the nation then the people already had the power to avert the threat. "Almost all men in this country, and in any country where freedom of thought is tolerated,"

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[120]Speech from the Balcony of the Bates House at Indianapolis, Indiana, February 11, 1861, in *ibid.*, 195.

[121]Address to the New Jersey General Assembly at Trenton, New Jersey, February 21, 1861, in *ibid.*, 237; see also Speech in Independence Hall, Pennsylvania, and Reply to Governor Andrew J. Curtin, at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, February 22, 1861, in *ibid.*, 240-41, 243-44. For Johnson's views on coercion, see Speech on the Seceding States, February 5-6, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 215.

he told an Albany crowd, "attach themselves to political parties. It is but ordinary charity to attribute this to the fact that in so attaching himself to the party which his judgement prefers, the citizen believes he thereby promotes the best interests of the whole country; and when an election is passed it is altogether befitting a free people, that until the next election, they should be as one people." According to Lincoln the reception given him by Governor Edwin D. Morgan of New York, was not intended for him personally "but as the representative for the time being of the majority of the nation." If Bell, Breckinridge, or Douglas had been elected then they would have received the same treatment.[122] The nation could not accept the tyranny of a minority.[123] While in Ohio, Lincoln insisted "we must adhere to the principle that the majority shall rule."[124] He agreed with the senator from Tennessee that there would have been no secession if the Republicans had been defeated. An enthusiastic audience agreed with the Illinoisan that an election defeat was "no reason why they should sink the ship."[125] Desiring to rouse Union sentiment and wanting the crowds to identify him with Unionism, Lincoln did not mention that all American political

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[122]Reply to Governor Edwin D. Morgan at Albany, New York, February 18, 1861, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 225; see his Speech at Cincinnati, Ohio, February 12, 1861, in *ibid.*, 198. For obvious reasons, Lincoln continually stressed that he was being honored not as an individual but as "the representative for a fleeting time of the American people." Remarks at Troy, New York, February 19, 1861, in *ibid.*, 227.

[123]Reply to Governor Edwin D. Morgan at Albany, New York, February 18, 1861, in *ibid.*, 225.

[124]Speech at Steubenville, Ohio, February 14, 1861, in *ibid.*, 20.

[125]Remarks at Poughkeepsie, New York, February 19, 1861, in *ibid.*, 228.

parties had had their origins in disputes about the meaning of the Constitution and the intent of the founding fathers. While historians have tended to support the interpretation as propounded by the Republicans and the majority of northern Democrats, it cannot be disputed that the southerners were equally sincere in their belief that the Union was a compact, that states were sovereign, and that states had the legal right to secede.

During the grueling trip designed to win support for the Union,[126] Lincoln referred to only two specific issues other than maintenance of the nation--the homestead and the tariff. Despite the popularity of the Homestead Bill throughout the North and northwest, he had virtually ignored the subject. Commerford and other reformers realized the appeal the legislation had and its role in winning converts to the new party. It was to a group of German-Americans that Lincoln endorsed the bill. "In regard to the Homestead Law, I have to say that in so far as Government lands can be disposed of, I am in favor of cutting up the wild lands into parcels, so that the very poor man may have a home."[127] Whereas Johnson believed that Homestead was a measure to aid God's chosen--the mechanics and the farmers who to Johnson were the foundation of the republic, Lincoln, although he agreed with his German-American host that workingmen formed the basis of all governments,

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[126]For typical appeals to Douglas Democrats, see Speech from the Steps of the Capitol at Columbus, Ohio, February 13, Speech at Cleveland, Ohio, and Remarks at Ravenna, Ohio, February 15, 1861, in *ibid.*, 205, 216, 217.

[127]Speech to Germans at Cincinnati, Ohio, February 12, 1861, [Commercial Version], in *ibid.*, 202.

defined the working class to include "other callings than those of mechanic. . . ."[128]

He assured a high-tariff Pittsburgh audience that tariffs would be required so long as there was no general tax. Professing not to understand the issue "in all its multiform bearings," he promised he would give it his close attention and would try to understand it better. He assured them that he would stand by the party platform but added, "there are shades of difference in construing even this plank of the platform." As for the tariff bill pending in Congress, he knew neither its provisions nor whether it would pass. If it did not pass, he said that "no subject should engage your representatives more closely than that of a tariff." The reporters failed to indicate the reaction of the audience, but even such a pro-protection town as Pittsburgh must have been startled, to say the least, to hear the President-elect declare after the secession of cotton states that the most important issue facing the nation was the tariff.[129]

Lincoln and Johnson were agreed that the struggle for the Union was a desperate fight to save the finest government in the world, and in that fight, the states which had not joined the Confederacy created on February 4 were vital. Throughout all his speeches Lincoln stressed that the preservation of the Union, the Constitution, and the liberties of the people were inseparable. Addressing the New

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[128] *Ibid.*

[129] Speech at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, February 15, 1861, in *ibid.*, 211-13.

Jersey state senators, he told them, "I shall be most happy indeed if I shall be an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people, for perpetuating the object of that struggle."[130]

Among those "almost chosen people" were the residents of his native state of Kentucky. Lincoln believed, as did Johnson, that the secessionists were trying to stampede the majority of the southerners but that at heart the vast majority of southerners were loyal to their country. Both men gravely over-estimated southern unionism and Lincoln's faulty judgement was perhaps influenced by the fiery nationalism of the Tennessee senator. Determined to keep Kentucky in the Union, Lincoln addressed a special appeal to the state while speaking in Cincinnati. He reminded them of his speech in the same city in 1859 when he had assured Kentuckians that the Republican party would uphold the Constitution and all its compromises. Denying there was any enmity toward the neighboring state, he was positive that with God's help "we shall again be brethren, forgetting all parties--ignoring all parties."[131] He even contemplated visiting Kentucky and had prepared a speech. Speaking as a Kentuckian, he had hoped to warn them that if he were to be inaugurated only after violating his pledges, then popular government was ended. "They break the only bond of faith between

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[130]Address to the New Jersey Senate at Trenton, New Jersey, February 21, 1861, in *ibid.*, 236.

[131]Speech at Cincinnati, Ohio, February 2, 1861, in *ibid.*, 198-99.

public, and public servant; and they distinctly set the minority over the majority."[132]

But what if he were too weak? What if he were to falter? It was "the masses" upon whom he would rely. Lincoln vividly portrayed himself to a Pennsylvania audience as a man struggling like Atlas to hold the world on his shoulders. "I feel that, under God, in the strength of the arms and wisdom of the heads of these masses, after all, must be my support. [Great cheering.]" He reassured the enthusiastic crowd, "If my own strength should fail, I shall at least fall back on these masses, who, I think, under any circumstances will not fail." Then he addressed the soldiers who were at the meeting and indicated that they gave "hope of what may be done when war is inevitable." However, he hoped that their services would not be needed in "the shedding of fraternal blood."[133] Lincoln had earlier repeated the Republican faith in the Declaration of Independence which guaranteed liberty not only for the United States but "the whole world for all future time." Amidst great applause and cheers, he told the crowd that it was the Declaration "which gave promise that in due time the weight should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that *all* should have an equal chance."[134]

While Lincoln was speaking to his northern audience of equality and of avoiding the shedding of fraternal blood, army commanders

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[132]Fragment of Speech Intended for Kentuckians [*c.* February 12, 1861], in *ibid.*, 200.

[133]Reply to Governor Andrew J. Curtin at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, February 22, 1861, in *ibid.*, 243.

[134]Speech in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, February 22, 1861, in *ibid.*, 240.

in Georgia had already surrendered federal arsenals. Buchanan's Secretary of War, Joseph Holt, informed the commander of the Augusta arsenal on January 23 that, "Georgia has assumed against your post and the United States an attitude of war." Faced by overwhelming odds, Holt ordered a surrender on honorable terms to avoid bloodshed.[135] And as each army post and arsenal was surrendered, and as each new state seceded, Andrew Johnson became more vehement in his denunciations. Lincoln during his whistle-stop tour had tried to present himself and the Republicans as concerned only with the continuation of government and left his audience to make a contrast between him and southern spokesmen. But Johnson was in the Senate and watched with increasing anger as each of his old southern enemies left the Senate and the Union. To the artisan they were mere canting hypocrites, and in an angry exchange with Joseph Lane of Oregon, he denounced the seceders as traitors. Lane had abused Johnson, accusing him of exhibiting "exulting stupidity and triumphant ignorance." In his reply of March 2, Johnson quoted the constitutional definition of treason and, to applause from the gallery, declared, "Show me who has been engaged in these conspiracies, who has fired upon our flag, has given instructions to take our forts and our custom-houses, our arsenals and our dock-yards, and I will show you a traitor." What should be done with this small band of conspirators? Johnson had no doubt whatsoever. If he were president of the United States, he would "have them arrested, and,

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[135] *Official Records*, Ser. 1, I, 322.

if convicted, within the meaning and scope of the Constitution, by the Eternal God I would execute them."[136]

Tennessee, Johnson retorted, did not need the sympathy of a northerner like Lane because the state had been redeemed by "the elective franchise, that glorious lightning-rod that conducts the thunder of tyrants off the heads of the people." More states would have stayed in the Union, Johnson insisted, if the people had been allowed to vote upon the secession ordinances.[137] Of the six states that had seceded none had put the measure to the popular vote. Why? Because as in Georgia "there was a powerful party there, of passive, conservative men, who have been overslaughed, borne down; and tyranny and usurpation have triumphed."[138] What could be done to save the border states? Not coercion of the state but coercion of secessionist leaders. In 1861, in contrast to 1865, Johnson was positive that "The gentlemen who have taken those States out are not the men to bring them back."[139]

It was this speech, rather than his efforts in December, that made Johnson the darling of the North. The New York *Times* dubbed him "the greatest man of the age,"[140] and *Harper's Weekly* reported that Johnson or Emerson Etheridge of Tennessee would be invited to join the new cabinet.[141] However, *Harper's* did not share Johnson's

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[136]Speech in Reply to Senator Lane, March 2, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 353.

[137]*Ibid.*, 356. [138]*Ibid.*, 361. [139]*Ibid.*, 362.

[140]New York *Times*, March 4, 1861, quoted in Winston, *Andrew Johnson*, 186.

[141]*Harper's Weekly*, March 9, 1861.

sentiments for the dissolutionists and editorialized that,

> If the Union is really injurious to them, Heaven forbid that we should insist on preserving it! But we think that, if they have time to consider the matter coolly, they will discover that it is best for them as for us. When they do, reconstruction will become a fact.[142]

Once again the senator was deluged with mail and invited to speak in Kentucky, Philadelphia, Boston, and elsewhere. The editor of the most popular magazine of the day published an open letter to Johnson which concluded: "Your voice in the Senate sounded like a trumpet of defiance to Treason, and it was paralyzed before you! Let us hear it again, brave and faithful Senator! Marshall the patriot hosts and lead us to the rescue of our insulted nationality."[143] By July Johnson was informed by a mulatto mason then resident in Ohio, but who had known the senator as a boy in Raleigh, that "the Name & acts of Andrew Johnson stands highest in order in this state & you are well known here by character as a great man--and a self made man &c[.]"[144]

The Tennessean proclaimed that if he were president he would

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[142] *Ibid.* Eliakim Littell, editor of one of the most popular magazines of the period, *Littell's Living Age*, wrote to the senator informing him that he "would have rejoiced if you had taken a seat in Mr. L.'s Cabinet!" Littell to Johnson, March 8, 1861, Johnson Papers, University of Tennessee.

[143] E. Littell to Andrew Johnson, April 13, 1861, in *Littell's Living Age*, LXIX (1861), 130.

[144] John E. Patterson to Johnson, July 2, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 538. In a postscript he begged Johnson to "Remember the poor & the needy while it is well [with] you[.] you number but one--but you are of much *weight* & *influence*[.]" Frederick Douglass made a similar appeal with no result.

hang "traitors," but two days later Lincoln gave an inaugural address which was in marked contrast to Johnson's heated denunciation in the Senate. The Railsplitter reiterated his reassurances that he had neither the legal right nor the inclination to interfere with slavery. Agreeing with southern spokesmen, he said the Constitution left no doubt that fugitive slaves should be returned to their owners, and the only disagreement--"not a very material one"--was whether this law should be enforced by national or state authority.

It was not his intent, however, to discuss specific policies but to point out that the disruption of the Union was being attempted. This could not be permitted because the Union was perpetual. No government, he argued, included a provision for its own termination. Enforcement of the Constitution would ensure the continuation of the Union. It was the intent of the founding fathers "*to form a more perfect union.*" If a state could destroy it, then the government was less perfect than that which had existed before the Union. It followed therefore that the ordinances of secession were illegal "and that acts of violence, within any State or States, against the authority of the United States, are insurrectionary or revolutionary, according to the circumstances." Therefore, he maintained that the Union was unbroken and he would ensure enforcement of the law in all the states. Specifically he intended to hold, and occupy, all government property, to collect duties, and imports, "but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion--no using of force against or among the people anywhere." He would not "force obnoxious strangers" into federal offices if hostility prevented local residents taking them.

Again he sought to put himself in the role of defender of the *status quo*, pointing out that critics of the government had a constitutional right to amend it or a revolutionary right to dismember it. Aware that many people sought amendment, he was prepared to support a proposal to guarantee slavery in perpetuity where it already existed. He could safely suggest this procedure because the deep South had already seceded and because he hoped that such a proposal would ensure the loyalty of the border states.[145]

While offering this measure of assurance, Lincoln declared that it was not a question of slavery but the fundamental problem which Americans must face was that on all constitutional disputes the people divided into majorities or minorities.

> If the minority will not acquiesce, the majority must, or the government must cease. There is no other alternative; for continuing the government is acquiescence on one side or the other. If a minority, in such case, will secede rather than acquiesce, they make a precedent which, in turn, will divide and ruin them; for a minority of their own will secede from them, whenever a majority refuses to be controlled by such minority.[146]

During the war, however, Lincoln was prepared to recognize the right of a minority to secede from the majority; the result was the new state of West Virginia. But in 1861, he was prepared to defend majority rule. Such a majority, restrained by constitutional checks and subject to easy change, according to popular sentiment, was "the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it, does

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[145]First Inaugural Address--Final Text, March 4, 1861, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 262-71.

[146]*Ibid.*, 267.

of necessity, fly to anarchy or despotism."[147]

The agony of suspense mounted. Fort Sumter was now the focus of attention for all Americans.[148] Would Lincoln try to resupply Major Anderson? Who would fire the first shot? The Gulf States had organized a new Confederacy and the pressure for secession mounted in the border states. Andrew Johnson returned to Tennessee and tasted the bitter fruits of defeat--only the second in his long political career. He had gone with his section of the state and remained loyal to the Union. Old men must have been startled to read Parson Brownlow's Knoxville *Whig* and see praise for Andrew Johnson. And they witnessed more miracles. Thomas A. R. Nelson, Oliver P. Temple, and Horace Maynard, all old Johnson opponents, spoke from the same platform as the senator and shared the same whiskey. Recalling many years later a unionist rally at Kingsport in 1861, John Bell Brownlow wrote that "Nelson was sound asleep in the stand on the floor of which was a big tin of whiskey punch. Nelson had had too much of it and Johnson had all he could bear & talk."[149]

Pressure mounted on Johnson and Lincoln and despite their denials that war was inevitable, both were prepared for it when it came. Last minute efforts for compromise centered on the fort in

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[147] *Ibid.*, 268.

[148] For an excellent account of the siege and fall of Sumter, see E. Milby Burton, *The Siege of Charleston, 1861-1865* (Columbia, 1970), 4-61; see also *Official Records*, Ser. 1, I, 1-317.

[149] John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, August 4, [1893?]. Temple Papers. For reports of Johnson speeches in East Tennessee, see Speech at Knoxville, April 27, and Speech at Elizabethton, May 15, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 473-74, 477-78.

Charleston harbor. On March 15, Lincoln asked his cabinet for their opinions on the reinforcement of Sumter. Ironically, "radicals" such as Seward and Chase favored withdrawal of the troops whereas the "conservative" Montgomery Blair insisted that the fort should be reinforced because he believed the large body of southern Unionists would be encouraged to "overthrow this rebellion." Evacuation, he reasoned, would convince "the rebels the administration lacks firmness" and such an impression would hasten war.[150] Three days later Lincoln compiled a list of eight reasons for leaving Sumter and could think of only two objections--the primary one being the damage caused to the Republican party.[151] But on March 29 he informed Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and Secretary of War Simon Cameron that he wanted a resupply expedition organized and ready to sail by April 6.[152]

As Lincoln prepared his expeditions for Sumter and for Fort Pickens in Florida, he received a letter from Secretary of State Seward, informing him that the administration had been in office for a month "and yet without a policy either domestic or foreign." The New Yorker then proceeded to instruct the President that, among other things, he should abandon Sumter because the public saw this as a stand against slavery whereas Republican policy should be for the Union. In foreign affairs they should rigidly enforce the Monroe

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[150] Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 285n.

[151] Memorandum on Fort Sumter, March [?], 1861, in *ibid.*, 288-90.

[152] Lincoln to Gideon Welles, to Simon Cameron, March 26, 1861, in *ibid.*, 301; see also his secret instructions for the *Powhatan* expedition to Alexander H. Foote, Samuel Mercer and David D. Potter, April 1, 1861, in *ibid.*, 313-15.

Doctrine and if Spain and France did not give satisfactory replies they should "convene Congress and declare war against them." He concluded this extraordinary memorandum thus:

> Either the President must do it himself, and be all the while active in it; or
> Devolve it on some member of his Cabinet. Once adopted, debates on it must end, and all agree and abide
> It is not my special province
> But I neither seek to evade nor assume responsibility.[153]

Bluntly Lincoln replied the same day. He failed to follow Seward's reasoning that Fort Sumter was a local issue but that Fort Pickens was of national importance. Unaware that there had been discord or lack of domestic and foreign policy, he told the secretary that whatever policy decisions were made, "I remark that if this must be done, *I* must do it." The firmness, if not ruthless streak, in Lincoln's character, was thus revealed to Seward, who now realized that he was not dealing with a weak or timid man.

The suspense was over. Lincoln sent a secret emissary to Charleston to notify the authorities that the fort was to be replenished. As the fleet moved down the coast, the South Carolina guns opened fire; Anderson and his men did not have a chance and the fort was surrendered. The waiting was over and for four years the smoke of cannon and gunfire spread across the South. *Littell's Living Age* editorialized on April 16, "Not until the last moment did the government move, by giving notice of its intention to send more provisions to those starving men, peaceably if permitted." What had been the

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[153]Seward to Lincoln, April 1, 1861, Robert Todd Lincoln Collection.

reaction? A "premeditated outrage," and the editor thanked God "that not even an indiscretion can be charged upon the President, who will now have the support of every loyal heart."[154] By the time Congress met in special session on July 4, according to Congressman George Julian, "the atmosphere of the Northern States had been greatly purified by the attack on Fort Sumter."[155]

When the first shot was fired, secessionist fervor mounted in the border states. In Tennessee, Governor Isham Harris on May 6 persuaded the legislature to pass an act submitting a declaration of independence to the popular vote. But prior to the vote, the governor prepared militarily to join the Confederacy while Johnson joined with the old Whigs, Nelson, Brownlow and Temple, in the battle to save the state for the Union, culminating in the Knoxville convention of May 30-31. Middle and West Tennessee, home of so many of Johnson's enemies in the Democratic party, voted overwhelmingly on June 8 to secede. This, according to Temple, was because the Unionist leaders in those sections had failed to keep up the pressure on behalf of the Union in April and May. And instead of explaining that the firing on Sumter made loyalty to the Union more imperative than before, they opted to use it as an excuse to abandon their Unionism.[156] Johnson did not attend the later Greeneville convention of East Tennessee Unionists which met on June 17 and which, after rejecting Nelson's

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[154] *Littell's Living Age*, LXIX (1861), 258.

[155] Julian, *Political Recollections*, 195.

[156] Oliver P. Temple, *East Tennessee and the Civil War* (Cincinnati, 1899), 179-223, 340-43.

proposals for armed resistance, petitioned the legislature for the right to secede and form a separate state, a request which was unanimously rejected by the legislature on June 29.[157] The East Tennesseeans' proposed constitutional convention in Kingston on August 31 was thwarted by the arrest of Nelson and his seeming acquiescence in the Confederate cause.[158]

Unlike the western section of Virginia, East Tennessee did not secede and become a new state in the Union, but it was of vital strategic importance in 1861. Convinced that there was a large body of Union sentiment in the South and wanting to retain the border states, Lincoln took an early interest in Tennessee and was determined to stop the state from seceding. One way to achieve this was by the use of patronage. Much to the dismay of the Constitutional Unionists, John Bell was not designated Lincoln's power broker. Johnson's selection over Bell has been attributed to the fact that a Jacksonian Democrat, Montgomery Blair, was post-master general. The party was not allowed the patronage of the post office, with the largest number of federal positions because of Bell's anti-Jacksonism.[159] Many years later, one party member recalled that between March 4 and March 18, when Johnson

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[157] For a detailed account of the Greeneville Convention by a participant, see *ibid.*, 343-65.

[158] *Official Records*, Ser. 1, LII, Pt. I, 176-77. For Johnson's opinion of Nelson's actions, see Speech at Cincinnati, August 31, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 700.

[159] J. Milton Henry, "The Revolution in Tennessee, February, 1861 to June, 1861," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (1959), 105-8; James L. Baumgardner, Andrew Johnson and the Patronage (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1968), 22-23.

returned to Tennessee, "he had nearly every Federal office in Tenn. filled with old Breckenridge [*sic*] Democrats when the old rascal knew that nearly all or a large majority of the loyal men in the State were old Whigs who had supported Bell & these & the 10,000 Democrats who supported Douglas were ignored."[160] A modern student of Johnson's use of the patronage has confirmed that the artisan "allowed party considerations and personal attitudes to sway him. He seemingly believed that the one sure way to insure Unionism in Tennessee was to build a party around himself."[161] As one office-seeker expressed it, getting him a job was "the best thing you can do towards *Johnsonizing* Middle Tennessee."[162] Johnson's power in the state became clear when a recommendation sent by Bell was referred to the artisan for approval.[163]

Later Oliver P. Temple suggested that Johnson's Unionism was based on the assumption that Tennessee would not secede but that if it did, his political chances were greater in the North. Strong endorsement of the Union at a time when other southern senators were leaving Congress, would greatly enhance his vice-presidential possibilities. His use of patronage and the press,[164] and his pressure on Lincoln suggests that he was indeed thinking of the presidency at least for

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[160]John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, September 7, 1891, Temple Papers.

[161]Baumgardner, Andrew Johnson and the Patronage, 26.

[162]William S. Speer to Johnson, March 12, 1861, Johnson Papers.

[163]Baumgardner, Andrew Johnson and the Patronage, 22-23.

[164]For Johnson's use of the press when he was military governor, see John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, n.d., Box 16, Appendix II, Temple Papers; and when President, W. G. Brownlow to S. P. Chase, June 20, 1866, Sioussat Papers.

1868. This does not mean that his Unionism was insincere but rather reveals a political astuteness at turning what was a liability into his own benefit.[165] Johnson had previously stated that the vice-presidency could be a stepping-stone into the presidency. Was Johnson merely the passive agent in his selection for that post in 1864 or did he actively seek it? Did he present such a potential threat that Lincoln was eager to have him as a running-mate? Nothing in Johnson's early career suggests that he was a passive agent--in fact, the reverse. In 1861 his power was augmented by having for the first time in his career complete control of patronage for his own state and power over appointments in other states.

Patronage did not save Tennessee from joining her erring sisters, but Johnson's Unionism ensured continued interest in, and support for, the artisan from the White House. This alliance was strengthened by agreement over war aims. Both Lincoln and Johnson were agreed in 1861 that the aim of the war was to save the Union and not to abolish slavery. On July 24 the Tennessee senator introduced resolutions defining the northern war aims which specifically denied that the war was being fought to interfere with or overthrow "the rights and established institutions of these States. . . ."[166] Both men were agreed that a small band of "discontented individuals" had left the Union to destroy democracy in the name of slavery but that the North

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[165]Temple, *Notable Men*, 394-96.

[166]Remarks on the War Resolutions, July 25, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 598.

was saving the Constitution and democratic government.[167]

And the strategic location of East Tennessee enhanced the influence of the tailor from Greeneville. Johnson and Horace Maynard made certain that Lincoln did not forget the section. They constantly badgered him to send military expeditions into the area and even prior to the state's secession on June 8, Unionist leaders were prepared to cut the vital rail links to Virginia. Parson Brownlow warned that if Confederates continued to send troops "into our country" then "the people will rise up in their might and demolish the Roads. Indeed we now have little hope that civil war will be averted. . . ." The people of East Tennessee would "fight to the death, and no leaders we have can restrain them, if indeed they ought to do so, which we think questionable."[168]

Johnson's demands for action met with military delays. Heads rolled. General Ormsby M. Mitchell replaced General George H. Thomas, with instructions to seize the East Tennessee and Virginia railroad and drive the Confederates out of the region.[169] Johnson and Maynard also worked closely with General William T. Sherman to ensure that troops were ready for the attack.[170] Buell reported that Johnson was

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[167]Message to Congress in Special Session, July 4, 1861, in Basler, *Collected Works*, IV, 421-41; Speech in Support of the Presidential War Program, July 27, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 606-9.

[168]Knoxville *Whig*, June 1, 1861; see warning to Confederate Secretary of War from an old Johnson enemy about the danger in East Tennessee, Landon C. Haynes to L. P. Walker, July 6, 1861, *Official Records*, Ser. 1, IV, 364-65; J. G. M. Ramsay followed up with a similar warning to Jefferson Davis on November 4, 1861. *Ibid.*, 510-11.

[169]*Ibid.*, 300, 303. [170]*Ibid.*, 247, 324.

with him in Louisville and that he, Buell, had satisfied the Tennesseean that all would be well.[171] Maynard, Johnson and East Tennessee Unionist leader William B. Carter persuaded Lincoln to endorse a plan to burn the railroad bridges and thus isolate Virginia.[172] Believing that Union forces were advancing into the area, local Unionists burned the bridges. However, Sherman insisted that Buell would need at least two hundred thousand men and encouraged delay. Oliver P. Temple accurately assessed the effectiveness of the bridge burning: "It did but little injury to the enemy, while it brought untold calamities and sufferings on the Union people."[173]

Despite the failure of the expedition, Johnson and Maynard continued to agitate for an invasion of the area in December because "the people are oppressed and pursued as beasts of the forest."[174] Buell reassured them that he "craved no higher honor" than to save the Tennessee Unionists. McClellan warned Buell on December 29 that "Johnson, Maynard, &c., are again becoming frantic, and have President Lincoln's sympathy excited. Political considerations would make it advisable to get the arms and troops into Eastern Tennessee at a very early day. . . ."[175]

As the new year dawned, Confederate control of the region remained unchallenged. Lincoln was seriously worried. On January 6,

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[171] *Ibid.*, VII, 444. [172] Temple, *East Tennessee*, 370-71.

[173] *Ibid.*, 375-87. [174] *Official Records*, Ser. 1, VII, 480.

[175] *Ibid.*, 926. Johnson's rage over the inactivity of the generals is dramatically recalled by F. A. Mitchell to O. P. Temple, December 22, 1898, Temple Papers.

1862, he told Buell that "his distress is that our friends in East Tennessee are being hanged and driven to despair, and even now I fear are thinking of taking rebel arms for the sake of personal protection." The President warned the general that if this happened "we lose the most valuable stake we have in the South." Johnson and Maynard had seen an earlier letter which he had sent urging Buell to act, said Lincoln "and they will be upon me to know the answer, which I cannot safely show them. They would despair, possibly resign, to go and save their families somehow or die with them."[176]

Although Lincoln was unable to meet Johnson's demands to save East Tennessee, he fulfilled the artisan's warning that secession would lead to the abolition of slavery. Johnson's acceptance of emancipation further enhanced his political position and made him the strongest candidate for the vice-presidency in 1864. But earlier Lincoln, like Johnson, had had no intention of freeing enslaved Afro-Americans. As Lincoln explained to Horace Greeley, he could not agree with those who only wished to save the Union if it preserved or destroyed the "peculiar institution." "If I could save the Union without freeing any slaves I would do it; and," he told the editor of the New York *Tribune*, "if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that." Ever the pragmatist, Lincoln said that whatever

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[176] *Official Records*, Ser. 1, VII, 928. For a vivid account of the Unionists' flight from East Tennessee to Kentucky, see Felix A. Reeve to O. P. Temple, October 19, 1891, Temple Papers.

he did about slavery or blacks would be done because it saved the Union.[177] But as the war dragged on, for military, political, and diplomatic reasons, Lincoln fulfilled Johnson's prediction and with his Emancipation Proclamation ended *de jure* slavery in Confederate-held territory. By 1865, he had not only abolished slavery but, according to W. O. Stoddard, his third secretary, had decided to give the vote to all male Negroes in the South and all Negroes who had served in the war. Appointed by Lincoln as marshal for East Arkansas in 1864, Stoddard recalled his last interview with the President. Lincoln realized that the war was coming to a close and that the army could not be kept indefinitely in the South. With this consideration, Lincoln ordered Stoddard "to do all you can, in any and every way, to get the ballot into their hands as freemen. We must make voters of them before we take away the troops. The ballot will be their only protection after the bayonet has gone, and they will be sure to need all they can get." The President then warned Stoddard, "The time is not ripe for saying all this publicly, but that time will come."[178]

President Johnson would not have agreed with these views but he would have endorsed Lincoln's letter to Greeley. Johnson supported the emancipation of blacks as a war measure, and it must have been a

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[177] Lincoln to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862, quoted in Horace Greeley, "An Estimate of Lincoln," in *Greeley on Lincoln*, ed. Joel Benton (New York, 1893), 61; see also *ibid.*, 71-72.

[178] W. O. Stoddard, Jr., *Lincoln's Third Secretary: The Memoirs of William O. Stoddard* (New York, 1955), 217. At the Unionist convention delegate Stoddard voted for Johnson as vice-president because John Hay told him that this was Lincoln's wish, *ibid.*, 216.

cause of personal satisfaction to see the "Cotton-Bale Lords" stripped of their labor force. As military governor, he insisted "that treason must be rendered odious--and that traitors must be impoverished or rendered bankrupt, and the worst class of them must be executed. . . ." Equally vehement about slavery, he declared that it was dead and not even an alliance of Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln could save it. Addressing a Unionist rally in 1864, "He declared to them that the first gun fired at Fort Sumter, three years ago, had shot the nigger out of the south." As for the "old fogies" who still clung to the institution, they were told to "muster up their manhood and prepare to let the 'peculiar institution' slide, for it was gone."[179] Despite Johnson's hopes, the Negro had not been shot out of the South; what has been termed the "American dilemma" would lead to Johnson's fight with the Republican party. While he could accept the ending of slavery as a punishment for white planters, his racism made it impossible for him to consider active support for black voting or civil rights. When William Holden was appointed provisional governor of North Carolina on May 29, 1865, his instructions to hold elections of qualified voters of the state's antebellum constitution indicated that Johnson did not intend to extend the franchise to any blacks.[180]

Ironically Johnson's anger at Wilson County voters in 1864 for an "expression of contempt for the Government" when they elected a free black as magistrate and an ex-slave as constable,[181] was an

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[179]Knoxville *Whig*, April 16, 1864.

[180]McPherson, *Political History . . . During the Period of Reconstruction*, 11.

[181]Johnson to M. M. Brien, May 15, 1864, Johnson Papers.

attitude shared by the majority of Americans. But Andrew Johnson's racism was conditioned by his being a poor white southerner. On February 1, 1866, the tailor-President was visited by a Negro delegation led by George T. Downing and Frederick Douglass, appealing for the black franchise. Johnson's response was blunt. Claiming to have been a slave to his own slaves, he did not like being "arraigned by those who deal in rhetoric and talk about abstract ideas of liberty or property," but who had "never perilled life, liberty or property." Votes for blacks, he contended, would lead to race conflict and "will result in the extermination of one or the other." He reiterated his Nashville pledge to be the Negroes' Moses, leading the black man from slavery to freedom. Warming to his subject, the President approached Douglass and told him angrily that he had opposed slavery because it was a "great monopoly" which enabled a few to make money and rule the majority. When Douglass tried to interrupt,Johnson cut him off and demanded to know if Douglass had lived on a plantation. Continuing, he asked "When you would look over and see a man who had a large family, struggling hard upon a piece of land, you thought a great deal less of him than you did of you own master's negro, didn't you?" Brushing aside Douglass' denial, the President pressed on, accusing slaves and their masters of holding the poor white in contempt and virtual slavery. Slaves had won freedom after the war, the non-slave-holder had gained nothing. After a continued acrimonious exchange, he told the delegation that emigration of blacks would end the conflict that existed between masters and poor whites. As they were ushered out, Douglass remarked to his fellow delegates: "The President

sends us to the people, and we go to the people." At which Johnson retorted, "Yes, Sir; I have a great faith in the people. I believe they will do what is right."[182]

This meeting is in sharp contrast to an earlier similar event when Douglass met Lincoln. The ex-slave recalled many years later, "Long lines of care were already deeply written on Mr. Lincoln's brow, and his strong face, full of earnestness, lighted up as soon as my name was mentioned. As I approached and was introduced to him he arose and extended his hand and bade me welcome."[183] Three years later, Douglass attended the inauguration when Lincoln pointed out the black abolitionist to Vice-President Johnson: "The first expression which came to his [Johnson's] face, and which I think was the true index of his heart, was one of bitter contempt and aversion."[184] Later Douglass went to the White House to congratulate Lincoln. Foiling efforts on the part of two policemen who sought to prevent his attendance, Douglass was eventually allowed to enter the reception room. There the President welcomed him, shaking his hand, and enquiring of "his friend Douglass" what he thought of the inauguration speech.[185] Allowing for exaggeration on the part of Douglass, it is inconceivable that Johnson would or could have felt so at ease in the presence of a Negro.

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[182] McPherson, *Political History . . . During the Period of Reconstruction*, 52-55. For the delegation's reply, see *ibid.*, 56.

[183] Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage and His Complete History*, ed. Rayford W. Logan (New York, 1962), 347.

[184] *Ibid.*, 364.

[185] *Ibid.*, 365-66.

Johnson believed in 1866 that Afro-Americans should be sent to colonies and Lincoln, who had also considered colonization programs, dropped them not only because of their obvious limitations, but also because of pressure within the party.[186] As a Republican he had shown throughout the secession crisis the need for political pragmatism based upon the principles of the Declaration of Independence. Refusing black troops at first because he feared the conservatives in his own party and the reaction of the War Democrats, Lincoln welcomed their use when faced by necessity. He incurred the wrath of the "Radicals" when he countermanded Frémont's order emancipating slaves who crossed into Union lines, but was willing a year later to do the same once he realized that he had to destroy the Confederate war power. Similarly his proposal to reconstruct governments in the South if ten percent of the voters in the 1860 election took an oath of loyalty to the Union, was a war plan. A modern student of Reconstruction has pointed out that "As a war measure, the Amnesty Proclamation was not nearly so lenient as some historians have believed. Lincoln offered amnesty only to those who made a conscious decision to abandon the insurrection while it still had a chance of success." Unlike Johnson, he recognized the right of Congress to play an active role in Reconstruction after the war. He pocket vetoed the Wade-Davis Bill because it deprived him "of what he hoped would be a potent weapon for shortening the conflict." By 1864 he believed, as did the majority

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[186]Belz, *Reconstructing the Union*, 282-83.

of Republicans, that limited black suffrage--for the most intelligent Negroes and former soldiers--had to be implemented.[187]

Although Johnson's racism played a major role in the later dispute with Congress, there were many other factors which increased the probability of such an argument. Johnson did not appreciate the effect Lincoln's death had on the North or that it "had given a strong impetus to the demand for Negro suffrage."[188] The sense of anguish and anger which swept the country was captured by a private in a Wisconsin artillery regiment encamped in the hills above Chattanooga.

> The soldier mourns the loss of the noblest American of the day. President Abraham Lincoln has fallen by the hands of a traitorous assassin. . . . A gloom was cast upon every one, and silently, we returned to camp, still hoping for contradiction. But no it was true. The scene that followed was one very seldom seen in a tented field. . . . All regarded the loss of him as a near and dear relative. Terrible were the oaths and imprecations uttered through clenched teeth against the vile perpetrators. The black flag of extermination would be hailed with joy by the soldiers at this moment as a just retaliation. Never before did I feel in favor of such measures, but now I think they deserve no other. . . . Traitors everywhere will rejoice over this, the crowned heads of Europe will greet it with joy, but their joy will come to grief.[189]

The following day the soldier noted that Andrew Johnson was now president. "A nation in tears looks towards him to-day for direction and guidance." And although he hoped Johnson would succeed and did not doubt his motives, "I fear that he has not the moral stability

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[187]Michael Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction, 1863-1869* (New York, 1974), 81; Belz, *Reconstructing the Union*, 47, 70-73, 80-81, 84, 101, 103-6, 115-16, 132, 143-47, 223-28, 281-311. Johnson was urged to extend the franchise to all Negroes shortly after he became president. See *Harper's Weekly*, May 13, 1865.

[188]Benedict, *Compromise of Principle*, 103.

[189]Jenkin Lloyd Jones, *An Artilleryman's Diary* (Wisconsin Historical Commission, 1914), 323.

required. If he will not set aside the public interest to follow party prejudices and personal interest, I trust all will be well." Whatever doubts he had about Johnson, he had complete trust in his army commanders.[190]

Johnson's failure to grasp the traumatic effect of Lincoln's death ensured a conflict with a Congress and a section bent on revenge. At first he fueled these emotions with his denunciation of "traitors" and a demand for ruthless action.[191] But for him summary treatment of those involved in the murder was sufficient. He would not have hailed with joy the "black flag of extermination," and the doubts confided to the diary of the Wisconsin private were confirmed as Johnson pressed ahead with Presidential Reconstruction. The man who had always been confident that the people were on his side was certain that he was still the spokesman of the masses. Lashing out at his Radical critics on February 22, 1866, he appealed to God once more "that the whole American people could be assembled here to-day as you are. I could wish to have an amphitheatre large enough to contain the whole thirty millions, that they could be here and witness the great struggle to preserve the Constitution of our fathers."[192] Who were these new conspirators? Johnson answered in this address, given in Washington but similar to so many speeches he had made throughout East Tennessee. Now, however, the danger of treason came not from Whigs,

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[190] *Ibid.*, 324.

[191] Julian, *Political Recollections*, 255, 257; *Harper's Weekly*, May 6, 1867.

[192] McPherson, *Political History . . . During the Period of Reconstruction*, 62.

Know-Nothings or secessionists, but from Radical Republicans whose leaders were Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner and Wendell Phillips. Growing more frenzied, the President of the United States not only boasted about his days as a tailor, but also about his devotion and faithfulness to the people. The champion of the masses, threatened by possible assassination, asked rhetorically if the Radicals had not had enough blood with Lincoln's death. If he was to die, his death would be because he vindicated the Union and sought to preserve the government in its original purity. If he was to die let it be so: "let an altar of the Union be erected, and there if necessary, lay me upon it, and the blood that now warms and animates my frame shall be poured out in a last libation as a tribute to the Union; and," he cautioned his absent critics, "let the opponents of this Government remember that when it is poured out the blood of the martyr will be the seed of the church. The Union will grow."[193] Even the Freedmen's Bureau was evidence of the conspiracy against him.[194]

Johnson's cries of danger were not merely the rantings of a demagogue. Four years of civil war and three years as military governor had convinced him that there were people who wished to destroy his glorious Union. With Lincoln's support, he had taken firm control of the administration of Tennessee. In contrast with his two terms as governor from 1853 to 1857, Johnson had almost autocratic control of

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[193] *Ibid.*, 61.

[194] Gideon Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles* (3 vols., Boston, 1911), II, 243; William S. McFeeley, *Yankee Stepfather, General O. O. Howard and the Freedmen* (New Haven, 1968), 240-56.

the state. When Mayor Richard B. Cheatham and the Nashville city council refused to take an oath of allegiance to the Union, he had had them removed from office and replaced with loyal Unionists.[195] He issued an amnesty oath which required the Confederate supporters not only to swear loyalty to the Union but also to promise to assist in the success of the Union armies.[196] Johnson's determination to punish individuals, not states, for their action can be seen in the fines levied against Confederate leaders in Tennessee to help widows and orphans, his arrest of Nashville church leaders, and the imprisonment of his old political ally, A. O. P. Nicholson.[197]

When Johnson was sworn into the presidency he continued to exert the same autocratic power which he had used, and which Lincoln had used. But whereas Lincoln and Johnson could defend their actions on the grounds of necessity between 1861 and 1864, the dramatic shift in favor of the Union forces made congressional critics restive

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[195]Clifton R. Hall, *Andrew Johnson: Military Governor of Tennessee* (Princeton, 1916), 42-43.

[196]Baumgardner, Andrew Johnson and the Patronage, 30; Winston, *Andrew Johnson*, 238-42. For the activities of the pro-secessionist Knights of the Golden Circle in the border states and midwest, see Bethania Meradith Smith, "Civil War Subversion," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XLIV-XLV (1951-52), 220-40.

[197]See John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, September 8, 28, 1893, Temple Papers. Johnson was eager to add to this power and Lincoln was forced to gently, but firmly, restrain him. After receiving a telegram from Johnson who sought to control troop movements in the west the President replied: "Do you not, my good friend, perceive that what you ask is simply to put you in command in the West. I do not suppose you desire this. You only wish to control in your own localities; but this you must know, may derange all other parts. *Can* you, not, and *will* you not, have a full conference with Gen. Halleck?" Lincoln to Johnson, July 11, 1862, in Basler, *Collected Works*, V, 313.

under Lincoln's tight control. William Whiting, the solicitor of the War Department and Lincoln's constitutional advisor, defended the President's use of war powers but he also insisted that even under military governments the President had to enforce acts of Congress. Many Republican congressmen went further, believing that most of Lincoln's war-time measures were unconstitutional.[198] If Lincoln faced dissent in his *own* party about actions taken in wartime, it is hardly surprising that a Democrat in time of peace should have faced congressional opposition.

There is no doubt that Johnson exacerbated the difficulties he faced. Instead of working with Congress and keeping conservative Republican support, he alienated those disposed to be his friends by his summary acts and vetoes. Johnson had defended Jackson's use of the veto but, unlike Jackson, Johnson was not working with the Democratic party but with Republicans, many of whom had retained their old Whig dislike of the veto power. Whereas the Republican members of the Unionist party favored a strong central government and tariffs, Democrat Johnson had consistently opposed the extension of federal government power and the raising of tariffs. Whereas Lincoln would have supported the activities of the Freedmen's Bureau, Johnson would veto the bill and did everything in his considerable power to destroy the Bureau's effectiveness.[199] One explanation for his behavior

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[198]Benedict, *Compromise of Principle*, 73-75.

[199]Welles, *Diary*, II, 243; McFeeley, *Yankee Stepfather*, 240-56.

has been that Seward tried to use Johnson to form a new party.[200] Certainly this is possible though it is doubtful that Johnson was quite such a passive agent of the Secretary of State.

A major reason for his failure to work with the Republicans was his devotion to the Democratic party. After the Union party convention in 1864 selected the border state War Democrat as the ideal choice to shore up Lincoln's flagging campaign in the midwest, Johnson accepted and appealed to his old party:

> In accepting the nomination, I might here close, but I cannot forego the opportunity of saying to my old friends of the democratic party *proper*, with whom I have so long and pleasantly been associated, that the hour has now come when that great party can justly vindicate its devotion to true democratic policy and measures of expediency.[201]

He did not consider the old southern planter elite part of the "democratic party *proper*" and confided to a one-time colleague that he wished "to see Davis, Toombs & other Southern Leaders, whom he hated; humiliated and defeated but not the Democratic party destroyed."[202] But he was not forgiven for his actions during the war. In the words of one congressman, "In securing the good opinion of his native South, he would attain the goal of his highest ambition, he would conquer the haughty enemy who during all the years of his public career had been able to fix upon him the badge of social inferiority.[203] To ensure that he would have the fruits of that victory, he required

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[200] LaWanda and John Cox, *Politics, Principle and Prejudice, 1865-1866: Dilemma of Reconstruction America* (New York, 1969); McFeeley, *Yankee Stepfather*, 240; James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress* (2 vols., Norwich,Conn., 1884-86), II, 63-65.

[201] Savage, *Life and Public Services*, 300.

[202] John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, June 21, 1892, Temple Papers.

[203] Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress*, II, 69-70.

all Confederate supporters with an annual income tax that had $20,000 to apply personally for their pardons. The aristocratic ladies of the South who came to appeal for their husbands, were aware of this and flattered the tailor-President.[204]

Johnson had fought the "*hell born and hell bound*" doctrine of state sovereignty,[205] but he had argued all his political career in favor of states' rights. Although in the heat of debate he had said he would accept a "consolidated government," it was at a time when he still hoped that a compromise could be achieved and a war averted. And that war had transformed the tailor from Tennessee. In 1861 he recognized the necessity to accept the election result even though it had brought a Black Republican into office. As he had reminded the lawyers who dominated his party, the election had been held according to the procedures prescribed by the Constitution. If Breckinridge had won the election there would have been no secession. Failing to save the Union, surrounded by "traitors" in Nashville, Johnson's rhetoric became more vehement. Any criticism was a sign of treason and yet another threat to the Union. In Nashville as military governor he had no legislative body to interfere with his efforts to restore government. The messiah of the middle class could claim the authority of the Union-loving people to justify every action.

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[204]Spalding, "Andrew Johnson in the White House," 657; Benjamin C. Truman, "Anecdotes of Andrew Johnson," *Century Magazine*, LXXXV (1913), 436-37; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction 1865-1877* (New York, 1967), 70-71; Mrs. C. C. Clay to Johnson, July 22, 1869, Johnson Papers.

[205]Speech at Cincinnati, June 19, 1861, in Graf and Haskins, *Johnson Papers*, IV, 493.

He behaved in the same way when he reached the White House. He decided that once more he would fight the conspirators against the Union. The threat this time came not from Yancey, Slidell or Rhett but from the Republicans.

In that struggle Johnson was to be charged with violating the Constitution that he had sacrificed so much to preserve. Although the Senate failed to impeach him, Johnson spent the rest of his life struggling to vindicate his stand. The bitter attacks on Lincoln were washed away by a nation's tears for a fallen martyr. Ironically, Johnson the radical Democrat had achieved his highest ambition not by the voice of the people but by the assassin's bullet and it was Lincoln's name that became synonymous with democracy and Johnson's with presidential abuse of power. As Americans removed Lincoln from the realms of reality to myth, the Washington wits' comment on Johnson was, "If he had died sooner, he would have lived longer."[206]

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[206]John Bell Brownlow to O. P. Temple, n.d., Box 16, Appendix II, Temple Papers.

CHAPTER VI

ANDREW JOHNSON, ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND DE TOCQUEVILLE'S AMERICA

> This pride of origin, which is natural to the English, is most remarkably increased in the American by the personal pride derived from democratic liberty. The white man in the United States is proud of his race and proud of himself.
>
> Alexis de Tocqueville*

The careers of Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson may be appropriately characterized as "The American Irony." Ostensibly the impecunious tailor from Greeneville was the natural ally of the poor and oppressed. A follower of Jackson, his radicalism was reinforced by a millennialism which envisioned the finest government on earth as existing in the United States and the only requirement to unite Democracy and "the Church Militant" was the extension of the former. Thus the plebeian not only believed the Jacksonian rhetoric but sought to make it a reality. Proposals such as popular election of senators and elimination of the electoral college, still considered radical measures by many Americans today, were advocated by Johnson as early as 1836. As president, the erstwhile mechanic continued to hate the "Boston cod-fish aristocracy" and indeed all aristocracies; but his Reconstruction proposals ensured the survival of the southern elite whom he had for decades also despised and envied.

Abraham Lincoln had known poverty as a youth, even if it

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*_Democracy in America_, 328.

was not quite "the gaunt and haggard monster" which haunted the Tennessean. But Lincoln, despite his Whiggish distrust of the masses, was to be the president revered by later generations as the savior of democracy. Because of his efforts government of the people, by the people, and for the people did not perish from this land. He not only preserved the Union but as leader of the Republican party emancipated slaves and revolutionized popular sentiment by considering the American Negro, if not equal, at least human. This revolution in American attitudes--a great change in which Johnson failed to participate--became possible only with the collapse of the constitutional settlement of 1789.

While the founding fathers had sought to ensure a role for the majority, they were equally concerned about protection of the minority. So long as the United States remained a deferential society, and so long as the people chose their leaders from the natural aristocracy, this delicate constitutional system could operate, and any serious dangers could be resolved by compromise. However, the advent of the Jacksonians upset the precarious balance. In response to local demands for widening the franchise and for office-holding, they declared that any man was fit to hold office; the only requirement, apart from loyalty to the Democratic party, was that the office be legally defined. As Merrill D. Peterson has suggested, "The concept of The People took two distinct forms in Jacksonian thought. One was summed up in the phrase 'the sovereignty of the people.' The People, in this sense, was a metaphysical

entity: the will of the *whole* nation, the rule of the people *en masse*." Secondly, the people, seen in a limited sense,-- the farmers, artisans and laborers--were the producers of society.[1]

Ironically, the men who ruled the Democratic party were not democrats. In fact, as the popular demand for majority rule grew in the North, the planter elite, who controlled the party, saw themselves endangered. Thus John C. Calhoun developed his theory of a "concurrent majority" which would protect the southern minority. The later Republican appeal, with its emphasis on the liberty, equality, and pursuit of happiness promised by the Declaration of Independence, resulted in the majority of southern Democrats repudiating the liberal democratic creed of Jefferson. It was not only extremists such as George Fitzhugh who supported this counter-revolution. James H. Hammond and Clement C. Clay of Alabama were among the many moderate southerners who deplored the tendency toward more democracy. "The equalization of white suffrage and representation in the Southern states before the Civil War," according to Peterson, "reflected the general drift toward the idea of democracy among all the whites, the ideology of white supremacy."[2] But as de Tocqueville pointed out, the pride in democratic liberty was not confined to the southern states and the ideology of white

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[1]Peterson, *The Jefferson Image*, 81-82.

[2]*Ibid.*, 167.

supremacy was not peculiarly southern.[3]

An early exponent of democracy and white supremacy, Andrew Johnson began his political career in alliance with the Greeneville elite of Valentine Sevier and Alexander Williams. However, as a poorly educated artisan, he was never acceptable to men such as "the Grand Duke of Lick Creek." Repudiated by the local aristocracy and suffering his first and only defeat before the Civil War, Johnson then turned to the masses and Jacksonianism, and by means of his blunt, stump speaking acquired an impregnable position in his congressional district. Only after a "Henrymander" were the Whigs able to remove him from his sinecure; but this only freed him successfully to seek the governorship.

In his bid for state executive office, Johnson found himself battling the elite once again. The Ewings and Harrises of the Tennessee Democratic party despised him but were forced to accept him. All his life Johnson was aware of the fact that the lawyer-planter elite had sought to deny him access to power; like de Tocqueville, he realized that the aristocracy of America were the lawyers. Whereas the former considered the legal profession a counterpoise to democracy, the latter distrusted this aristocracy--a distrust which was combined with the Jacksonian shibboleth in the

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[3]A modern scholar suggests that once colonization schemes failed, Republicans adopted a policy of confining and using the freedmen in the South and discouraging northern immigration. Voegli, *Free But Not Equal*, 95-112.

rule of the people *en masse*. After all, had not the people always ensured the success of the East Tennessean despite the machinations of his wealthy enemies?

Lincoln, also born into relative poverty, was more fortunate. Better educated than Johnson, he was helped by John Stewart who advised the Illinoisan that if he wished to succeed in politics he should study law. Aided by the comparatively slipshod system for legal training that existed in the nineteenth century, Lincoln acquired sufficient expertise to ensure a political career. Yet despite his legal training, influential friends, and marriage to a southern belle, Lincoln's career was one of numerous defeats. As a state legislator he had acquired power as a member of the "Long Nine" and had helped to move the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield. On the other hand, he and his Whig colleagues had bankrupted the state with their improvement schemes.

After much internal party bickering, Lincoln served one undistinguished term in Congress and not only failed to be re-nominated but also, because of his opposition to the Mexican War, ensured a Democratic victory in the only safe Whig district in Illinois. As Johnson moved from success to success--congressman, governor, senator--Lincoln was threatened with political oblivion. It seemed that the plebeian's fight against the elite was the truer road to success. Defeated for the Senate in 1854 and 1858, Lincoln had been nominated but not selected as a vice-presidential candidate in 1856. But, ironically, Johnson's victories came

despite the party leadership and each one tended to increase his isolation, whereas Lincoln's defeats proved to be advantageous. These numerous reversals and the eventual collapse of the Whig party required, and ensured, greater flexibility than was needed by a successful politician in the dominant party. Although beaten by Stephen A. Douglas in 1858, Lincoln won the popular vote of Illinois against the Little Giant and when Republican politicians sought to block the ascendancy of William H. Seward, they were able to turn to the Springfield lawyer.

Anti-elitism, however much it might win Johnson personal victory, alienated him from his fellow southern Democrats. Johnson was in step with the majority of Americans in his faith in democracy, in the farmer and artisan, and in the Union. His struggle for homesteads from 1846 and 1860 won him many friends in the midwest as well as New York and Pennsylvania, but the measure always suffered defeat at the hands of his opponents in the South. To fellow southerners Johnson remained an "ultra" and an "agrarian" radical.

Alexis de Tocqueville would have considered Johnson's career the inevitable result of the tyranny of the majority. The Constitution which the Frenchman so much admired was that of the founding fathers, in which majority rule was limited. Later scholars have tended to support de Tocqueville's gloomy forebodings;[4] however,

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[4]For example, Francis G. Wilson, "Tocqueville's Conception of the Elite," *Review of Politics*, IV (1942), 271-86; Robert Nesbit, "Democracy in de Tocqueville's America," paper presented at the University of Tennessee, Winter, 1976.

these opinions have been influenced by twentieth century events, particularly the developments of National Socialism and Fascism. The genius of American politics was not majoritarianism but the combination of majoritarianism and minority rights. When the southern elite seceded from the Union, Johnson and Lincoln were united in support of majoritarianism. As Johnson insisted throughout the summer and fall of 1860, Southern minority rights to slave property would be protected by the Constitution and the Union no matter what the Black Republicans wished to do. But Johnson's fellow southerners did not share his faith, his passionate Jacksonianism, or his millennial views.

When the South seceded the southerners consummated an extraordinary alliance and made a convert to majoritarianism. Whereas Johnson, denouncing his colleagues as traitors, would not defend slavery at the cost of the Union, Lincoln, in order to save the Union, would not destroy slavery but would espouse majoritarianism. Endorsing Lincoln's Reconstruction proposals in 1863, *Harper's Weekly* editorialized:

> The President has often been accused of tardily following instead of leading public opinion. But it is his great merit that he early saw this to be a war in which the people must save themselves. If they were unequal to the task, a popular government was a failure. And therefore he has sought only to be the executive magistrate of this will, which he has divined with more sagacity than any public man in our history. It is that sagacity which now admonishes him to put into clear and simple form the settlement to which the national common-sense irresistibly tends. He has done it.[5]

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[5] *Harper's Weekly*, December 26, 1863.

De Tocqueville would not consider divining and following the popular will sagacious.[6] But the young Frenchman's fears were based on the belief that Americans exalted equality and denigrated liberty. He mistook equality of opportunity for absolute equality--most Americans believed in the former.[7] But he was a French aristocrat whose interest in the American experiment could not overcome his elitist attitudes.[8]

The tyranny of the majority perceived and feared by de Tocqueville, and long recognized by southerners, was not a serious threat until after the Civil War. But majoritarianism triumphed only because the minority had seceded from the Union and in order to preserve the government Johnson and Lincoln appealed to majority rule. While the war may have ended the threat to the nation from state sovereignty, it fulfilled the Frenchman's forebodings about the tyranny of the majority.

The Gallic visitor to the United States distrusted the whims of the people and the subservience of American presidents to popular opinion. However, while Johnson had an abiding faith in the majority, Lincoln always remained aloof and determined to lead. His first

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[6]For his comments on the tyranny of the majority and his scathing attack on Jackson, see de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. 231-40, 360.

[7]*Ibid.*, 419-20.

[8]These are most marked in his comments concerning the effects of democracy on the humanities. See *ibid.*, 426-66.

priority was to save the Union; but as Richard N. Current has ably demonstrated, Lincoln was also a politician capable of growth. In the 1850's, he shared the racism of his fellow westerners; but as a result of the war he not only abandoned colonization schemes, but also emancipated slaves and moved toward at least limited Negro suffrage.[9] Johnson, however, accurately assessed the popular mood to be one of opposition to black suffrage.

Unlike a Lincoln or a Charles Sumner, Johnson had struggled all his life to improve his social status. Convinced that he was the social and intellectual superior of his contemporaries, the aristocratic Sumner could advocate full voting and civil rights for blacks because such enactments would not challenge his status. The same was true to a lesser degree for Lincoln. For Johnson such actions would destroy the long battle he had fought on behalf of the artisan. His Homestead Bill had been designed to shore up the declining status of the mechanic class. His sixteen-year struggle would have been in vain if the freedmen were granted similar status with forty acres and a mule. Johnson's insecurity as a member of the beleaguered class of plebeians reinforced his democratic radicalism. His belief in the peculiar genius of "Anglo-Saxon" political institutions exaggerated his racism and made it impossible for him to compromise with the "moderate" Republicans who demanded limited enfranchisement and a modicum of civil rights for blacks.

Unlike Johnson, Lincoln had successfully joined the American

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[9]Richard N. Current, *The Lincoln Nobody Knows* (New York, 1963), 214-36.

elite. His greatness stems from his understanding of the American political process--of the need for leadership and the necessity for that leadership to be tempered by popular opinion. Yet both the Tennessean and Illinoisan could seek and achieve the highest executive office in the land, unthinkable for men of similar status in Europe. Another tailor who shared many of Johnson's tenets, Francis Place of England, had to content himself with advising and drafting legislation for his aristocratic friends in the House of Commons.

Whereas British political parties were agreed on constitutional issues, American parties were not. Every four years the battle for the presidency exacerbated the divisions and accentuated the suspicions. Richard Hofstadter, studying "the paranoid style" in American politics in which "the feeling of persecution is central," observes that

> the spokesman of the paranoid style finds [a hostile and conspiratorial world] directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others. . . .His sense that his political passions are unselfish and patriotic, in fact, goes far to intensify his feelings of righteousness and his moral indignation.[10]

Hofstadter considers this a phenonemon limited to fringe groups such as the Anti-Masons. Yet "the paranoid style" was present in the major antebellum political parties, discouraging the acceptance of loyal opposition, and leading to secession. Lincoln and the Republicans were convinced that a vast Slave Power threatened the freedom-loving people of Illinois and the North. Southerners were not content with slavery in their own states; they wanted to make all

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[10]Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York, 1965), 4.

Americans slaveowners. The only way to end the stranglehold of the "peculiar institution" was to confine it to those states where it already existed. Then, Lincoln and his supporters believed, the owning of Africans as chattels would die out.

Johnson and the southern Democrats also saw conspiracies against the nation. Southerners saw abolitionists' activities not only as a conscious design to foment slave insurrections, but also as a deliberate plot to destroy the Constitution. Forced to defend their society from the attacks of free-soil, free-labor advocates, southerners withdrew into a romantic world of fantasy. Johnson may not have subscribed to the fantasy, but he shared the fears. He also had the southern poor white's distrust of the planter class. To Johnson, fire-eaters such as Yancey and Rhett were as bad as the abolitionists. This conspiratorial effort by southern extremists to destroy the Union had been crushed with their defeat in the war. However, as Johnson assumed the mantle of office from a martyred president's shoulders, he was convinced that the conspiracy against the Union, and the people, whom he believed he personified, had not been fully crushed. The "Boston cod-fish aristocracy" represented by Sumner were still plotting to destroy his beloved Union with plans for black equality.

Johnson had been able to join hands with Lincoln during the Civil War, not merely for political reasons but to destroy the southern conspirators. Unlike Lincoln, as a man outside the elite, Johnson was unable to work with the Republican conservatives to move the nation toward a smooth reunion with limited gains for black

Americans. Ironically his battle against the Republicans appeared to have saved the South. By exhausting the energies of the Radicals, the nation had no vanguard to ensure continued protection for the freedmen. Ironically Johnson's racism extended American democracy to the blacks he despised, and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and the 1866 Civil Rights Act made the twentieth century civil rights movement possible. Lincoln's elitism and greater sympathy for the Negro would probably have ensured second-class status for the freedmen.

Alexis de Tocqueville, whose reflections upon American institutions provide the point of departure for this study of two nineteenth century commoners, believed that the executive power was much weaker in America than in France; the reason for this, he noted perceptively, "lies perhaps more in circumstances than in the laws." With the possible exception of Polk, the presidents who followed Andrew Jackson are not among America's greatest executives. Buchanan's denial of secession and of coercion seemed to have proved the Frenchman's belief that the feeble federal government headed by an emasculated executive would be incapable of holding the Union together. However, de Tocqueville realized that circumstances could bring a dramatic change:

> If the Union's existence were constantly menaced, and if its great interests were continually interwoven with those of other powerful nations, one would see the prestige of the executive growing, because of what was expected from it and what it did.[11]

He observed that although the president was commander-in-chief and controlled foreign affairs the United States, separated by an ocean from the rest of the world, was too weak to command the sea "and its

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[11] de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 114.

interests are seldom in contact with those of other nations on the globe."[12] Although his comments are very appropriate for twentieth century America, de Tocqueville failed to realize that an internal enemy would be as effective as an external foe in maximizing the executive power. Unlike de Tocqueville (or Buchanan), Lincoln did not consider it inevitable that states should leave the Union and that the president could do nothing. As a recent historian of the Civil War has noted, "Abraham Lincoln's bold use of his authority as commander-in-chief marks a shift of power. . .which raised for the first time the specter of unrestrained executive leadership and uncompromising nationalism that would prove mixed blessings in the twentieth century."[13] Lincoln imposed martial law, suspended *habeas corpus*, freed four million slaves, and imposed an international blockade without a declaration of war. Andrew Johnson, believing he could use the new authority held by the executive, moved to reestablish the southern governments and to issue pardons, all without consulting Congress. But his long isolation from the center of political activity meant that he was not sensitive to the feelings of Congress. Despite the death of Lincoln, even many Radical Congressmen, such as Sumner, were prepared to grant the Tennessean a great deal of freedom of action and it was only when Congress felt that the South was returning on too generous terms that they decided to

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[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Barney, *Flawed Victory*, x.

intervene. The presidency had acquired new authority with the success of Union arms and although Congress believed Johnson to be guilty of outrages, it failed to assert fully its authority.

Despite the enhancing of presidential power, Lincoln and Johnson ultimately were responsible to Congress, and de Tocqueville's prediction that involvement with foreign powers would result in an imperial presidency would not be fulfilled until this century. "The President of the United States possesses almost royal perogatives which he has no occasion to use," wrote de Tocqueville, "and the rights of which he has been able to make use so far are very circumscribed; the laws allow him to be strong, but the circumstances weak."[14] In 1861 when the South seceded, the circumstances changed so that the president could exert the full authority of the law. Similarly in 1865, Johnson believed that circumstances were such that he should restore the South without delay. Like Lincoln, he relied on his authority as commander-in-chief. But Johnson acted in time of peace, and not of civil war. A Congress already disgruntled with its Republican leader, was not prepared to allow the Greeneville tailor and Democrat the use of the same authority in time of peace.

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[14]de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 114.

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