

Reconstruction of lincoln and johnson essay sample



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A. Introduction

The American Civil War led to vast social and political consequences in the United States. While the Union experienced economic growth and triumph, the Confederacy's losing brought an inevitable destruction wave, and a feeling of betrayal to the nation. The handling of the freedmen's future, as well as the way of achieving reintegration of seceded states was a primary concern for the United States. Under this context, the governing president, Abraham Lincoln, issued the Reconstruction Plan, which addressed mainly the formerly mentioned problems. After Lincoln's death in 1865, president Andrew Johnson continued enforcing the Reconstruction Plan. However, the circumstances and historical pressures concerning the country's well being during Johnson's presidency pushed him to transform the original plan into a more politically-aggressive and a less socially-oriented one. The purpose of this analysis is to find what political, social and economic reasons led Lincoln to create the Reconstruction Plan, and which led Johnson to transform it? This research ranges from 1863, when the original Plan was created, to 1869, the end of the Presidential Reconstruction. The methods employed are the analysis of primary sources including sections of the original and modified Reconstruction Plans, as well as the circumstances surrounding both presidencies, with the purpose of understanding how the context in which each Reconstruction Plan was written affected it.

B. Summary of Sources

* When the Civil War started, the North was not ready for war. Lincoln's army was in disarray and it was a challenge to rebuild it. Weapons were old, supplies old, and personnel were limited. The Southern commanders were

stronger than his, because they had experience in previous wars. (Berkin, Et. Al., Ch. 19) * Lincoln was fighting a war waged essentially for a moral cause, and he had to retain the high moral ground, but he had also to keep the country together. He had to be a pragmatist without descending into opportunism. His generals, for military purposes, began to issue local emancipation decrees. (Johnson, 468) * Religion started taking an important toll in the war. The Churches of the same religion argued for or against slavery depending on their location (North or South) “ It may be that the splits in the Churches made a final split in the Nation possible” (Sanders) * Lincoln started seeing including God’s will as another war effort. Thus, even when he was a free-soiler, he approached the problem of emancipating the slaves. This changed the object for which the war was being fought. Lincoln had entered it to preserve the Union. By 1862 he was convinced that, by divine providence, the Union was safe, and it was his duty to make all people of the United States free. (Johnson, 471)

* Lincoln created the Freedmen’s Bureau to socially assist freedmen. He also proclaimed his Plan for Amnesty and Reconstruction in December 1863, in which he asked for 10% of the electoral college in each state to vow loyalty to the Union for the State to be reaccepted. His practical step was proposing the 13th amendment to grant liberty to the slaves. He was also in favor of the 14th amendment, to grant citizenship to blacks. However, he didn’t live to see this for he was murdered in 1865. (Franklin, 98) * Andrew Johnson, the new president, was a Southerner, and a lifelong Democrat. He wasn’t as morally oriented as Lincoln. His plan was still based on forgiveness, however, he began his term with a violent denunciation of all rebels as

traitors who ought to be hanged. (102) * After emancipation, "...slavery was breaking down, even in parts of the South that was not yet under Union rule. Slaves were walking off plantations, as there was no one to prevent them or hunt them down once they were at liberty." (Johnson, 493)

* Johnson knew he had to re-establish political, economical and social order. He issued a new proclamation. He appointed provisional governors for each rebel state, with instructions to avoid slavery in their law and ratify the Thirteenth Amendment. He was swift to proclaim the rebellion legally over, in April 1866. Between 1865-1877, the nation sped toward an economic system of industrial capitalism. The power of federal government expanded greatly. (Browne, Kreiser, 12) * The South, on the other hand, was facing a severe economical crisis. Johnson wanted its economic sector to be functioning fast. He permitted the creation of Black Codes in seceded states, in which blacks were not to be treated as equal citizens. The Freedman's Bureau spent a great deal of bureaucratic time and intense sums of money on protecting, helping, and even feeding the blacks. (Franklin, 105). * The Radical Republicans in the Congress wanted a vengeful Reconstruction Bill. They also passed a law extending the mandate of the Freedmen's Bureau. Johnson vetoed this measure, and accused those scheming it as traitors. Because of the many disagreements between the Radicals and Johnson, the Congress managed to impeach him in 1869. (Brock, 203)

C. Analysis

The historical context surrounding Lincoln's Reconstruction was that of Civil War. Lincoln was very firm in his moral principles, and wanted to reunite his country while avoiding bloodshed and destruction (Johnson, 464) At the <https://assignbuster.com/reconstruction-of-lincoln-and-johnson-essay-sample/>

beginning, he wasn't fighting against slavery, however, his first Reconstruction step was to set free all slaves with the Emancipation Proclamation. The reasons lying behind this ideological change were social as well as political. Socially, religion became a great pressure for Lincoln. While Southerners argued that the inferior race was described in theological texts, Northerners saw slavery as an abomination (Sanders) Lincoln, having strong moral principles, started considering God's will as an important war effort. Therefore, he addressed the problem of emancipation and switched the war's focus from only achieving unity to also achieving abolition of slavery. (Johnson, 470) There were also political pressures that pushed Lincoln into Emancipation. When his attempts at ending war by economically asphyxiating the South failed (Berkin, Et. Al., Ch. 19), he needed to fight. However, his army was in disarray and it was a challenge to rebuild it. Weapons were old, supplies old, and personnel were limited. Thus, he needed to gather a stronger army, as well as weaken his opponent's.

His generals, for military purposes, began to issue local emancipation degrees (Ch. 19) With the North's victory came the need for re-integrating the South, and because Lincoln needed to extinguish any spark of independence of the South (Johnson, 468), he took a politically permissive and forgiving path. He issued the Plan for Amnesty and Reconstruction, in which if 10% of the voting population of a state made an oath of loyalty to the Union, would be admitted back " and the state shall receive thereunder the benefits of the constitutional provision..." (Lincoln). This tolerant Reconstruction measure demonstrates the desperation of repairing the war's legacy of a fragmented country. Lincoln also decided what was popularly

considered, at the time, as the second most important Reconstruction measure: the future of the freedmen. (Johnson, 471) Because Lincoln didn't live to see the evolution of the problem in a long term, he couldn't perceive the economical impact that the end of slavery was about to generate. Instead, he combated the problem from a social aspect, reflecting his moral and egalitarian personality.

This justifies his creation of the 13th Amendment, which constitutionally freed all slaves. It also justifies the creation of the Freedman's Bureau in 1865. It primarily dealt with the administration of justice, education and schools, medical assistance, and land distribution for people of color (Franklin, 105). With Lincoln's murder in 1965 came President Johnson as well as a booming industrialization. In the South there was no money to maintain the government, nor authority that could impose and collect taxes. The value of South's currency dropped dramatically, and its manufacturing industry was destroyed. On the contrary, the Northern economy was flourishing. The war generated opportunities to amass private wealth, the creation of transport, communication and new job spots, (Morrison, Commager, Leuchtenburg, 375). For Johnson, the idea of spending too much in the social integration of the blacks meant a lack of attention to the industrial needs of the country. This is why he started accelerating the reconstruction process and ended the freedmen's bureau. With the help of political measures, he got in charge of stirring the Union's economic interests. He established governors in every state were Lincoln had not, and permitted each state to organize its constitutional conventions.

In his Amnesty Plan, Johnson excludes some rebel classes with political experience from forgiveness with the idea of establishing control in the states of the governments. (388) Johnson's allowing of states to create the Black Codes can also be justified by the need of the country to focus on economical reintegration of the South (as well as Johnson's personal lack of interest in the social rights of blacks). The Black Codes practically bound freedmen to work with their previous masters and deprived them of civil rights. " Socially, emancipation altered more the form than the essence of the economic condition of the negro" (391). This means that the blacks did not have land in which to farm, neither the tools they needed. They were socially isolated from the white world. This way, it was in the economic interests of the nation that they remained working in the cotton fields, rather than becoming an independent working force. Therefore, it was in the economic industrialist interests of the nation, of both North and South, to stop investing in the social integration of Blacks and start looking towards manufacture and transportation. Thus, the interests of the nation stopped being so focused on the blacks and veered towards industrialization, this being reflected in Johnson's Plan (Remini, 157).

C. OPVLs

The Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, by Abraham Lincoln This primary source was written by President Abraham Lincoln, who directed the Union during the American Civil War, in December 8th, 1863. The source's purpose is to grant legal pardon to any former slave owner or confederate leader, as well as establish the conditions required for a Confederate state to rejoin the Union. Lincoln publicly establishes his maximum authority over the

Union, for the document was open for every citizen to read. This source is direct due to Lincoln's intent to transmit to American society his official decision regarding Reconstruction, in the form a Proclamation. Its historical validity comes from the fact that it provides factual evidence of the Presidential Reconstruction's aims. Its analysis offers the possibility of understanding what Lincoln view as the needs of the country during that time, for he addressed the problems he thought were needed to solve. It also provides his political and legal strategy.

However, because it represents only the point of view of the President, it does not provide much information about the period of Reconstruction and if his plan was actually respected. The opinion of the Congress and citizens is not presented. The Proclamation of Amnesty and Pardon for the Confederate States, by Johnson This source was written by Democrat President Andrew Johnson on May, 29, 1865 soon after becoming de facto president when Lincoln was murdered. In this public source he forgave those who violated the rights of the recently freed slaves. He also indirectly expressed his dislike for wealthy Southerners by denying them pardon. The source is considered to be primary and official, due to Johnson's political position during Reconstruction period. Because Johnson addressed this as a new Proclamation, which was to be known by every American, it is a direct and public source. It is valid for historians because it provides evidence about Johnson's transformation of the original plan addressed by Lincoln. It also provides valuable information about his political position and his ideas regarding reintegration of the South. However, the source is limited, because

it includes only Johnson's ideas and does not show the Congress's opposed and revengeful point of view regarding reconstruction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Lincoln was a man whose moral principles, and external influences such as religion, led him to include the abolition of slavery as one of the main Reconstruction goals, reflecting this in his Plan. His need to politically reunite the United States resulted in a permissive and forgiving plan in which he accepted the South back to the Union without any punishment. Lincoln lived during the war and had no idea of the future economical impact of it, resulting in the creation of an expensive social-aid bureau that assisted freedmen. However, with his assassination came Johnson. While Lincoln presented a mild plan in which a swift but silent integration of the South was the goal, Johnson took the plan and made it more politically aggressive, he established his own governors to be able to establish a strong government in the South, while ending with the social integration policies for the blacks. This can be justified by the context that surrounded each president. While Lincoln lived in a time where the war wasn't ended, and social integration of blacks was seen as primordial, Johnson lived in a time where the North wanted to continue industrialization. The main interest during Johnson's time was to help the South integrate into the dynamic economic life of the industrial North.

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