

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom. Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Sixty-Nine

The Impeachment of Andrew Johnson

LESSON IDEA

To review the issues and events that led to the impeachment of Andrew Johnson, and to demonstrate that he was pilloried not for his wrongdoings but for trying to be just and fair.

PREPARATION

Review the previous lessons on the War Between the States, the Emancipation Proclamation, and Lincoln's assassination to better understand the political intrigues which prompted President Johnson's impeachment.

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WHEN ANDREW JOHNSON took the oath of office as President of the United States, following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, two prominent Republican leaders — Thaddeus Stevens, a representative from Pennsylvania, and Edwin Stanton, Secretary of War — breathed a sigh of relief. There would be no more Presidential interference with their plans for a military dictatorship in the defeated South. Lincoln, their antagonist, was dead. Johnson, they were sure, would favor them. "Treason is a crime," the new President had said, "and crime must be punished. Treason must be made infamous; and traitors must be impoverished."

This vindictive attitude seemed to fit perfectly with the proposal Stanton had made — the very day of Lincoln's assassination — to divide the South into military districts, each to be run by a military commander accountable only to Stanton. And Stanton's military dictatorship was supported nicely by Stevens' dogma that the seceded states were no longer in the Union — that they were now "conquered territories" to be policed by Congress.

"I would lay a tax whenever I can, upon the conquered provinces," said Stevens, "just as all nations levy them upon provinces and nations they conquer." The United States "must treat those states outside of the Union as conquered provinces, and settle them with new men, and drive the present rebels as exiles from this country." If the Southern "territories" wanted to rejoin the Union, they would have to revise their state constitutions according to Congressional dictates, outlaw slavery, and give the Negroes the right to vote.

This line of reasoning had some strange twists, which Lincoln had been quick to see. As historian Lloyd Paul Stryker pointed out: "The Southern states were either in the Union or they were out. If they were in the Union, Congress had no power to provide what constitutions or laws they should adopt; if they were out of the Union, then they had succeeded in their war and Congress had no greater right to interfere with them than with Canada or Mexico. But the difference between Lincoln and his Congress lay far deeper than a mere dispute as to their constitutional prerogatives. Lincoln divined the inner purpose of the Radicals and he had set his will to thwart their hidden schemes to spoliage and trample down the South when her armies were defeated. If Congress could abolish slavery, it could disfranchise Southern white men and give the vote to the illiterate ex-slaves. Lincoln determined to prevent these things."

But Lincoln was dead, and Andrew Johnson was more likely to support than thwart the radical juggernaut. Or so Stanton and Stevens believed on the day he became President. In less than a

