

industry committees and in dependence on a far flung publicity campaign did the New Deal agency try to imitate its predecessor. Yet, while the WIB was a success, the NRA was a failure. The well-known reasons for the debacle were two-fold. In the first place, the WIB was able to increase production because of the large and immediate government loans and expenditures extended principally by the War Finance Corporation. In 1933, on the other hand, the primary aim of the NRA was to restrict production, and its activities were not accompanied by a large and sudden influx of new capital to increase purchasing power. The Public Works Administration spent its funds slowly and with care. Moreover, during 1918 the WIB had authority to use the President's absolute war emergency powers which Congress had granted in the Lever Act, to ensure enforcement of its directives. But the NRA relied on Code Authorities for the execution of its program, agencies which were manned by the same individuals who had themselves participated in the code-drafting process. Despite a similar institutional structure, therefore, the two agencies differed markedly in attainment of their goals.

Nevertheless, the experiment in industrial mobilization revealed the New Deal's link with the past. During the first year of his presidency, Roosevelt frequently fell back on his World War I experiences and sought to fashion his leadership in Woodrow Wilson's image. The early New Deal programs in the realm of business were composed of more than mere momentary improvisation. Based on institutions developed under the strain of the earlier crisis, they derived from the hard and concrete experience of the First World War.

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Andrew Johnson: His Historiographical Rise and Fall

Andrew Johnson could scarcely have escaped being one of the most controversial figures in American History. He headed the nation at a time of revolutionary crisis. His policies and actions aroused strong passions and produced bitter conflicts. What he did or failed to do profoundly affected issues still vital and unresolved to this day. And his enigmatic personality made him peculiarly liable to diverse interpretations of his purposes and motives.

Johnson's immediate contemporaries generally rendered an unfavorable verdict on him both as man and statesman. Partisan opponents such as James Russell Lowell, Henry Wilson, and James G. Blaine portrayed him as an obstinate, conceited, boorish character who wilfully defied Congress and Northern public opinion in a vain effort to carry out an inadequate and pro-Southern reconstruction policy.¹ The only Republicans to defend him were members of his cabinet, namely Gideon Welles and Hugh McCulloch; and while an occasional Southerner or Democrat had a good word for him, even they tended to be rather lukewarm in their praise.²

Not until the turn of the century did some truly historical evaluations of Johnson appear. The most influential of these was contained in the sixth volume of James Ford Rhodes' *United States from the Compromise of 1850*, published in 1906. Rhodes, who had been a young Northern businessman and Republican at the time of Reconstruction, found no reason to alter the prevailing view of Johnson's character. "Of all men in public life," he wrote, "it is difficult to conceive of one so ill-fitted for this delicate

¹ James R. Lowell, *Works of James Russell Lowell*, 10 vols., Boston, 1893, V, 289-326; Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, 3 vols., Boston and New York, 1877, III, 595-597; James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress: From Lincoln to Garfield*, 2 vols., Norwich, Conn., 1884, I, 241, 263, 267, 306. See also John L. Motley, *Four Questions for the People*, Boston, 1868, 31-32.

² Gideon Welles, "Lincoln and Johnson," *Galaxy*, XIII (February, 1872), 663ff; Hugh McCulloch, *Men and Measures*, New York, 1888, 403-407; Alexander H. Stephens, *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States*, 2 vols., Philadelphia, 1870, II, 646-649; Richard Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction*, New York, 1877, 236; John S. Wise, *Recollections of Thirteen Presidents*, New York, 1906, 108-112. Wise, interestingly enough, portrays Johnson as a drunkard during the last years of his life; his evidence is first-hand and circumstantial, yet not a single biographer of Johnson has ever referred to it.

work [of Reconstruction] as was Andrew Johnson."³ In his opinion Johnson's main defects were conceit and obstinacy, the same conclusion expressed by Blaine, and while he admitted that Johnson possessed "intellectual force" and "strict integrity," he declared that these qualities were cancelled out by inflexibility and "lack of political sense." In addition, he accepted as true the charge that Johnson drank to excess, and he quoted Lowell's statement that the Swing Around the Circle was an "indecent orgy."⁴

Rhodes also strongly criticized Johnson's dealings with Congress, in particular his vetoes of the Freedmen's Bureau Bill and the Civil Rights Bill, and his opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment. By these acts, he asserted, Johnson destroyed any chance of co-operation between the executive and legislative, and opened the way for Radical domination.⁵ This last he considered unfortunate, as it led to an immoral, unconstitutional, and impractical attempt to reconstruct the South on the basis of military force and Negro suffrage. In general he concluded that "No one else was so instrumental in defeating Johnson's own aims as was Johnson himself."⁶

Rhodes' essentially Northern interpretation was more supplemented than modified by the writings of his contemporaries, John Burgess, Woodrow Wilson, and William Dunning, all of whom were Southerners. Burgess declared that "Mr. Johnson was an unfit person to be President of the United States," and that "he was low-born and low-bred, violent in temper, obstinate, coarse, vindictive, and lacking in the sense of propriety. . . ."⁷ Wilson characterized Lincoln's successor as "self-willed, imperious, implacable," a man who "saw to it . . . that nobody should relish or trust him whom bad temper could alienate."⁸ Only Dunning, leader of the pro-Southern school of Reconstruction historiography, tended toward a sympathetic view of Johnson's personal character, describ-

³ James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*, Volume VI, New York, 1906, 1-2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-5, 60-62, 72-75, 102-105, 122. Rhodes (p. 5) apparently based his charge of drunkenness ("... at some time during his occupancy of this office [Military Governor of Tennessee] he began to drink to excess.") on a conversation with Hannibal Hamlin, who was involved in Johnson's intoxication at the 1865 inaugural.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 34-57, 68-71, 82-94, 115-116.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷ John W. Burgess, *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876*, New York, 1902, 191-192.

⁸ Woodrow Wilson, "The Reconstruction of the Southern States," *Atlantic Monthly*, LXXXVII (January, 1901), 3-4,

ing him as a man of "integrity of purpose, force of will, and rude intellectual force." However, he followed Rhodes in condemning the vetoes of the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights bills (both of which he criticized as such), and he believed that the Swing Around the Circle "again demonstrated that Andrew Johnson was not a statesman of national size in such a crisis as existed in 1866." In addition, by revealing that the historian George Bancroft was the real author of the much-admired Presidential Message of December, 1865, Dunning actually produced a further down-grading of Johnson's historical reputation.⁹

On the other hand, all of these turn-of-the-century historians more or less agreed that Johnson tried to put into effect Lincoln's Reconstruction plan, and that in the words of Burgess he was "nearer right" than the Radicals.¹⁰ And they were unanimous in denouncing the Tenure of Office Act, Stanton's conduct, and the impeachment proceedings. Their main complaint against Johnson was not so much what he tried to do, but how he went about doing it. Both explicitly and implicitly they made it clear that they believed that if Lincoln had lived affairs would have turned out much better.

The first historian to attempt a full-scale upward revision of Johnson's reputation was James Schouler, in his *History of the Reconstruction Period*, published in 1913. Schouler based his work upon an extensive use of Johnson's papers, made available in 1904, and also relied heavily on Gideon Welles' *Diary*, published in 1911.¹¹ He criticized Rhodes for having been "quite unjust to Johnson," exonerated the seventeenth President of the drunkenness charge, and defended his use of ghost writers. Moreover, his account of Johnson's struggle with Congress was highly sympathetic to the former, and he assigned a greater share of the blame to the Radicals, whom he stigmatized as "revengeful and visionary." However, despite finding many qualities to praise in Johnson, his basic conclusion was actually much the same as Rhodes': "This President created difficulties for himself at every step, while trying to carry out ideas often of themselves sound and useful."¹²

⁹ William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction Political and Economic 1865-1877*, New York and London, 1907, 19, 72, 82.

¹⁰ Burgess, *Reconstruction and the Constitution*, 191-192.

¹¹ Dunning, of course, had consulted these sources, and even Rhodes had examined them, but Schouler apparently was the first to make a systematic use of them.

¹² James Schouler, *History of the Reconstruction Period 1865-1877*, New York, 1913, 142.

World War I and the years immediately following saw no significant additions to Johnsonography, and the Rhodes interpretation, albeit somewhat modified by Schouler and Dunning, still held sway among American historians. Thus neither E. P. Oberholtzer, in the first volume of his *History of the United States Since the Civil War*, published in 1917, nor Walter L. Fleming in his *The Sequel of Appomattox*, published in 1919, departed in any essential from the Rhodes-Burgess-Dunning view, in fact, they were if anything more harsh on Johnson than Dunning had been, with Fleming, a student of Dunning and a Southerner, describing the seventeenth President as an "ill-educated, narrow, vindictive . . . stubborn, irascible, and undignified man," who "never sloughed off his backwoods crudeness."¹³ The only important historical work which had a favorable word for Johnson during this period was Benjamin F. Kendrick's *The Journal of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction* (New York, 1914), which by apparently proving that the Radicals did not really intend the Fourteenth Amendment to be the final terms of Reconstruction in 1866, implied that Johnson was not guilty, as was customarily claimed, of an egregious blunder in advising the South to reject it.

Then, at the end of the 1920's, an historiographical revolution took place. In the brief span of three years five widely-read books, all extremely favorable to Johnson, appeared. First, in 1928, was Robert W. Winston's *Andrew Johnson: Plebeian and Patriot*. Next, in 1929, there was Lloyd Paul Stryker's *Andrew Johnson: A Study in Courage* and Claude G. Bowers' *The Tragic Era*. And finally, in 1930, there came Howard K. Beale's *The Critical Year* and George Fort Milton's *The Age of Hate*. Not all of these works were of equal merit. Some were more influential than others. And they differed in approach and interpretation. But they all combined to raise Johnson's reputation to a height which would have been inconceivable to James Ford Rhodes.

No longer was Lincoln's successor deemed a stubborn, egotistical, ill-tempered demagogue whose maladroit policies and vulgar conduct needlessly antagonized Congress and led to the regrettable excesses of Radical Reconstruction. Now he was a humane, enlightened, and liberal statesman who waged a courageous battle in defense of the Constitution, the Union, and democracy against the scheming and unscrupulous Radicals, who for their part were motivated by a vindictive hatred of the South, partisan ambition, and (in

¹³ Walter L. Fleming, *The Sequel of Appomattox*, New Haven, 1919, 71-72, 137.

the eyes of Beale in particular) a desire to establish the national supremacy of Northern "Big Business." In short, rather than a boor, Johnson was a martyr; instead of a villain, a hero.

From a scholarly standpoint the most significant of these books was Beale's *The Critical Year*. Beale was a disciple of Charles Beard's economic determinism, and his book was an elaboration of that historian's "Second American Revolution" thesis. In addition, Beale openly proclaimed his purpose of dethroning Rhodes and Dunning as the standard authorities on Reconstruction.¹⁴ These historians, he asserted, had failed to see "the larger economic and social aspects." In his opinion, "the future has vindicated" Johnson on "reconstruction and constitutional interpretation." The main reason Johnson lost to the Radicals was his failure to exploit economic issues during the election of 1866. The Radicals, on the other hand, triumphed through a clever campaign of villification and demagogic "claptrap." In general, Beale felt that "in spite of obvious mistakes and shortcomings, Johnson becomes more worthy of respect."¹⁵

The pro-Johnson historiographical revolution was as successful as it was sudden.¹⁶ It even led to a movie, *Johnson of Tennessee*, starring Van Heflin, which portrayed the ex-tailor as a heroic leader in the cause of sectional unity. Until very recently probably the majority of historians would have felt themselves safe in saying that the once maligned Johnson had been elevated permanently to a position of respectability, almost prestige, among American Presidents.¹⁷ One

¹⁴ Howard K. Beale, *The Critical Year: A Study of Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*, New York, 1930, 3-4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-29, 398-399.

¹⁶ For examples of the favorable reception given the revisionist works, see the review of Stryker's *Johnson* by Thomas P. Abernathy, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XVI (December, 1929), 414-416; the review of Beale's *Critical Year* by Homer C. Hockett, *ibid.*, XVII (March, 1931), 635-637; and the review of Milton's *Age of Hate* by Avery Craven, *ibid.*, XVIII (December, 1931), 413-414. The pro-Johnson point of view was incorporated into such widely read books as Robert Selph Henry's *The Story of Reconstruction*, Indianapolis and New York, 1938; Matthew Josephson, *The Politicos, 1865-1896*, New York, 1938; Richard N. Current, *Old Thad Stevens, A Story of Ambition*, Madison, 1942; William E. Woodward, *Years of Madness*, New York, 1951; and any number of textbooks, including the extremely influential *Civil War and Reconstruction* by James G. Randall, New York, 1937, and *The Growth of the American Republic*, New York, first edition 1930, by Samuel E. Morison and Henry Steele Commager. Only a few Negro historians, historians of the Negro, and biographers of Thad Stevens (excepting Current) went counter to this attitude.

¹⁷ A poll of fifty-five American historians conducted by Arthur M. Schlesinger shortly after World War II resulted in Johnson being rated as an "average" President; Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Paths to the Present*, New York, 1948, 96, 98.

hopes, however, that no historian made such a statement, or if he did, published it. For during the past several years a counter-revolution in Johnsonography has gotten underway, with some impressive results. Perhaps the first noteworthy manifestation of this new wave was David Donald's article in the December, 1956, issue of *American Heritage*, entitled "Why They Impeached Andrew Johnson."

Donald, who can be accused neither of Northern bias nor of obsolete historical ideas, wrote of Johnson in words amazingly reminiscent of Rhodes. Johnson, he contended, suffered from "chronic lack of discretion"; "he lacked political sagacity"; and "his mind was immovably closed, and he defended his course with all the obstinacy of a weak man." Donald, furthermore, arrived at almost exactly the same overall judgment as Rhodes: Johnson, who "played into his enemies' hands" by his rude personal conduct, "sacrificed all influence with the party which had elected him and . . . turned over its control to the Radicals. . . ."¹⁸

Other articles, plus several monographs, have added fuel to the flames now licking at the pedestal constructed for Johnson in 1950.¹⁹ But by far the major work which seeks to revise the revisionists is Eric L. McKittrick's *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*, published in 1960. Space forbids a detailed description and analysis of this most stimulating book. Suffice it to say that in it McKittrick at-

¹⁸ David Donald, "Why They Impeached Andrew Johnson," *American Heritage*, VIII (December, 1956), 23-25, 103.

¹⁹ For examples, see the following: Robert P. Sharkey, *Money, Class, and Party: An Economic Study in Civil War and Reconstruction*; Fawn M. Brodie, *Thaddeus Stevens: Scourge of the South*, New York, 1959; Stanley Cohen, "Northeastern Business and Radical Reconstruction: A Re-examination," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVI (June, 1959), 67-90; Ralph T. Roske, "The Seven Martyrs?" *American Historical Review*, LXIV (January, 1959) 323-330; Harold M. Hyman, "Johnson, Stanton, and Grant: A Reconsideration of the Army's Role in the Events Leading to Impeachment," *ibid.*, LXVI (October, 1960), 85-100; Jack B. Scroggs, "Southern Reconstruction: A Radical View," *Journal of Southern History*, XXIV (November, 1958), 417-439. Some of the more recent textbooks show the influence of the new revisionism. However, Hodding Carter in the *Angry Scar: The Story of Reconstruction*, New York, 1959, while attempting earnestly to achieve objectivity about Reconstruction in the South itself, follows in a general way Beale in his interpretation of Reconstruction nationally, and is decidedly pro-Johnson. And Milton Lomack's *Andrew Johnson: President on Trial*, New York, 1960, essentially follows Beale, Bowers, and Milton. The first general history of Reconstruction to incorporate in large measure the new revisionism is John Hope Franklin's *Reconstruction After the Civil War*, Chicago, 1961. In addition, David Donald in his recent revision of Randall's *Civil War and Reconstruction*, New York, 1961, presents much of the new view; a comparison of Randall's original text and Donald's revision makes a very interesting and revealing study.

tempts to do to Beale what Beale supposedly did to Rhodes. As for his appraisal of Johnson, McKittrick agrees substantially with Rhodes. Indeed, he admits to "an unusual rapport" with not only Rhodes, but even James G. Blaine! Both of these writers, he states,

had a highly developed appreciation of the conflicting political requirements . . . a sense of limits, and an understanding of the possible, all adding up to an attitude of mind which I found very helpful in my efforts to understand why the men of the time behaved as they did.²⁰

An indirect but powerful second to McKittrick's study is Harold M. Hyman's *Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War*, written in collaboration with the late Benjamin Thomas.²¹ Hyman, in relating Stanton's role in Reconstruction, of necessity deals with the character and actions of Johnson. The portrait that emerges is that of a devious, cunning, and even unscrupulous President who stubbornly pursued a program that was as foolish as it was fallacious. On the other hand, Stanton, who is second only to Thad Stevens as one of the traditional villains of Reconstruction, is presented as a dedicated, patriotic official who sacrificed his financial interests and physical health in order to protect what he considered to be the achievements of the war and the integrity of the army from Johnson's pro-Southern meddling. Indeed, Hyman's account of the conflict between Johnson and Stanton departs so far from the standard version that it is no exaggeration to say that he has practically re-written the entire history of Reconstruction as it occurred in Washington between 1865 and 1868.

It would be premature to declare that the new revisionism, championed by McKittrick, has completely superseded the old one, headed by Beale: Quite obviously some scholars have nothing but contempt for it.²² However, few would deny that Johnson's his-

²⁰ Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*, Chicago, 1960, 521.

²¹ This work, published by Alfred Knopf in the spring of 1962, was originally instituted by Thomas, then after his death taken over by Hyman. Most of the research and interpretations presented in it are Hyman's.

²² For examples, see review of McKittrick's book by William B. Hesseltine in *Journal of Southern History*, XXVII (February, 1961), 110-111; and review of Franklin's *Reconstruction After the Civil War* by Avery Craven, *ibid.*, XXVIII (May, 1962), 255-256. A recent repeat of Arthur Schlesinger's Presidential rating poll, this time involving seventy-five historians, resulted in Johnson remaining in the "average" category, although at the very bottom of it; Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Our Presidents: A Rating by 75 Historians," *New York Times Magazine*, July 29, 1962, 12-13. Just how the only President in our history to be impeached can be rated "average" is beyond this writer.

torical stock, after rising from the bottom in 1930, is on the way down again some thirty years later. A number of factors, I believe account in the main for the oscillation:

First. *Professional Ambition*. Without disparaging the motives of the historians it would seem that professional ambition most likely played a part in Beale's onslaught against Rhodes, and probably holds true of McKittrick in respect to Beale. Such professional rivalry is natural, even desirable. In fact, a historian whom somebody aspires to supplant should consider himself as marked with distinction!

Second. *The discovery of new evidence or the more intensive use of old*. This is illustrated, in the case of the upward re-estimation of Johnson, by the influence of the publication of Gideon Welles' diary in 1911. As for his recent downward revision, one need only point to the enormous body of new work that has been done in the field of Reconstruction history since 1930.²³ Much of this work, it should be added, was inspired by Beale's 1940 article on the "Rewriting of Reconstruction History" in the *American Historical Review*.

Third. *Changes in historical fashion*. Since 1900 three main types of historical outlook have each in their turn prevailed in this country. Rhodes, Burgess, and their generation stressed the ethical in their judgment of men and events, and were primarily interested in the political-constitutional aspects of history. Beard and Beale, on the other hand, achieved their fame and influence through an iconoclastic application of economic interpretation. Most young historians between 1925 and 1945 followed their lead. Today, however, psychological interpretation appears to be the most popular approach, along with the cultural, sociological, and even anthropological. The psychological gambit is especially notable in McKittrick's work, with its concept of Johnson as an "outsider," and its thesis that the North required that the South provide it with "symbolic" assurances of victory.²⁴

Fourth. *Changing attitudes toward the Negro*. Here, in my opinion, is the touchstone to all writing about Reconstruction. Rhodes and his contemporaries either overtly or covertly assumed

²³ A stimulating survey of this new work by a new-revisionist historian is Bernard A. Weisberger's "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography," *Journal of Southern History*, XXV (November, 1959), 427-447.

²⁴ McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*, 21-41, 90-91.

the inherent inferiority of the Negro.²⁵ To them the great mistake, or rather crime, of Reconstruction was the attempt to give the Negro social and political equality—something which went counter to the "facts of race." They believed, to be sure, that the newly-freed slave should have been safeguarded in his basic human rights, but they questioned the wisdom of making him a citizen so soon, and they utterly condemned granting him the vote. To the degree they found good in Johnson, it was to the degree he stood in the way of the above; and one of the main reasons they criticized him so severely was because they felt that his shortcomings made it possible for the Radicals to impose, even for a short time, the horrors of "negro rule" on the white people of the South.

However, Rhodes and his fellow historians at least did not lose sight of the central role of the Negro in the story of Reconstruction.²⁶ Beale and his followers, on the other hand, in effect ignored the Negro. They did so not because of anti-Negro prejudice (it would be absurd to accuse Beale of that!) but simply because they were preoccupied with what they deemed to be the "real" issues, e.g., the economic ones. Approaching Reconstruction from this angle, they dismissed the Radical concern over Negro rights as mere self-serving propaganda.

Not so the new revisionists. Like Rhodes they regard the Negro as fundamental to the history of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era. Unlike him, however, they totally reject the concept of racial inferiority, discount the alleged evils of "Black Reconstruction," and strongly sympathize with the efforts of Sumner and Stevens in behalf of Negro rights. Moreover, one of the main reasons they condemn Johnson is because of what they feel were his callousness and even hostility toward the Negro. Thus John and LaWanda Cox, in a recent article in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* analyzing the vetoes of the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights bills, refer explicitly to Johnson's "racist attitudes," criticize his lack of "sensitivity to Republican racial attitudes," and declare that he deprived the nation of "an opportunity to establish a firm foundation for equal citizenship with moderation and a minimum of rancor."²⁷

²⁵ Rhodes, 41, 148-149; Burgess, 45, 53, 133; Dunning, 57-58, 63, 112; Fleming, 21, 42, 52, 89, 91-93, 185-186, 214, 254-256; Schouler, 105. There is no trace of racism in Woodrow Wilson's *A History of the American People, Volume V*, New York, 1901, which deals with Reconstruction.

²⁶ See, for instance, Rhodes, 153.

²⁷ John H. and LaWanda Cox, "Andrew Johnson and His Ghost Writers: An Analysis of the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights Veto Messages," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVIII (December, 1961), 460-479.

Or in other words, whereas Rhodes and his school found fault with Johnson because his mistakes opened the way for what they considered to have been misguided efforts to elevate the Negro, the Coxes and the school they represent castigate him for standing in the way of what they deem to have been progressive attempts to better the Negroes' lot. It is, all in all, an interesting example of scholars widely separated in time and ideology arriving at basically the same conclusion about a historical figure for diametrically opposed reasons.

Undoubtedly the Coxes, McKittrick, Donald, and most of the other recent critics of Johnson are reflecting, in their concern over Negro rights, the modern-day interest in the same subject.²⁸ These historians see the Negro nearly one-hundred years after the abolition of slavery being denied certain fundamental rights. They are inclined, therefore, to believe that had not these rights been given at least on paper to the Negro immediately following the Civil War, they would perhaps never have been granted. They feel, too, that the revolutionary turbulence which accompanied Radical Reconstruction was probably inevitable under the circumstances, and that to have avoided it in the 1860's would have been merely to postpone it to a later and possibly less auspicious time. And, finally, they are aware of the significant fact that no Negro in modern times has ever joined the critics of the Radicals and the advocates of Johnson in maintaining that his race received citizenship and suffrage "prematurely."

The radical attitudes of Rhodes and Dunning were typical of their day, while the economic preoccupation of Beard and Beale well-suited the Age of the Great Boom and the Great Bust. In short, we have in the case of Andrew Johnson's historical reputation another illustration of the trite but true axiom that historians tend to write of the past in terms of the present. Also, the historiographical rise and fall of Johnson provides a fresh reminder that no history is the last word—that at most it is merely the latest, and that even the latest sometimes has a striking resemblance to the very earliest!

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²⁸ Two notable manifestations of this, among many, are Kenneth M. Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution*, New York, 1956, and C. Vann Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, New York, 1955. See also Fawn M. Brodie, "Who Won the Civil War, Anyway?" *New York Times Book Review*, August 5, 1962, 1, 22-23.

The Historian, Presidential Elections, and 1896

Electioneering has long been a favorite pastime of the American people.¹ In his "immortal" study, *Democracy in America*, Alexis De Tocqueville noted that the frequency of elections kept American society "in a perpetual state of feverish excitement."² No sooner is one election over than the next one begins. Presidential elections in particular, have always been one of the most important and engrossing topics of conversation in the land. "As the election draws near, it is the daily theme of the public papers, the subject of private conversation, the end of every thought and every action, the sole interest of the present"—an observation hardly less true for our own day than De Tocqueville's.³

Despite the fact that they have occasionally provoked a great deal of conflict, presidential elections have generally served as a unifying factor in American history. Presidential campaigns have helped to contain the centrifugal forces which have constantly threatened to tear American society asunder. In the age before radio and television, this was especially true as presidential elections were one of the few events in which most Americans could participate simultaneously.

Because of the tremendous amount of time and energy Americans have expended on their elections, it is somewhat understandable that historians have devoted so much attention to the study of presidential campaigns. As the President has easily been the most powerful and influential person in our pluralistic and decentralized society, historians have quite naturally been interested in explaining why and how he was elected. The result of such curiosity measured quantitatively has been astounding: theses, dissertations, articles, and monographs number into the hundreds.

Despite the uniqueness of each presidential election, the literature has much in common. After focusing on the pre-convention maneuvering of potential candidates, the historian generally de-

¹ A somewhat different version of this paper was read at the Mississippi Valley Historical Association's meeting in Detroit on April 21, 1961, at which time the author was the commentator at a session on nineteenth century depression politics.

² Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, New York, 1897, 221.

³ *Ibid.*, 141.