

Andrew Johnson

1808–1875



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Andrew Johnson was the only southern senator to remain in the U.S. Senate after the South seceded from the Union. As president, Johnson's lenient treatment of the South during Reconstruction led to his impeachment



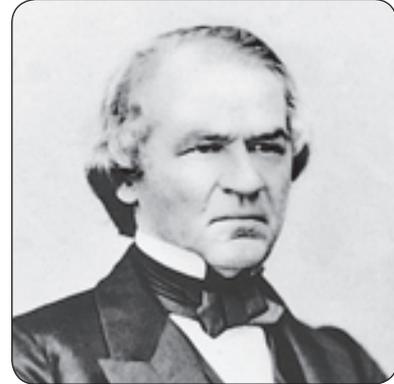
As you read the biography below, think about how Andrew Johnson's compassion for the South led to his restricted power as president.

Andrew Johnson was born into poverty in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1808. At 18, Johnson moved to Tennessee and opened a tailor shop.

In 1828, Johnson entered local politics and by 1834 he had been elected mayor of Greeneville, Tennessee. Johnson was known as one of the best debaters in the community of Greenville. He often argued strongly against slavery. Johnson's position was at odds with many people in the South. But Johnson's antislavery stance was not the last time he would be at odds with others.

Johnson's political career advanced and he held several offices, including state senator and governor of Tennessee. Johnson was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1857.

Before the Civil War, Johnson usually voted with senators from the South in matters relating to slavery. But when the southern states, including Tennessee, seceded from the Union, Johnson was the only southerner to remain in the Senate. Johnson supported President Abraham Lincoln's administration, and Lincoln appointed Johnson military governor of Tennessee. Johnson's job as



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impeach charge the holder of a public office with misconduct

military governor was difficult, but it allowed him to put into practice Reconstruction measures in Tennessee.

When Lincoln ran again for president in 1864, Lincoln chose Johnson as his running mate. When Lincoln was assassinated, Johnson became president. Almost immediately, Johnson was in conflict with the Radical Republicans.

Johnson believed that the southern states had never really left the Union. Under this theory, Johnson allowed ex-Confederate leaders to run for public office. Johnson also opposed granting civil rights to African Americans. Congress passed a Civil Rights Act, but Johnson vetoed it. Congress overrode Johnson's veto and passed the act.

As a result, Thaddeus Stevens, one of the most radical Republicans, led the charge to **impeach** Johnson. In February 1868, the House of Representatives voted to impeach Johnson. But when the Senate voted on the issue in May, the movement to convict Johnson and remove him from office failed by one vote. At the end of his term, Johnson did not seek reelection. He died in 1875.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Compare and Contrast** How were Andrew Johnson's views prior to the war different from the actions he took during Reconstruction?

- 2. Evaluate** Do you think it is a good thing to be able to impeach the President of the United States? Provide reasons or examples to support your point of view.

ACTIVITY

- 3.** Pretend that you are a reporter interviewing President Johnson. Write down your questions and what you think his responses would be.