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False Idol: The Memory of Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction in Greeneville, Tennessee

1869-2022

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in History

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by

Zachary A. Miller

August 2022

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Dr. Steven E. Nash, Chair

Dr. Tom D. Lee

Dr. Stephen G. Fritz

Keywords: Civil War, Reconstruction, East Tennessee, memory, Andrew Johnson

## ABSTRACT

False Idol: The Memory of Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction in Greeneville, Tennessee

1869-2022

by

Zachary A. Miller

The memory of Andrew Johnson in Greeneville has progressed through three phases. The first phase began during Johnson's post-presidential career when he sought national office to demonstrate his vindication. After Johnson died the first phase continued through the efforts of his daughters and local Unionists who sought to strengthen the myth of monolithic Unionism and use Johnson to promote reconciliation and to shield the region from federal intervention in the racial hierarchy. The second phase in the construction of Johnson's memory began in 1908 when Northerners began to unite with white Southerners in white supremacy. East Tennesseans then celebrated the aspects of Johnson's memory that they cherished, his attempts to undermine Reconstruction. The Civil Rights Movement ushered the final phase, prompting historians to reexamine Johnson's racism and presidency. With the image of a white supremacist no longer viable, Greenevillians depict Johnson as a progressive president unfairly impeached by Radical Republicans.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

On November 29, 2019, historian Manisha Sinha published an opinion piece in the *New York Times* that greatly reflected how most professional historians view Andrew Johnson and his political legacy. In the article, Sinha compared Donald J. Trump to Andrew Johnson, arguing that Johnson “pioneered the recalcitrant racism and impeachment-worthy subterfuge the president [Trump] is fond of.”<sup>1</sup> In 2021, C-Span published its presidential historians’ survey in which historians ranked Donald Trump 41 and Andrew Johnson 44 out of 45 presidents, just ahead of James Buchanan.<sup>2</sup> While both Sinha’s article and the C-Span rankings reflect national and scholarly assessments of Andrew Johnson’s presidency, Johnson’s hometown of Greeneville, Tennessee, does not share this sentiment, the National Park Service nurtures, protects, and preserves the troubled legacy of Andrew Johnson and interprets it to thousands of visitors annually at the Andrew Johnson National Historic Site.

Born in December 1808 to a poor white family outside of Raleigh, North Carolina, and later indentured to a tailor he subsequently ran away from, Andrew Johnson arrived in Greeneville in August 1826 at the age of eighteen. Beginning as a tailor, he moved up the political ranks, serving as town alderman, mayor, state representative, state senator, congressman, governor, senator, vice-president, and president of the nation. Johnson remains the

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<sup>1</sup> Manisha Sinha, “Donald Trump, Meet Your Precursor,” *New York Times*, November 29, 2019. Merritt, *Masterless Men*, 40. Merritt describes the Homestead Bill as the most radical land redistribution in U.S. history, yet Johnson supported the Mexican American War and wished that every white family owned at least one slave.

<sup>2</sup> “2021 Presidential Historians Survey,” C-Span, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.c-span.org/presidentsurvey2021/?page=overall>. Historians ranked the presidents by evaluating their public persuasion, crisis leadership, economic management, moral authority, international relations, administrative skills, relations with Congress, agenda, pursuit of equal justice for all, and performance within context of times. At the bottom of the rankings are William Henry Harrison, Donald J. Trump, Franklin Pierce, Andrew Johnson, and James Buchanan, respectively.

poorest man to become president and the only one to have been forced to labor.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Johnson's rise truly is impressive in an area in which few landless whites ever had a chance to run for office. Despite championing positions like the Homestead Bill, which guaranteed land for white people in the West, as a Southern politician Johnson remained committed to the slave power and maintaining slavery.<sup>4</sup> Unlike Abraham Lincoln, who recognized his prejudices as well as the fact that he and the nation needed to change, Johnson never overcame his bigotry. Instead, he tended his prejudice like a garden. Thus, upon taking the office of the presidency in 1865, at one of the most crucial moments in U.S. history in which four million freed African Americans needed assistance from the federal government, Johnson repeatedly denied equality to African Americans.

In the 147 years since Andrew Johnson died, individuals and groups have debated the meaning of his legacy. William A. Dunning, whose name became tied to the first scholarly interpretation of Johnson and Reconstruction, described the era as a punishment inflicted upon the white South by vengeful conquering Yankees who granted African Americans citizenship rights. Dunning viewed Johnson as an incompetent chief magistrate, primarily for his refusal to compromise and his vindictiveness. Still, Dunning agreed with Johnson's interpretation of the constitution, his racial views, and his contempt for Radical Republicans.<sup>5</sup>

Outside of East Tennessee, public opinion concerning Johnson remained extremely negative. Scholars trained by Dunning and others set aside Dunning's interpretation from 1928

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<sup>3</sup> Keri Leigh Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 40.

<sup>4</sup> Merritt, *Masterless Men*, 40. Merritt describes the Homestead Bill as the most radical land redistribution in U.S. history, yet Johnson supported the Mexican American War and wished that every white family owned at least one slave.

<sup>5</sup> David M. De Witt, *The Impeachment and Trial of Andrew Johnson, Seventeenth President of the United States* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1903); William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction: Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1907).

through 1937 and repaired Johnson's reputation at the cost of his political enemies. This interpretation, led by scholars like John Trotwood Moore and Claude Bowers, recast Johnson as a heroic defender of the constitution, while condemning his enemies as dangerous radicals.<sup>6</sup> When the U.S. experienced the first breakdowns of Jim Crow during the 1960s, the historiography of Johnson and Reconstruction shifted once more. Scholars like Eric McKittrick connected Reconstruction and Johnson to racism.<sup>7</sup> Since the 1960s, African American civil rights have stood at the center of Reconstruction scholarship with Johnson judged an obstacle (or even an active opponent) to progress.

Civil War and Reconstruction memory studies are equally crucial to understanding the Lost Cause, Andrew Johnson, and why white East Tennesseans celebrated Johnson's memory well into the twenty-first century. Alan T. Nolan described the Lost Cause as a myth created by white Southerners attached to the Confederacy that depicted the war as having been waged for the protection of states' rights, not the preservation of slavery. The Lost Cause also depicted Confederate soldiers as courageous, Confederate women as virtuous, and enslaved people as happy and loyal.<sup>8</sup> In 2001, David Blight argued that the desire for reconciliation between North and South pushed many white Americans to obscure, overlook, or silence the pivotal role of race and slavery during the Civil War and Reconstruction. White Northerners and Southerners, using

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<sup>6</sup> Examples of the books published during the late 1920s and 1930s consist of Robert W. Winston, *Andrew Johnson, Plebian and Patriot* (New York: Henry Holt, 1928); Claude G. Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln* (Cambridge, MA: Mass., Houghton Mifflin Co, 1929); John Trotwood Moore, "The Rail-Splitter's Running Mate," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 30, 1929; Lloyd Paul Stryker, *Andrew Johnson: A Study in Courage* (New York: Macmillan, 1929; George F. Milton, *The Age of Hate: Andrew Johnson and the Radicals* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1930).

<sup>7</sup> The two most impactful studies of the 1960s focusing on Andrew Johnson and Presidential Reconstruction were Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960); LaWanda Cox and John Cox, *Politics, Principle, and Prejudice, 1865–1866: Dilemma of Reconstruction America*. (New York, NY: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).

<sup>8</sup> Alan T. Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," in *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, eds. Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).



the Lost Cause, united in white supremacy after 1913 at the expense of African American's civil rights.<sup>9</sup> Blight further contends that this vision emphasized constitutional issues over slavery and moral concerns. At the core of this memory of the Civil War lay the belief that both sides were courageous and that neither was wrong. Andrew Johnson, a man who in many ways embodies both positions, is an excellent case study for Civil War Era memory because the memory of Johnson, the white supremacist Unionist, further demonstrates Blight's argument that white Americans united in the belief of white supremacy. Johnson's wartime allegiance no longer mattered; white Americans honored him for his attempts to maintain a white man's government during Reconstruction.

Although many white Southerners adopted the Lost Cause, a significant portion of white Appalachians, especially within East Tennessee, did not initially endorse the Lost Cause. In 2008 John C. Inscoe argued that white Appalachians helped perpetuate the myth of monolithic Unionism, a popular misconception that the region "had no interest in or commitment to the Confederate cause."<sup>10</sup> Despite the absence of a slaveocracy and plantation-based economies, Inscoe maintains that white Appalachians were "first and foremost Southerners" in the sense that they were just as committed to slavery as their Southern brothers and sisters. Although Unionists were not in the majority in East Tennessee, it is vital to understand why the area contained Unionists at all. Inscoe argues that their opposition to the Confederacy lay not in sympathy for enslaved people; rather, it represented a class-based opposition to the slaveocracy that Andrew

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<sup>9</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001) 26-27.

<sup>10</sup> John C. Inscoe, *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008) 27.

Johnson and other East Tennessee politicians despised.<sup>11</sup> Writing in 2010, Tom Lee argued that East Tennessee's Unionism, aside from the class-argument, represented a disconnect East Tennessee felt with the rest of the state before the war. Moreover, Lee maintained that the myth of monolithic Unionism and a focus on "the notion of a distinct East Tennessee history both softened reunion and appealed to northern audiences. For former Confederates in East Tennessee, the utility and predominance of the Unionist myth meant that their own past was often obscured."<sup>12</sup> Thus, the notion of monolithic Unionism could also shield the region from federal intervention regarding African Americans' civil rights.

Kelli B. Nelson's 2011 study on East Tennessee's Civil War monuments also greatly enhances our understanding of the region's Civil War memory and the myth of monolithic Unionism. Nelson argues that East Tennessee's Civil War monuments went through three distinctive phases. The first focused on advertising the region's Unionist background, beginning with the Andrew Johnson monument in 1878. East Tennessee focused on its Unionist heritage to attract Yankee capital and, more importantly, shield themselves from federal intervention because the area had been loyal. Therefore, the region could be trusted to maintain its racial order. Furthermore, the Union monuments contributed to the myth of monolithic Unionism. The second phase began in the early 1890s in which the East Tennesseans ceased to advertise their Unionist heritage and focus on reconciliation between the two sides. By 1910 the reconciliationist atmosphere gave oxygen to groups like the United Daughters of the

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<sup>11</sup> Inscoc, *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South*, 27. Inscoc also demonstrates how mountain political leaders such as Zebulon Vance, William "Parson" Brownlow, and Andrew Johnson opposed secession arguing that slavery was safer in the Union than out, reflecting the conservatism inherent in Appalachian Unionism.

<sup>12</sup> Lee, "Tom Lee, "The Lost Cause that Wasn't: East Tennessee and the Myth of Unionist Appalachia," in *Reconstruction Appalachia: The Civil War's Aftermath*, ed. Andrew L. Slap (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2010), 308.

Confederacy (UDC), who had been relegated to the shadows by the previous Unionist heritage. Nelson argues that the third phase began in 1931 when East Tennesseans largely accepted the Lost Cause, solidifying a Confederate image.<sup>13</sup>

In 2011 Barbara Gannon argued that although most white Southerners accepted the Lost Cause, Northerners, especially members of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), an organization of Union veterans, adhered to the “Won Cause.” According to Gannon, the Won Cause represented Union veterans’ memory of the Civil War that celebrated emancipation as a fruit of their victory and refused reconciliation with their former enemies who they viewed as traitors.<sup>14</sup> However, Gannon’s study focuses almost entirely on Northern veterans and does not study in detail the numerous GAR posts within the South. Samuel B. McGuire’s 2015 dissertation, “East Tennessee’s Grand Army,” focuses on Union veterans in East Tennessee, where the largest concentration of white Southern Unionist troops resided. According to McGuire, East Tennessee’s memory of the war fits neither Gannon nor Blight’s scholarly paradigm. Despite interracial posts with Black comrades and the celebration of Union victory, McGuire contends that white East Tennessean GAR members touted reconciliation with their former enemies and “vacillated on race.”<sup>15</sup> The memory of Andrew Johnson coincides well with McGuire’s argument because although white supremacy was a tenant of Johnsonian memory, so too was Johnson’s Unionism and class. This demonstrates how the memory of Johnson is filled with contradictions, just like the man and East Tennessee’s memory of the Civil War Era.

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<sup>13</sup> Kelli Brooke Nelson, “On the Imperishable Face of Granite: Civil War Monuments and the Evolution of Historical Memory in East Tennessee 1878-1931,” Master’s thesis, (East Tennessee State University, 2011), 14.

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradship in the Grand Army of the Republic*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011) 4-5. According to Gannon, the Won Cause represented Union veterans’ memory of the Civil War that celebrated emancipation as a fruit of their victory and refused reconciliation with their former enemies they viewed as traitors.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel B. McGuire, “East Tennessee’s Grand Army: Union Veterans Confront Race, Reconciliation, and Civil War Memory, 1884-1913,” PhD diss., (University of Georgia, 2015) 102.

At the heart of East Tennessee's Civil War memory lay Andrew Johnson, the region's most famous Unionist and Reconstruction president. The intent of this study is to investigate how East Tennesseans have remembered Andrew Johnson, which in many ways coincides with the region's memory of Reconstruction. Although existing studies of East Tennessee's Civil War and Reconstruction memory are highly beneficial to scholars, no study focuses on how the region remembers one of, if not its most famous politician. Moreover, most East Tennessee memory studies stop in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, this study explores Johnson and Reconstruction memory from 1869 until 2021, examining how that memory has changed over the years. How white East Tennesseans have remembered Johnson over time provides an excellent demonstration of how East Tennessee's Civil War and Reconstruction memory has never been stagnant and has changed due to external and internal forces. Moreover, it further adds to McGuire's point that the memory of the Civil War Era in East Tennessee does not fit any scholarly model. Instead, the memory of Johnson in East Tennessee like the Civil War, has consistently been a paradox.

Because Andrew Johnson had been a poor white who advocated for that class and later opposed secession, Unionists praised him as a statesman at Lincoln's level. At the same time, Johnson's amnesty proclamations forgiving millions of white Southerners for their roles in the Confederacy and his attempts to combat Radical Reconstruction, allowed Confederates in the region to celebrate Johnson as a powerful tool for reconciliation. Due to their shared racism, ex-Confederates and Unionists united in the memory of Andrew Johnson in order to shield their white supremacy with the thin veil of patriotism and loyalty. During the early 1900s, white Northerners began to unite with white Southerners in white supremacy. Similarly, reconciliation now dominated East Tennessee's memory of the Civil War, shifting the memory of Andrew

Johnson from conservative Unionist hero into a constitutional defender of the white South. The memory of a white supremacist president during the first half of the twentieth century reflected the intense push for Jim Crow laws designed to segregate African Americans from white society. However, following World War II and the Civil Rights Movement, the memory of a bigoted Johnson was no longer feasible. This prompted Greenevillians and other East Tennesseans to depict Johnson as a conservative man of his times who courageously fought impeachment by Radical Republicans. This view remains the core interpretation of Johnson in Greeneville today.

Numerous individuals and groups sought to influence the memory of Andrew Johnson from 1869 until today. One of the most helpful resources to investigate how East Tennesseans celebrated and remembered Andrew Johnson are newspapers. Despite these sources mainly serving the upper and middle classes, events focusing on Johnson usually referred to how they attracted poor whites as well, a testament to Johnson's legacy with that class.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, because newspapers had the farthest reach outside of the region, they had the largest impact on how the rest of the nation portrayed East Tennessee.

The memory of Andrew Johnson in Greeneville and throughout East Tennessee is a perfect representation of how different people molded memory for specific purposes. Johnson's memory went through three distinctive phases that are different yet closely related to Nelson's three phases of Civil War memory in East Tennessee. The first began with the erection of the Andrew Johnson memorial atop his gravesite commissioned by his daughters Martha J. Patterson and Mary J. Stover in 1878. The Johnson monument spearheaded the myth of monolithic

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<sup>16</sup> The *Greeneville Intelligencer* reported how one of the most notable features of Andrew Johnson's funeral in 1875 was "the presence of an exceedingly large number of what is known as the 'plain people' present. The farmers and mechanics, the honest yeomanry, were out in force, and showed unmistakably the hold he had upon that class." "Andrew Johnson Funeral Incidents," *Greeneville Intelligencer*, August 6, 1875, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586557959>.

Unionism in East Tennessee. After the centennial of Andrew Johnson's birth in 1908, white East Tennesseans, under the direction of popular historians and writers, constructed the image of a white supremacist hero who defended the white South from the horrors of Radical Reconstruction. Meanwhile, the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s prompted a drastic reevaluation of Johnson's career and legacy. From 1958 through today, the memory of Andrew Johnson has dropped to the point where historians consistently rank him as one of the worst presidents in history. Still, Greeneville and the National Park Service remain committed to a heroic interpretation of Andrew Johnson.

The heroic interpretation of Andrew Johnson in East Tennessee did not begin in 1878; it began at least when Johnson returned home from the presidency in 1869, though probably earlier. Chapter one examines the first phase of Johnsonian memory during his post-presidential career and his multiple attempts to secure national office again. To achieve this goal, Johnson immediately involved himself in state and national politics, seeking a U.S. Senate seat in 1869, only to fail when one of his former associates voted against him. Johnson further sought redemption by attempting to run for the House of Representatives across the state in 1872. Though numerous East Tennesseans encouraged Johnson to run for his old seat in upper East Tennessee, Johnson longed for a seat representing the entire state to demonstrate his Tennesseans' approval of his record. During this campaign, Johnson attempted to appeal to Unionists by preaching his stand against secession and Confederates by reminding them of his policies that forgave them for the war and curbed Radical Reconstruction. What is also remarkable is how Johnson attempted to appeal to African American voters by arguing that it was he rather than Lincoln who freed them. However, Johnson split the ticket and finished third in a three-way race. Johnson's final attempt for national office came in 1875 when he secured

election to the U.S. Senate. Had Johnson hidden in the shadows and sought not to influence his legacy after the presidency, the memory of a heroic Johnson would not have been as enduring as it was and has been in East Tennessee.

In 1878 Martha J. Patterson and Mary J. Stover dedicated a memorial atop their father's grave that sparked East Tennessee's Unionist Civil War monument phase. Kelli Nelson argues that during this period, "white East Tennesseans worked to create an image that would advertise their region as loyal to the national government and promote the area to potential northern investors."<sup>17</sup> Chapter two explores how the image of Johnson served as a powerful reminder to the federal government that the region could be trusted to manage its own affairs, especially regarding the racial order. During the Gilded Age, the memory of a seemingly incorruptible president who rose through his ability and hard work was equally powerful. While East Tennesseans pushed the myth of monolithic Unionism across the country with Johnson as the central figure behind the myth, they also pushed the image of Johnson at home to sow reconciliation with their former Confederate enemies. At the core of the first phase of Johnson's memory were his family and local GAR leaders in Greeneville. The combined efforts by Martha Johnson Patterson and Congressman Walter P. Brownlow helped secure the Johnson gravesite as a national cemetery by 1901, establishing the blueprint for Johnson sites in Greeneville to be preserved.

Following the centennial of Johnson's birth in 1908, the memory of Andrew Johnson shifted from one of a conservative Unionist hero to that of a white supremacist reconciliationist. Chapter three examines the zenith of Johnson's memory and how the image of Johnson fostered reconciliation at the expense of Radical Republicans and Reconstruction, which were associated

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<sup>17</sup> Nelson, "On the Imperishable Face of Granite," 15.

with centralized government, racial equality, and corruption. Equally important during this period was the growth of historical tourism, which prompted Greeneville residents to promote their town as the crown jewel of East Tennessee's historical tourism industry. During the late 1890s and early 1900s, Greeneville industrialized as tobacco warehouses, factories, and shops transformed the town into one of the largest tobacco trade centers in the South.<sup>18</sup> With tobacco buildings slowly encircling important buildings like the Johnson homestead and tailor shop, out of town and town residents sought to preserve such buildings. Johnson advocates increasingly lobbied the state of Tennessee to purchase the tailor shop in 1923 and eventually the federal government to purchase the homestead, tailor shop, and cemetery by 1942.

Although most major Johnson properties and objects belonged to the National Park Service by 1958, trouble loomed for the heroic interpretation of Andrew Johnson. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s prompted many historians to reexamine Johnson's intense racism and attempts to prevent an interracial democracy. With the breakdown of Jim Crow, the memory of a white nationalist hero had to be updated to attract visitors to the site. Chapter four explores how Greeneville residents sought to soften the image of Andrew Johnson. Historian Robert Orr and the NPS softened Johnson's relationship with slavery by arguing that Johnson was a benevolent enslaver who only purchased his enslaved people to keep them from a worse fate in the Deep South. Central to the softened memory of Johnson is the notion that Johnson tried following in Abraham Lincoln's footsteps, sought civil rights for all, and that Radical Republicans unfairly impeached him. Noticeably, arguments of Johnson saving the white South from racial conflicts and the praising of his vetoes of the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights

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<sup>18</sup> Tom Lee, "Southern Appalachia's Nineteenth-Century Bright Tobacco Boom: Industrialization, Urbanization, and the Culture of Tobacco," *Agricultural History*, 88, no. 2 (2014), 185.



Bills went from being celebrated by locals to being pushed aside and less important than Radical attempts to undermine the presidency.<sup>19</sup> Although there have been attempts to open the interpretation at the Johnson site since the 1990s, the memory of a heroic defender of the constitution and Greeneville's favorite son still dominates the NPS's interpretation of Johnson. However, plans are in development for the park to open the interpretation to focus more on racial violence during the period, the issue of citizenship, and a more balanced interpretation of the impeachment trial. How the town will react to these changes remains to be seen.

In the end, the memory of Andrew Johnson in Greeneville and across East Tennessee has consistently been complex and filled with contradictions. Although the first phase of his memory emphasized the region's Unionism and loyalty, it simultaneously sought not to alienate ex-Confederates but to accept them into the fold. As Yankee capital poured into the region and Northerners began to unite with white Southerners in white supremacy, the Unionist image waned into a memory resembling Lost Cause views on Reconstruction. However, the praising of Johnson's patriotism, despite the inherent white nationalism and Johnson's loyalty to the federal government, did not fit perfectly into Lost Cause arguments. Finally, the Civil Rights Movement and the attempts to illustrate Johnson as a racial egalitarian when he was the furthest thing from one demonstrates how Greeneville recognizes the complexities of Johnson yet continues to honor a false idol.

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<sup>19</sup> The Freedmen's Bureau Act of 1866 was designed to extend the life of the Freedmen's Bureau, an institution devoted to aiding African Americans in the transition from slavery to free labor in the South. Johnson vetoed the act and repudiated the Bureau and the government for not aiding poor whites. Eric Foner argues that the Civil Rights Bill of 1866 "represented the first attempt to give meaning to the Thirteenth Amendment, to define in legislative terms the essence of freedom." Still, Johnson vetoed the measure, where he appealed to "fiscal conservatism, raising the specter of an immense federal bureaucracy trampling upon citizen's rights, and insisting self-help, not dependence upon outside assistance, offered the surest road to economic advancement, Johnson voiced themes that to this day have sustained opposition to federal intervention on behalf of Blacks." Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) 247-248.

## CHAPTER 2. THE VINDICATION OF ANDREW JOHNSON, 1869-1877

March 20, 1869, started as a dreary, rainy morning in Greeneville. Despite the weather, throngs of citizens from the town and surrounding areas waited at the train depot for the return of Greeneville's most illustrious citizen, ex-president Andrew Johnson. The wait in the rain did not last long. Suddenly, the clouds disappeared, and the shrill of the train engine roared across the town; Andrew Johnson was home. As Johnson stepped off the train, "the enthusiasm of the people knew no bounds."<sup>1</sup> The procession moved up the street to the courthouse, where across the street a banner hung reading "Welcome Home," when in 1861 it read "Andrew Johnson—Traitor." T. A. R. Nelson, a defense team member against impeachment and a conservative Unionist, reintroduced Johnson.<sup>2</sup> Following Nelson's short history of Johnson, it was time for the ex-president to speak to his old neighbors, friends, and enemies. Johnson addressed the crowd with well-rehearsed topics. He warned that the time of parties was now over. Instead, the real question was should government be "of Constitution and law" or "a despotic power?" The former president then discussed the issues of slavery and emancipation, claiming that "for the last four years he had been the greatest slave on the earth." Johnson compared what he saw as an unjust impeachment and Radical Republican rule to being a slave, while ignoring the real plight African Americans faced. More importantly, the ex-president warned that the Constitution would sink forever if not taken back from "the usurpers"

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Harrison Doughty, *Greeneville: One Hundred Year Portrait, 1775-1875* (Greeneville, TN: Doughty, 1975) 249.

<sup>2</sup> For more information regarding T.A.R. Nelson and his Johnsonian and Greeneville connections see Doughty, *Greeneville*, 249.

(congressional Republicans). Johnson concluded his brief address and walked down Main Street to his home, where his family was waiting.<sup>3</sup>

Careful planning had taken place just a couple of weeks prior to present the ex-president's lavish welcome home party. Two weeks before Johnson's return, prominent men in Greeneville met to organize the procession. They welcomed all citizens to participate, though they designed the procession to be free of partisan influences. For those who wished to reflect deeply on his career, his strongest allies planned a separate event where Johnson could unburden himself and recount the "fearless defense of the cause of constitutional liberty" he had fought so long for.<sup>4</sup> Despite having planned a separate event for Johnson, the organizers felt there was no need for partisan feelings because Johnson's fellow citizens in town felt "an honest pride" in his public services. However, for Johnson's return to be free of political animosity the planners opted for a separate event for Johnson and his supporters to recount his career which reflected how the nation felt about Johnson as a whole. Johnson remained an anathema across the country. For those who cast their lot with the Confederacy, Johnson was a traitor to the South. At the same time, Republicans in the North saw Johnson as a vengeful, prejudiced man, with too lenient of a Reconstruction plan in the South.

East Tennessee also experienced a division in feeling toward the former president and Reconstruction. Although only 21.7% of Greene Countians voted in favor of secession in June 1861, Greene Countians and over 48,800 other East Tennesseans fought for or aided the

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<sup>3</sup> "Andrew Johnson at Home," *Knoxville Daily Press and Herald*, March 21, 1869, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586336666/?terms=Andrew%20Johnson&match=1>.

<sup>4</sup> Henry H. Ingersoll to Andrew Johnson, 8 March, 1869, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, ed. Paul H. Bergeron, vol. 15 (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 522-523. Ingersoll was an important figure in Greeneville who later chaired the committee in charge of the funeral ceremonies for Johnson.

Confederacy, representing the majority of troops raised in the region.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, since 1865, the Republican party had dominated the legislative assembly in the state. By April 1869, that party was splintering. One of the primary causes for the split in the Republican party was William “Parson” Brownlow, the Republican Governor of Tennessee. Brownlow could not rely on the white Unionist vote alone throughout the state; thus, he and Radical allies revoked the right to vote from virtually all ex-Confederates and relied on freedmen’s votes to guarantee Republican power. In so doing, Brownlow effectively aligned Tennessee’s Republican Party with the Radicals of the North, securing the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in defiance of Andrew Johnson.<sup>6</sup> An open rift in the Tennessee Republican party came in April 1869 during the Republican primary for governor. The contest proved more than just a primary for incumbent Republican Governor DeWitt C. Senter who had become the conservative Republican and Democratic choice with his endorsement of voting rights for ex-Confederates. The election proved a referendum on Reconstruction in the state, with Senter’s main opposition, Republican William P. Stokes, advocating a limited and gradual approach to restoring voting rights for ex-Confederates. Thus, despite Johnson’s claims on the day of his return that his “public career had

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<sup>5</sup> For a short overview of Greeneville and Andrew Johnson during the secession crisis, see Gordon B. McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1978) 18; for a detailed map and table with county by county voting percentages see “Tennessee Secession Referendum, 1861,” Vote Archive, accessed March 1, 2022, <https://votearchive.com/tn-sec-ref-1861/>; for an analysis of U.S. and Confederate troop strength in East Tennessee see Peter Wallenstein, “‘Helping to Save the Union’: The Social Origins, Wartime Experiences, and Military Impact of White Union Troops from East Tennessee,” in *The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays*, eds. Kenneth Noe and Shannon H. Wilson (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 15-16. Wallenstein found that an estimated 27,400 white East Tennessean men served in the U.S. Army compared to the 48,800 East Tennessee Confederates. Although there was a majority of East Tennessee Confederate soldiers, the 27, 400 Unionists reduced CSA troop strength in the region by more than a third. <sup>5</sup> “Andrew Johnson at Home,” *Knoxville Daily Press and Herald*, March 21, 1869, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586336666/?terms=Andrew%20Johnson&match=1>.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of Tennessee during Reconstruction see, Ben H. Severance, *Tennessee’s Radical Army: The State Guard and Its Role in Reconstruction, 1867-1869* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), reviews how Brownlow mobilized the Tennessee State Guard in 1867 and 1869 to protect Republican voter turnout.

ended,” the conditions on the ground only one month after returning home were too great for Johnson to ignore.<sup>7</sup>

Andrew Johnson did not hide in the shadows after he returned home from the presidency in 1869. Johnson sought political office to influence Reconstruction policies and, more importantly, to vindicate himself nationally. Johnson denied requests from upper East Tennesseans to run for his old congressional seat in Tennessee’s First District, seeking instead to demonstrate that he was the voice of white Tennesseans by exonerating himself on the state level.<sup>8</sup> Rather than being remembered as the first president impeached, Johnson sought to secure a legacy as a fair and just president who was persecuted by Radical Republicans bent on destroying the South’s social order and undermining the Constitution. Johnson also attempted to appeal to Black voters as well, often arguing that it was because of *him* not Lincoln that they were freed. However, Johnson’s quest failed, with Southerners, Northerners, and most African Americans still despising the accidental president at the time of his death. Despite Johnson’s failure for national vindication, his quest endeared him even further to East Tennesseans, who often supported him, regardless of their wartime affiliation. It is the period from 1869 to 1875 that solidified Johnson’s memory within East Tennessee. Had Johnson not sought political office or to demonstrate how his presidential policies had continued political relevance, especially in regard to white supremacy, it is likely Johnson’s memory would not have endured as long as it has in East Tennessee. Thus, Andrew Johnson’s humble origins, Unionist stance, and Reconstruction policies aimed at preventing the social mobility of African Americans became his appeal to voters in Tennessee and set up the basis for his legacy.

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<sup>7</sup> “Andrew Johnson at Home,” *Knoxville Daily Press and Herald*, March 21, 1869, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586336666/?terms=Andrew%20Johnson&match=1>.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Johnson to John Netherland, 3 March 1872, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 294.

### *Andrew Johnson's Senate Race of 1869*

Greeneville is “too small a place to contain so large a man,” remarked one of Johnson’s neighbors shortly after the former president returned home in 1869. Indeed, Johnson scheduled public speeches across the state for early April, recognizing that the gubernatorial election approaching would allow him to stay in the public arena.<sup>9</sup> The next governor would have a tremendous influence on deciding the next U.S. Senator in October. Johnson was in a unique position to run for the Senate seat due to his character and political record. As a conservative Democrat, Johnson could possibly gain the support of conservatives who would remember favorably his pre-war stances as well as his Reconstruction plan. Johnson could also appeal to more moderate and conservative Republicans who supported his stance on secession and disagreed with Radical Republican policies. However, his days as military governor of Tennessee left many Confederates, especially around Nashville, with bitter memories of the ex-president. In order to appeal to the Confederates, Johnson boasted at one speech in Nashville that “I have pardoned more people than any man in the civilized world. With one single stroke of the pen the prison doors of 65,000 men were thrown open.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, those that Johnson pardoned and fell under his blanket amnesty proclamations never faced imprisonment nor execution for their crimes.

Johnson also attempted to appeal to Black voters as well, although he laced that appeal with thinly veiled threats. In his April speech delivered in Nashville, Johnson “stressed his support as military governor for ending slavery,” reminding those in attendance that

when you come to consider who it was that proclaimed you free, you will remember...Mr. Lincoln refused to extend his proclamation to Tennessee and left her out. Andrew Johnson in the midst of danger and death proclaimed it from the capitol steps.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert B. Jones and Mark E. Byrnes, “‘Rebels Never Forgive’: Former President Andrew Johnson and the Senate Election of 1869,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 3, (2007) 250.

<sup>10</sup> *Nashville Republican Banner*, April 11, 1869, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/604998303>.

Your Moses did it. I have been absent four or five years, and if you have been delivered and made free by that Moses, you have since been made slaves... You were proclaimed free by one man, but these false gods [Republicans] really have you in a worse state of slavery than you were before the war. They are your taskmasters, when you ought to be free and should exercise your own minds.<sup>11</sup>

It is striking that Johnson claimed credit for emancipation in Tennessee, especially since it was largely through Johnson's efforts that Lincoln excluded Tennessee from the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>12</sup> Johnson then urged the freedmen to support universal male suffrage to ensure their liberty and for the states because if the freedmen continued to vote Republican, they "would not be allowed to think" for themselves and subsequently enslaved again. Johnson declared that the freedmen's "true policy is not only to go for your own freedom and enfranchisement, but for the enfranchisement of *all*, and thus cultivate good feeling and harmony among the same people with whom you have got (sic) to live."<sup>13</sup>

Johnson's attempts to appeal to African American voters demonstrates his sense of paternalism. Although Johnson had been a poor white, as one of Tennessee's most prominent politicians and a former president, Johnson was a member of the elite. Because of his elite status, Johnson had to treat African Americans with some semblance of humanity, though Johnson made a clear distinction in differences in status and intellectual abilities between Black and

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<sup>11</sup> *Nashville Republican Banner*, April 11, 1869, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/604998303>; In October 1864, on the steps of the Tennessee State Capitol, Johnson proclaimed all enslaved people in the state free. Johnson remarked that he wished a Moses would rise to lead Tennessee African Americans to freedom. When the African American crowd dubbed Johnson as their Moses, Johnson readily accepted, a cruel irony since his presidency sought to obstruct Black freedom at every step. For a full transcript of Johnson's 1864 speech see "The Moses of the Colored Men' Speech," National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior), accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/anjo/learn/historyculture/moses-speech.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson and forty other Unionist Tennessee leaders wrote a petition to Abraham Lincoln in December 1862, asking him to exempt Tennessee from the emancipation proclamation, which he promptly did. See John Cimprich, "Military Governor Johnson and Tennessee Blacks, 1862-65," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 4, (1980) 462.

<sup>13</sup> Ex-President Johnson's Speech," *Nashville Union and American*, April 11, 1869, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/80672397>.

white. Despite directly telling Black and white audiences that he did not believe in social equality with Blacks, Johnson advocated for basic civil rights and the vote for Black Tennesseans. Like Wade Hampton III, Johnson's sense of paternalism reflected his elite status and his racism, it was to be Johnson, the so-called Moses, not African Americans to lead themselves to freedom.<sup>14</sup> Rod Andrew Jr. argues that no matter how benevolent Hampton tried to appear, "his speeches and policies could never lead to racial justice or equality, since paternalism itself was built on the assumption of Black inferiority."<sup>15</sup> This argument can be applied to Johnson as well. Johnson may have professed to be the Moses for African Americans and endorsed the vote for Black men in Tennessee, though that advocacy was often patronizing and laced with threats. For Johnson, Black men had the basic right to vote—if they didn't vote Republican and demand social equality.

In a campaign speech addressed to an estimated 2,500 people in Greeneville, Johnson criticized and warned the freedpeople in the audience. Although African Americans were now free, Johnson claimed that when Black men "went into midnight leagues [Union League] and took their dark oaths, they surrendered their freedom and became the slaves of new masters [Radical Republicans]," though it is unclear if the Union League operated in Greeneville.<sup>16</sup> Johnson claimed that the Radicals were lying to the Freedmen and that they would not be

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<sup>14</sup> Wade Hampton III was a Confederate General, a white supremacist redeemer governor of South Carolina in 1876 through 1879, and U.S. Senator from 1879 to 1891. For more information on his life and career see Rod Andrew Jr., *Wade Hampton: Confederate Warrior to Southern Redeemer*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Rod Andrew Jr., *Wade Hampton*, xii-xiii.

<sup>16</sup> The Union League or Loyal League originally operated in the North during the Civil War and trickled down South both during and after the conflict. It was the first African American Radical Republican organization in the South though it was not composed entirely of Blacks as many whites joined too. Union Leagues engaged in politics, homesteading land, public school rights for children, agricultural concerns, and a host of other issues. For more information concerning the leagues see Brittany Rogers, "Union League (1863-)," *Union League (1863-)* •, February 6, 2020, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/union-league-1863/>.



enslaved again “if the rebels are enfranchised.” Johnson then warned them that “your interest, your happiness, your prosperity, your all demand that you should resume friendly relations with the white people of the State. Your refusal to do so will be to your own injury.” Finally, Johnson warned African Americans that because they were outnumbered more than three to one, the freedmen could not “in justice, in honesty, in fairness, or with safety to yourselves engage in a struggle to keep white citizens disfranchised and outlawed.”<sup>17</sup> Like other paternalistic white supremacists, Johnson’s sense of paternalism was laced with threats to the African American population to remain in their social spheres.

While trying to persuade African Americans that he was their true friend, Johnson also sought to demonstrate his conservatism to voters disgusted with Radical Reconstruction. Johnson defended himself as a true Democrat and one that had never drank from the cup of Radicalism. Due to his election as Vice President on the National Union ticket with Abraham Lincoln, many former rebels viewed Johnson as a Republican and a traitor. Johnson castigated Republicans for failing to bring Jefferson Davis to trial and bailing Davis out of prison, while he “had been placed upon trial, though guilty of no crime.”<sup>18</sup> Johnson also used his former class status as a former poor white to appeal to the non-elites who had supported the Confederacy. He reminded his audience that “while he was being reviled for pardoning the masses, who had been forced into the rebellion,” men like General James Longstreet had been pardoned by a Republican and received an illustrious office. Johnson had two reasons for attacking Longstreet. First, Longstreet and his army made their winter camp in Greeneville. Subsequently, Johnson claimed that Longstreet devastated the country and “robbed his house of his trunks,” for which Longstreet

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<sup>17</sup> “Ex-President Johnson at Home,” *Greeneville National Union*.

<sup>18</sup> “Ex-President Johnson at Home,” *Greeneville National Union*, July 8, 1869, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/86083146/johnsons-return-home-speech-talks/>

denied personal responsibility; he also maintained that he helped Johnson recover some documents that had been confiscated.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, Longstreet's name drew contempt from both Unionists and Confederates in the region. For Unionists, Longstreet was the man who occupied their town and ordered their food confiscated during the winter of 1863-1864 after his botched siege of Knoxville. Longstreet established his headquarters inside Greeneville while his army camped between the town and Russellville, taxing the local food supply to the limit. Robert Tracy McKenzie argues that because Longstreet's forces assumed they would not return to East Tennessee, the Confederates "took everything they could with them from the region."<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, William Garrett Piston argues that Longstreet became a "Judas" to Confederates because although he had been Robert E. Lee's "Old War Horse" during the war, his support for and by the Republican party in Congress and his old friend Ulysses S. Grant drew the contempt and ire of many ex-Confederates.<sup>21</sup>

Robert B. Jones and Mark Byrnes argue that Governor Senter used his position in July 1869 to replace "county registers of voters with men who would enroll all interested in voting for Senter—a step that would affect Johnson's plans for returning to the Senate."<sup>22</sup> Thus, thousands of men who had supported the Confederacy registered to vote, with some running for legislative seats. On August 5, Senter carried all three divisions, although he had a slim lead over Stokes in the East. With Senter elected and a conservative General Assembly to elect a senator in October,

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<sup>19</sup> For insight into the Confederate occupation of Greeneville, see Robert T. McKenzie, "'Oh! Ours is a Deplorable Condition: The Economic Impact of the Civil War in Upper East Tennessee,'" in *The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays*, eds. Kenneth Noe and Shannon H. Wilson (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 204-207.

<sup>20</sup> McKenzie, "'Oh! Ours is a Deplorable Condition,'" 205.

<sup>21</sup> William Garrett Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), x.

<sup>22</sup> Robert B. Jones and Mark E. Byrnes, "'Rebels Never Forgive,'" 257.

Johnson decided to throw his hat in the ring.<sup>23</sup> Johnson's actions during the campaign led to what Gordon B. McKinney viewed as a "revival of the Democrats," and Johnson became "a symbol around which to rally." Furthermore, Johnson's return to the state and campaign trail led to one of the first conservative government takeovers during Reconstruction.<sup>24</sup> Instead of being redeemed by white Democrats like other Southern states during Reconstruction, Tennessee's retreat from Reconstruction began with its Republican party, primarily Governor Senter becoming more conservative in stark contrast to his war-time efforts with William Brownlow.

Instead of running against an ex-Confederate, Johnson's preeminent rival for the Senate was Emerson Etheridge of Dresden. An antebellum Whig Congressman and Unionist during the war, Emerson was more moderate than many Radical Republicans. Etheridge criticized Brownlow's earlier moves at disfranchisement of former Confederates. Thus, to many in both Republican and conservative camps, Etheridge seemed the more plausible choice. Indeed, Johnson was fighting an uphill battle. Although Johnson supported suffrage for former rebels, many still felt deep emotional ties to the Confederacy in 1869. Johnson likely knew that he was not well liked across the state. Furthermore, because he declined the first congressional seat and wanted a statewide office, it is possible that Johnson wanted redemption with all whites in the state. One Memphis paper claimed that Johnson "spoke in favor of the confiscation of all Southern property, even after the war had terminated." Moreover, the paper used Johnson's Amnesty Proclamation against him, claiming that Johnson declared that those who "were worth twenty thousand dollars should have their property confiscated and themselves hanged."<sup>25</sup> Due

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 257-258.

<sup>24</sup> McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 37.

<sup>25</sup> "Andy Johnson Endeavoring to Go Up the Ladder Again," *Memphis Public Ledger*, October 7, 1869, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586936171/?terms=Andrew%20Johnson&match=1>.

to the deep Confederate mistrust and rage still aimed at Johnson, William B. Stokes predicted that Johnson would lose the election because “Rebels never forgive.”<sup>26</sup>

The ballot process began on Oct. 19, with Johnson leading in the first votes. However, problems for Johnson were apparent. For starters, only one Johnson supporter resided West of the Tennessee River in the State Senate. However, Etheridge only received one vote from the East. Johnson’s near-unanimous support from the East in the first few days of balloting reflects the sentiment among Republicans and Unionists concerning Johnson in the region. Robert B. Jones and Mark E. Byrnes noted that “it was to some extent a contest between two regional standard-bearers—East versus West, with mid-state members split among several candidates but with Johnson having the most support.”<sup>27</sup> With little change to the ballots over two days, Etheridge withdrew from the race on October 21. Johnson proceeded to lead the ballots, coming only four votes shy. On the night of October 21, Johnson’s opponents met to devise a plan to beat the ex-president. Etheridge proposed that they pledge support for Henry Cooper, brother of Edmund Cooper, state legislator and former secretary to Johnson. Initially, Edmund supported and even nominated Johnson on the first day. Each time his brother was nominated, Edmund abandoned Johnson and voted for his brother. Thus, the final ballot recorded Henry Cooper as the next U.S. Senator.<sup>28</sup>

Johnson and his allies blamed the defeat on Cooper’s treachery and the ire of ex-Confederates. In a private letter to former Navy Secretary Gideon Welles, Johnson claimed:

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<sup>26</sup> *Nashville Union and American*, October 14, 1869, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/80678790/?terms=Andrew%20Johnson&match=1>.

<sup>27</sup> Jones and Byrnes, “Rebels Never Forgive,” 261.

<sup>28</sup> Jones and Byrnes, “Rebels Never Forgive,” 262-264. Interestingly, the authors found that Johnson split the East with Cooper. Cooper carried the West with 22 of 25 votes from the region. Most Middle Tennessee delegates voted for Johnson. This is puzzling how Cooper hailed from the middle section and did not carry the stain Johnson did for his actions as military governor in which Johnson often arrested Confederate sympathizers and those opposed to his administration.

There never has been a greater outrage perpetrated on popular Sentiment since the formation of the Government. Edmund Cooper's treachery on the night before the election, who was pledged to my Support...conspired with the "Radicals," extreme "Rebels" and the old Whigs and defeated me by four votes--While in fact my majority according to popular Sentiments was about fifteen.<sup>29</sup>

Johnson further wrote that Edmund was a "Judas," the Coopers and their allies may have won the office, but they also won the "infamy in getting it--while I have the honor, the Confidence and the respect of the people in losing it. *The honor is mine* and disgrace is theirs."<sup>30</sup>

#### *Andrew Johnson as a Private Citizen*

Aside from seeing his family, Johnson was not eager to return to Greeneville. Although he loved his wife, Eliza, the man was not suitable for private life in a small town. On February 13, 1870, Johnson wrote a friend that Greeneville "is as lifeless as a grave-yard... all or nearly all our best citizens have gone. I feel as though I am among strangers and scarcely ever go up into the village."<sup>31</sup> The few events he did attend in town were typically held in his honor, or were events Johnson funded. At the end of 1869, Johnson began to lay the foundations for the Democratic party in Greeneville. Felix A. Reeve, a neighbor of Johnson's and son-in-law to Republican Congressman Horace Maynard, proposed that Johnson bestow a financial donation to construct a Catholic Church in town, because the "Catholic Church has well-grounded claims on all who are friendly to constitutional and liberal government. For that body of Christians is, and ever has been, *democratic* and *conservative*." Johnson contributed \$500, the largest financial donation to the church. The ex-president attended the dedication of the church in 1870.<sup>32</sup>

Andrew Johnson did engage in at least one official public act between 1869 and 1872 when he attended the 1870 Tennessee State Constitutional Convention. Johnson opposed the new

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<sup>29</sup> Andrew Johnson to Gideon Welles, 8 December 1869, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, ed. Paul H. Bergeron, vol. 16 (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 146.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Johnson to William M. Lowry, 13 February 1870, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 168.

<sup>32</sup> Felix A. Reeve to Andrew Johnson, 11 August 1869, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 97.

Constitution and voted for the old one. The principal reason for his opposition was the poll tax provision in which a poll tax was now required for all citizens to purchase and show proof of said purchase in order to cast their vote. Johnson rightfully recognized that the new Constitution would disenfranchise both whites and Blacks and would “only allow men with capital to vote” if ratified. Johnson further wrote that since he had defended suffrage for former rebels and “after toiling as arduous as I did during the last spring and summer to accomplish our end so desirable I cannot now yet yield my consent to vote for the ratification of a Constitution that disenfranchises every voter in the state.”<sup>33</sup> The Constitution passed despite Johnson’s class-based opposition. Joseph H. Cartwright argues that the new Constitution “launched the Conservatives, now calling themselves Democrats, into a decade-long run before the political winds of financial retrenchment, white supremacy and ‘New South’ progressivism.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, Johnson’s prediction was correct that the document would disenfranchise both white and Black voters.

The “Courageous Commoner” often delivered speeches in his bastion of East Tennessee. In May of 1871, Johnson was the keynote speaker for a mass meeting of Knoxville mechanics, reflecting his status and symbol as an ally of white labor. Johnson recalled his plebian origins, fight for the Homestead Bill, and his bravery during secession and Reconstruction. The overview of his career that Johnson presented to the Knoxville mechanics affirmed his previous class status as a mechanic. Despite now being a wealthy man himself, Johnson reminded his audience that he had been one of them, and that they could also rise in society with hard work. Johnson also advocated his stance during Reconstruction that mirrored how other East Tennesseans felt when he declared “thank God, I am no Rebel, and I thank God still more, I am no Radical.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Andrew Johnson to George H. Nixon, 4 March 1870, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 172.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph H. Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880s*, (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1976) 16.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Johnson’s Speech at Knoxville, 27 May 1871, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 258.

This sentiment reflected the conservative Unionist sentiment in East Tennessee. Although East Tennessee contributed tens of thousands of men to the Union cause, their opposition was primarily class-based.<sup>36</sup> Due to the actions of Brownlow and the suffrage of Black males, “the Republican party during Reconstruction...did not seem to offer a satisfactory alternative to the Democrats for many mountaineers.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, most white East Tennessee Unionists were like Johnson at this period; they could not fit in with either the Won Cause or the Lost Cause.<sup>38</sup>

*Andrew Johnson's Attempts at Vindication, 1872-1875*

1872 provided a unique opportunity for Andrew Johnson to shape Reconstruction policies and his legacy. The census conducted in 1870 found that Tennessee had experienced population growth and was entitled to another representative for Congress. Johnson refused to run for his old seat despite pleas from allies across the first congressional district. Instead, he wished to run for Congressman at Large, harkening back to his statewide success before the war. Running for the office would allow him to canvass the entire state. Johnson claimed that campaigning the state would allow him to “reindoctrinate the people of the state in the principles of the Constitution.”<sup>39</sup> Just as in 1869, Johnson encountered significant obstacles. When Johnson decided to run in August 1872, he intentionally ran as an independent, bypassing the major party primaries. Thus, Johnson involved himself in a contest between veteran Republican

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Wallenstein, “Helping to Save the Union”: The Social Origins, Wartime Experiences, and Military Impact of White Union Troops from East Tennessee,” in *The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays*, eds. Kenneth Noe and Shannon H. Wilson (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 16. Wallenstein found that “an absolute majority of white soldiers from poor families in East Tennessee joined the Union side.”

<sup>37</sup> McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> For analyses on the Lost Cause see Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) and Alan T. Nolan, “The Anatomy of the Myth,” in *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, eds. Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000; for an analysis of the Won Cause in which Union veterans denounced Confederates and praised emancipation as one of the victories of the war, see Barbara Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Johnson to John Netherland, 3 March, 1872, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 294.

Congressman Horace Maynard and the Democratic nominee, former Confederate general Benjamin F. Cheatham.

Despite long odds, Johnson was confident. In an interview with the *New York Herald*, Johnson claimed that only unreconstructed rebels would vote for “Chickamauga Cheatham.” When asked who he thought would vote for him, Johnson replied, “plenty of the old rebels--men who sympathized with the secession movement, more or less, but who never went in the army... They have had enough of such men. They are reconstructed, and they see secession was a mistake... I'll get their votes.” Johnson ended the interview with, “let us have reconciliation and amnesty, and let us go forward to build up our Union on a fraternal and imperishable basis,” thus reflecting the reconciliationist atmosphere in East Tennessee.<sup>40</sup>

At a campaign speech in Brownsville, a few months later, Johnson tested his appeal to former Confederates in the western portion of the state. “I saw your prostrate condition; I saw you had no one to help you, and what did I do? Was I vindictive? Was I retaliatory? Did I hand over anybody to be prosecuted? Did I confiscate anybody's property? No... I said amnesty and pardon to all.” Johnson further asserted that he took the persecution from the Radicals to save the South.<sup>41</sup> Despite Johnson’s attempts to persuade West Tennesseans, many newspapers within the region denounced Johnson and endorsed Cheatham. West Tennessee papers often referred to Johnson as “Brigadier General Andrew Johnson,” reflecting their great animosity towards him for siding with the Union. Meanwhile, editors ignored his presidency.<sup>42</sup> The *Memphis Daily Appeal* denounced Johnson as a “pugnacious East Tennessean” who was the “only Southern

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with *New York Herald*, 27 September 1872, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 378-379.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Johnson Speech at Brownsville, Tennessee, 17 October 1872, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 389.

<sup>42</sup> “We Want the Evidence,” *Jackson Whig and Tribune*, October 26, 1872, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/83304150>.



Senator” to retain his seat in 1861.<sup>43</sup> While Johnson tried appealing to ex-Confederates in West Tennessee, newspapers in his hometown bitterly denounced Cheatham and what they and Johnson dubbed the “Ring,” meaning the ring of former Confederates supposedly controlling the levers of power in Nashville.<sup>44</sup>

Despite Johnson’s attempts to appeal to ex-Confederates and white conservatives across the state, using his Reconstruction record rather than his antebellum and Civil War history as the basis of his appeal, he failed, finishing third in late November. As one Greeneville paper noted, and later scholars observed, Johnson lacked allies in the press, save eight newspapers, one of which was in Greeneville.<sup>45</sup> Although disappointed, Johnson and his family still felt proud. Andrew Johnson, Jr. wrote his father that he consoled himself “with the thought that you have broken the ‘ring’ and defeated Cheatham.” His son also confirmed Johnson’s earlier predictions that Black men would not vote for him, even in Greeneville, declaring “the negroes all voted the straight radical ticket, save a few exceptions.”<sup>46</sup> Johnson won Greene County with a slim 156 vote majority over Maynard, while Cheatham recorded only 186 votes out of 2,610 votes cast.<sup>47</sup> The African American vote proved crucial in Greene County for Maynard, although an exact number of African American voters in the 1872 election is unavailable, examining the 1870 Census reveals that of a total African American population of 2,038, in 1870 there were 453 men

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<sup>43</sup> “Frank Cheatham in Washington,” *Memphis Daily Appeal*, October 19, 1872, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/164013367>.

<sup>44</sup> “The Contest—Its Result,” *Greeneville Weekly Sentinel*, November 29, 1872, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/86195236/triangular-contest-for-congress/>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*; Robert B. Jones, “The Press and the Legislature: Andrew Johnson’s Election to the U.S. Senate in 1875,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2003): 238–57, Jones’s article shows how Johnson failed to achieve any press support in his 1872 congressional race. Johnson learned from his mistakes by 1875.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Johnson, Jr. to Andrew Johnson, 10 November 1872, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 400.

<sup>47</sup> Robert H. White, ed., *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee*, Volume Six (Nashville, TN: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1963). 280.

twenty years and older in the county.<sup>48</sup> Naturally, not all of the 453 would have voted either from political indifference, death between 1870 and 1872, or some may have moved out of the county. Nevertheless, the slim victory that Johnson recorded in Greene County would have been larger without African American men voting for Maynard. The election of 1872 provides perhaps the best insight into how voters felt about Johnson and remembered the Civil War within his own county. Whereas the final two senate races of his career relied on votes in the General Assembly, the house race of 1872 was left entirely to the people. Thus, providing Johnson with only a 156 vote majority over Maynard, Greene County was clearly divided on Andrew Johnson. Moreover, Johnson lost to Maynard overwhelmingly in other East Tennessee counties such as Carter, Johnson, Washington, Cocke, Hamblen, Hawkins, and Sullivan. Even in the East, Johnson's support was minimal. Although Johnson came in second in the East, he finished third in the Middle and Western portions of the state.<sup>49</sup>

Although Johnson had lost the election for Congressman at Large, he soon cast his eyes on the U.S. Senate seat that would be vacant in 1875. The same seat his ancient enemy, William P. Brownlow, then occupied. Johnson began campaigning for the seat a year in advance, and in that year, several issues arose that would help Johnson on his quest for to shape his legacy. Johnson ferociously attacked the Civil Rights Bill of 1874, comparing it to the one he vetoed during his presidency.<sup>50</sup> The act galvanized whites in East Tennessee. Gordon B. McKinney noted that when the act passed in 1875, "the Republican party seemed on the verge of extinction

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<sup>48</sup> "Black & Mulatto Families, Greene County, Tennessee: 1870," Black in Appalachia: Community History Digital Archive (Black in Appalachia), accessed March 3, 2022, <https://blackinappalachia.omeka.net/items/show/850>. Black in Appalachia provides an excel sheet with Greene County African American families.

<sup>49</sup> White, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee*, 280-281.

<sup>50</sup> Robert B. Jones, "The Press and the Legislature: Andrew Johnson's Election to the U.S. Senate in 1875," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2003), 241.

in the highlands.”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the memory of Brownlow across the state during this period was connected to the State Guard that he mobilized to combat the Ku Klux Klan. Despite successfully routing the Klan in the state to the point where it existed mainly in the shadows, many white Tennesseans saw Brownlow as a despotic tyrant using Black troops to enforce the Radical regime.<sup>52</sup> Johnson used this memory to his advantage, often arguing that any attempt to undermine the Klan, something he hardly believed existed, would only usher in the suspension of habeas corpus and “armies ordered into the South.”<sup>53</sup>

By 1874, nine years had passed since the end of the Civil War. Over time, former enemies of Johnson began to view him in a more favorable light. For instance, former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest opposed Johnson for the Senate in 1869. By 1874, however, Forrest had met with Johnson and decided that although he would not endorse Johnson, he would not oppose him either.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the recent General Assembly election saw Democrats obtain 91 of 99 seats. The few Republicans were from the East, like rising star Alf Taylor, son of former Johnson cabinet member Nathaniel Greene Taylor. Although limited to eight seats, the East Tennessee Republican faction would prove critical to electing the old Democrat to the U.S. Senate.<sup>55</sup>

The official balloting began on January 19, 1875. Robert B. Jones maintains that “the general assembly was overwhelmingly composed of men who had supported the Confederacy.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 32.

<sup>52</sup> For an analysis on the Tennessee State Guard during Reconstruction see Severance, *Tennessee's Radical Army*, xvii. Severance argues that although the State Guard was most responsible for carrying out the orders of the Brownlow administration, the Guard conducted itself with discipline and restraint. Severance further argues that Reconstruction failed in the state “in large part because the Radicals were too cautious in their use of force,” contrary to the memory of the Guard, xvii.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with *Memphis Appeal*, 22 August 1871, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 272.

<sup>54</sup> Robert B. Jones, “The Press and the Legislature,” 243.

<sup>55</sup> Robert B. Jones, “The Press and the Legislature,” 245-246.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

Despite this, Johnson led every ballot through the seven days, with near-unanimous support from the East and Shelby County, the county seat of Memphis. On January 24, Johnson met with Republicans to give them his assurances that “if elected he would speak for the Unionist sentiment in the state, pursue a moderate course, and not oppose the Grant administration except in ‘extreme cases.’”<sup>57</sup> With this assurance, Johnson won the election. One Knoxville paper also attributed Johnson’s victory to former rebels who pressured their representatives in East Tennessee to vote for Johnson, reflecting the profound change in sentiment former Confederates held toward the ex-President.<sup>58</sup> Robert B. Jones also noted a clear generational gap between those who voted for Johnson and those opposed. Those with clear pre-war Democratic credentials were less likely to vote for Johnson. In contrast, younger Democrats who had not known Johnson during his antebellum career and secession voted overwhelmingly for Johnson.<sup>59</sup> This demonstrated how younger Democrats were much more likely to remember Johnson for his Reconstruction policies rather than antebellum disagreements. Again, we see how Johnson used his Reconstruction record as a basis for appeal.

At last, vindication had arrived for Andrew Johnson. His sole surviving son wrote to him on January 29 declaring:

Thank God, you are elected and your past course vindicated.... The news was received here with shouts of joy, amid the ringing of bells... There was intense excitement, more than I have ever witnessed in Greeneville... The people here want to give you a grand reception when you return... Greeneville still moves along in the same dull old way, but on Tuesday when the news of your election reached us it presented more the appearance of an Indian village dancing their scalp dance.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 251, Jones also found that in the House, “eighteen of the thirty-five Johnson men were from East Tennessee and six others were from Shelby County,” 252.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Johnson, Jr. to Andrew Johnson, 29, January 1875, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 684.

Martha Johnson Patterson, Johnson's oldest and favorite child, also wrote to her father exclaiming, "I feel it is the greatest victory of your life."<sup>61</sup> Greeneville citizens likewise celebrated Johnson's victory. One resident wrote directly to Johnson, claiming, "the country justly regards it, as a reward for devotion to civil liberty and constitutional government."<sup>62</sup> One modern local author noted that the election "was a great personal triumph and one that brought honor to Greeneville."<sup>63</sup> The prophecies Johnson had been declaring about the people and their support for his policy was coming to fruition.

Johnson also viewed the election as his greatest triumph. In an interview with the *New York Tribune*, Johnson claimed, "I regard my triumph in Tennessee, after the hardest fight I ever engaged in, with more satisfaction than I could regard my return to the Presidency." Johnson then said that the election "was the fighting of Hood's army over again. There were many of his generals and high officers, with my pardons in their pockets, trying to beat me as they tried during the war."<sup>64</sup> In another interview, Johnson attacked the Civil Rights Bill of 1875 and argued that "I believe the people of the country have come to the conclusion that either the negro must be put in his proper place, or the two races must separate." Although Johnson did not mention what the "proper place" was for African Americans, Johnson's fervent belief in a white man's government, was a warning to African Americans to stay out of politics. Johnson also attacked Confederate sentiment in the state. Because Confederates failed to keep him from the Senate, his election "was the first triumph of Union principles in Tennessee since the war."

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<sup>61</sup> Martha Johnson Paterson to Andrew Johnson, 29 January 1875, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 685.

<sup>62</sup> Henry H. Ingersoll to Andrew Johnson, 3 February 1875, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 696.

<sup>63</sup> Doughty, *Greeneville*, 250.

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Johnson interview with the *New York Tribune*, 6 March 1875, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 706.

Johnson concluded the interview with his newfound nationalistic notion that “what we want is to nationalize ourselves.”<sup>65</sup>

The election of Andrew Johnson in 1875 and the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 further accelerated Democratic popularity in East Tennessee. The Civil Rights Act and Johnson’s victory helped usher into office one of the only two Democrats elected to represent the first congressional district in Tennessee after the Civil War. Gordon B. McKinney argues that 1875 was the “only time between 1865 and 1900 that a regularly nominated Republican did not carry the region.”<sup>66</sup>

As Democrats made significant gains in the region, relations between Confederates and Unionists were also improving in Greeneville by 1875. Union veterans vastly outnumbered those who served for the Confederacy. Nevertheless, at one Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) picnic in early July, a sizable party of Confederate veterans attended, though no exact numbers were recorded. According to the article, no U.S. veteran “hurt their feelings, and apparently they enjoyed the occasion as well as any others. Thus, may they ever be esteemed as brothers, and joined in all similar occasions in the future.”<sup>67</sup> In his dissertation studying the GAR in East Tennessee, Samuel B. McGuire found that U.S. veterans began reconciliation efforts as early as the late 1860s. Furthermore, “local Unionists not only came to the aid of their Confederate neighbors because of commercial ties and friendships, but many also sustained kinship ties with

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<sup>65</sup> Andrew Johnson interview with the *New York Herald*, 7 March 1875, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 711.

<sup>66</sup> McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 40, William McFarland, Democrat, was elected Congressman of the 1<sup>st</sup> district in March 1875. The Democratic Congressman only served one term before being ousted by a Republican. McKinney also notes that despite Democratic gains in East Tennessee, it only took two years to reorganize and dominate the region.

<sup>67</sup> “Soldiers’ Social Re-Union and Picnic,” *Greeneville American*, July 7, 1875, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/86686665/federal-soldiers-reunion-plans-for/>.

outspoken Rebels.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, white reconciliation was coming much faster in East Tennessee than elsewhere in the country at this period, something Johnson had been advocating since his return in 1869 and through his policies as president.

Although by 1875 both Unionists and Confederates in East Tennessee rallied around the conservative great commoner, African Americans in the region also connected themselves to Johnson, or more precisely, the formerly enslaved families Andrew Johnson freed during the war. Oral tradition in the Johnson family has often claimed that Johnson freed his slaves on August 8, 1863. Although no direct evidence proves that August 8, 1863, is the actual date, one event does lend it credence. In 1871, Sam Johnson, who Johnson formerly enslaved, was the “Officer of the Day” at an August 8<sup>th</sup> celebration in Greeneville. Bands played, and African American children flew American flags in front of a large parade. After marching out of town, Andrew Johnson addressed the procession.<sup>69</sup> Johnson likely repeated some of the themes he had mentioned before in 1869 while campaigning for Senter. While addressing Black voters on the stump, Johnson wanted them to know that he had personally freed the slaves in Tennessee, not Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and that he their “true Moses” who had not “deserted” them, meaning Johnson was the one to lead African Americans to freedom.<sup>70</sup> August 8<sup>th</sup> celebrations remained relatively small and isolated to small towns in upper East Tennessee throughout the 1870s. During the 1880s, the celebration spread across the region and the state, connecting Andrew Johnson to the memory of emancipation in Tennessee.

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<sup>68</sup> Samuel B. McGuire, “East Tennessee’s Grand Army: Union Veterans Confront Race, Reconciliation, and Civil War Memory, 1884-1913,” Ph. D diss., (University of Georgia, 2015), 33

<sup>69</sup> “Celebration at Greeneville,” *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, August 9, 1871, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/94112375/1st-recorded-august-8th-in-greeneville/>.

<sup>70</sup> “Andrew Johnson at the Capitol,” *Nashville Union and American*, April 11, 1869, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/80672412/>.

*The Death of Johnson and the Localization of his Memory, 1875-1877*

Before Andrew Johnson died in July 1875, argues Tom Lee, public opinion of Johnson across the nation “remained overwhelmingly negative.”<sup>71</sup> Greeneville was not immune to the negative sentiment either. Even Democrats within Johnson’s hometown did not fully trust Johnson, primarily because they feared he would remain “autocratic” in nature, “and in politics an uncompromising independent.” While Johnson’s maverick style of voting had served him well in antebellum Tennessee, Democrats in his section wanted someone who would vote with their party against Republicans by 1875.

When the ex-president died on July 31, all animosity in Greeneville disappeared. The same Democratic newspaper that refused to endorse Johnson for Senate graciously remembered how Johnson “vetoed the measures originating in the malevolent desire to humiliate the people of the South by dictating ratification of the Radical amendments.”<sup>72</sup> The paper then turned Johnson’s one-vote victory in the impeachment trial into “being acquitted by the want of a full two-thirds vote in favor of acquittal,” conveniently ignoring how Johnson escaped the ordeal by one vote. Finally, the paper claimed that had Johnson lived to serve his term, “we doubt not now the country would have been greatly benefitted by the reforms which he would in all probability have advocated,” though the paper failed to mention what those reforms would have been. The paper concluded the eulogy with local pride in Johnson, claiming that “his only conqueror was Death.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Tom Lee, “The Lost Cause that Wasn’t: East Tennessee and the Myth of Unionist Appalachia,” in *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War’s Aftermath* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 315.

<sup>72</sup> “Celebration at Greeneville,” *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, August 9, 1871, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/94112375/1st-recorded-august-8th-in-greeneville/>.

<sup>73</sup> “Andrew Johnson,” *Greeneville American*, August 4, 1875.



The town planned an elaborate funeral for the ex-president, correctly predicting that thousands would attend the Great Commoner's funeral. Businesses, homes, and the courthouse were all draped in black to mourn the fallen president.<sup>74</sup> The *Greeneville Intelligencer*, edited by Andrew Johnson, Jr., noted that one of the more notable features of Johnson's funeral was "the presence of an exceedingly large number of what is known as the 'plain people' present. The farmers and mechanics, the honest yeomanry, were out in force." Furthermore, the plain people present "showed unmistakably the hold he had upon that class. He had been one of them." It was the mechanics who "feel his loss most keenly" and "were there by the thousands."<sup>75</sup> One undated article with an unknown publisher, but presumably a local paper claimed:

At the beginning and during the progress of that long and terrible struggle, the fact that Johnson went against the South, was ever ominously in our memory. But we zealously cherished the thought that if we lost in the contest he might again be depended on as the friend of his native South. Nor were we disappointed... Andrew Johnson bade the Hand of fanaticism to cease persecutions, and heroically placed himself between the despoilers and the prostrate South.<sup>76</sup>

Ironically, Johnson did not achieve true vindication until he died.

Governor James Davis Porter appointed David M. Key to the Senate on August 18, 1875. Although initially from Greeneville and a Democrat like Johnson, Key served in the Confederate army as a lieutenant colonel. Despite his Confederate background, the *Greeneville American* was pleased with Porter's decision. However, the paper called for the federal government and Key to "ensure to every State a republican form of government and to the people thereof liberty." Thus, "the ballot should be taken away from them (African Americans) and restored only as they may

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<sup>74</sup> Doughty, *Greeneville*, 256.

<sup>75</sup> Andrew Johnson, *Greeneville Intelligencer*, August 6, 1875, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586557959>.

<sup>76</sup> Doughty, *Greeneville*, 256-257.

be able to attain to some certain standard of qualification.”<sup>77</sup> A marked departure from attempts by Democratic politicians like Johnson who sought instead to appeal to African American voters rather than revoking the right to vote, a dangerous foreshadowing of what was to come in the following decade.

Republicans in the region were aware of the challenges facing them by the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and Reconstruction. Furthermore, Gordon B. McKinney found that “during Reconstruction, mountain political leaders emphasized national issues.” Leaders like Andrew Johnson “became identified with a particular national issue.” For Johnson, his national issues ranged from the Homestead Bill in the antebellum period, his Unionist stance, to his contempt against Radical Reconstruction. However, McKinney argues that by 1876, mountain voters were tired of Reconstruction and national issues at large.<sup>78</sup> In the first congressional district of Tennessee, like elsewhere in the Appalachian South, Republicans began to retreat from civil rights for African Americans.

In 1876, the Republican nominee for Congress, James H. Randolph, denounced Black suffrage. The Democratic newspaper denounced Randolph and asked African Americans, “Randolph was against you; are you for him or against him?” The paper employed the rhetoric Johnson applied in his post-presidential campaigns in which he tried to appeal to Blacks as their true friend, after the newspaper called for Senator Key to disenfranchise them only three months earlier.<sup>79</sup> The Democratic paper further employed Johnsonian rhetoric when appealing to former rebels to vote for the Democratic incumbent, William McFarland. The paper asked the

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<sup>77</sup> “Senator Johnson’s Successor,” *Greeneville American*, August 25, 1875, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586556675>; “The Negro Problem,” *Greeneville American*, August 25, 1875, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586556675>.

<sup>78</sup> McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 75.

<sup>79</sup> “Where Randolph Stood on the Colored Question,” *The Public Opinion*, November 2, 1876, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586555387>.

mountaineers to remember that McFarland “endeavored to obtain pardons for those of you who had unthoughtedly (sic) broken the *letter* of the revenue laws.” Harkening back to Johnson’s plebian politics, the paper claimed that McFarland “tried to get the poor men of East Tennessee who are indicted for petty violations of the revenue laws, pardoned by the government.” Despite the fallout Republicans experienced in 1874 due to the Civil Rights Act, the retreat from the federal enforcement of civil rights combined with the memory of fighting for the Union allowed Republicans to rebound in 1876.<sup>80</sup>

Consequently, by applying the memory of fighting for the Union, Republicans in the region contributed to the myth growing in Appalachia that the region had no interest or connection with the Confederacy. Moreover, the amplification of Unionist memory was also aimed at securing Northern investments for industry. In order to advertise the region as loyal, Unionists frequently used the memory of Andrew Johnson, perhaps the region’s most famous Unionist, to demonstrate East Tennessee’s loyalty. More importantly, conservatives used the image of Johnson as a shield to protect themselves from federal intervention in civil rights, for if the famous Unionist Andrew Johnson was from East Tennessee, the federal government could trust white East Tennesseans to govern their own social order. However, had Johnson not actively sought national office in the last few years of his life, in which he constantly gave interviews and speeches for statewide and national audiences, the dominant themes of his memory would not have permeated so deeply into East Tennessee’s memory of Johnson. The following chapter demonstrates how East Tennesseans used the memory of Andrew Johnson to

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<sup>80</sup> McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 9, McKinney argued that “as long as the Republicans did not use the power of the federal government to attempt to secure greater rights for blacks, the mountain men ignored the issue. Republicans also formed “their political organization into a structure reminiscent of the Union army, Republican leaders recalled Civil War memories to counter Democratic appeals to mountain voters to remain southerners on racial matters.”

display their region as a Unionist bastion, committed to the Constitution and the ideals Johnson advocated.

### CHAPTER 3. THE MYTH OF MONOLITHIC UNIONISM AND ANDREW JOHNSON IN EAST TENNESSEE, 1878-1908

On June 5, 1878, after nearly two years of planning by Andrew Johnson's daughters, three thousand East Tennesseans attended the dedication of the Andrew Johnson monument at his gravesite in Greeneville, Tennessee. Themes of the "Great Commoner" permeated the event. Mr. Van Gunden, the owner of the company that constructed the monument, said that his company felt "highly honored" in being chosen, for they had both "the artists' and mechanics' pleasure" in "being permitted (though in a humble way) to perpetuate the memory of Tennessee's greatest statesman."<sup>1</sup> After Martha Johnson Patterson and Mary Johnson Stover unveiled the monument, the keynote speaker, George W. Jones, began his oration praising his former friend. Jones recounted Johnson's climb up "Jacob's ladder," his rise in politics as a man of "low birth," and Johnson's national political career.<sup>2</sup> Johnson's friend incorporated his own interpretation of Johnson's character and political career. Although the Johnson monument celebrated the legacy of the region's most famous Unionist, Jones was careful to not offend any with Confederate sympathies, claiming that Johnson's "position as Military Governor was as anomalous and distasteful to him as it was irritating and vexatious to the people." Jones also mentioned what he and Johnson viewed as the "unconstitutional, reckless schemes" of Congress: the Freedmen's Bureau Bill and the Civil Rights Bill. When combatting these bills with "the veto power...the rock of Gibraltar was not more sure and firm than" Johnson.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Andrew Johnson: The Unveiling of the Monument to His Memory Yesterday," *Knoxville Daily Tribune*, June 6, 1878, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586157170>, two pages were devoted to the Johnson Monument unveiling.

<sup>2</sup> "The Oration of Hon. George W. Jones," *Knoxville Daily Tribune*, 2, June 6, 1878, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586157170>.

<sup>3</sup> "The Oration of Hon. George W. Jones," *Knoxville Daily Tribune*, 2, June 6, 1878, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586157170>. Jones argued that the Freedmen's Bureau Bill and the Civil Rights Bill would have enforced the "enfranchisement of colored men by the states," and subordinated "states to military district government."

The two dominant themes of Jones's oration were Johnson's "commoner" status and commitment to the Constitution and the Union. The design of the monument further reflected Johnson's zeal for the Constitution: "crowned by an eagle, the shaft bears a hand atop an open Bible pointing to a copy of the United States Constitution."<sup>4</sup> Kelli B. Nelson noted that the Johnson monument "displayed the proximity of Johnson's devotion to religion and the federal government and ensured that subsequent generations would view the ex-president as a good and pious American with an unshakable faith in the government and the people of his country."<sup>5</sup> After the monument was unveiled, newspapers predicted that the monument "will become a pilgrim shrine to which generations yet unborn shall journey to pay homage to the memory" of Andrew Johnson.<sup>6</sup>

The unveiling of the Johnson monument in 1878 and Jones's speech reflected how East Tennesseans remembered the Civil War and Reconstruction. Although Greene County and East Tennessee contained Unionists, their resistance to the Confederacy was more based on class than concern for African Americans. Moreover, although Andrew Johnson had advocated for abolition in 1864 and even freed his slaves, he did not endorse racial equality. White East Tennessee Unionists shared this sentiment, which is reflected in the monuments they built between 1878 and 1901. The Johnson monument "honored a man who maintained the conservative attitudes that many other white East Tennesseans held. His adherence to the Union had more to do with resistance to class oppression than out of any sympathies for African Americans."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kelli Brooke Nelson, "On the Imperishable Face of Granite: Civil War Monuments and the Evolution of Historical Memory in East Tennessee 1878-1931," Master's thesis, (East Tennessee State University, 2011), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Nelson, "On the Imperishable Face of Granite, 19.

<sup>6</sup> "Andrew Johnson: The Unveiling of the Monument to His Memory Yesterday," *Knoxville Daily Tribune*, 1, June 6, 1878, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586157170>.

<sup>7</sup> Nelson, "On the Imperishable Face of Granite," 27.

Several themes from the monument dedication in 1878 took root in Greeneville's memory of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Andrew Johnson. First, Johnson's rise out of poverty and eventually to the presidency gave something for every white boy to hold on to, for if he could, they could. Moreover, aside from being an inspiration to future generations, mechanics and farmers could proudly adopt the memory of Johnson as reflected in Van Gruden's remarks at the monument unveiling. Second, Johnson was not a traitor either to the South or the North. Johnson's steadfast constitutionalism and fight against the Radicals absolved him from any wrongdoings during secession. Johnson's defense of the Union also shielded white supremacy in the region, wherein white leaders clung to the image of Andrew Johnson to demonstrate loyalty to the federal government in order to avoid direct federal intervention in the racial hierarchy. Furthermore, Johnson could not be a traitor to the North or the Republican party because he had always been a Democrat. Third, Johnson's "heroic" defense of the Constitution against Radical assaults with the Civil Rights bill, Freedmen's Bureau bill, and the enfranchisement of African American males. Lastly, his "moral courage" was worthy of Tennessee's conservative white supremacist hero, Andrew Jackson.<sup>8</sup> All of these themes were pushed onto the mainstream by Andrew Johnson during his attempts for national office between 1869 and 1875.

As demonstrated with the Johnson monument, when Andrew Johnson died and for years after his death, favorable memory of him isolated itself to Greeneville and East Tennessee. Johnson's role during secession and the Civil War estranged him from ex-Confederates across the South while his controversial Reconstruction record alienated him from Republicans in the North and African Americans across the country. But East Tennesseans saw a larger value to keeping Johnson before the country's eyes. Between 1878 and 1900, white East Tennesseans'

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<sup>8</sup> "The Oration of Hon. George W. Jones," *Knoxville Daily Tribune*, 2, June 6, 1878, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586157170>.

memory of Johnson, the Civil War, and Reconstruction increasingly tied itself to the myth of monolithic Unionism to secure Northern investments for industrialization by advertising the region as loyal. John C. Inscoe describes the myth of monolithic Unionism as a vision that claimed East Tennesseans “had no interest in or commitment to the Confederate cause.”<sup>9</sup>

East Tennesseans used the image of Andrew Johnson, arguably the most famous Unionist from the region, to reinforce the myth of monolithic Unionism in East Tennessee, in order to court Yankee capital. However, the myth of monolithic Unionism and the memory of Andrew Johnson were not one in the same. Johnson’s memory not only promoted the myth of monolithic Unionism nationally, but it also sowed reconciliation in the region by reminding ex-Confederates and conservatives of Johnson’s Reconstruction policies. Because Johnson had been an ardent Unionist followed by a starkly conservative and racist presidency, the memory of Johnson represented a memory that both Unionists and Confederates could support. Although white East Tennesseans merged the memory of Unionism and Andrew Johnson, it did not represent what Barbara Gannon defines as the “Won Cause.”<sup>10</sup> White East Tennesseans did push what David Blight labels “a white supremacist memory” that united white Americans by touting reconciliation at the expense of African Americans.<sup>11</sup> However, due to the praise for the Union and Johnson’s patriotism, white East Tennesseans’ memory did not completely fit Blight’s model. Rather, East Tennessee’s memory of the Civil War mirrored that of East Tennessee’s

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<sup>9</sup> John C. Inscoe, *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008) 27. Inscoe also demonstrates how mountain political leaders such as Zebulon Vance, William “Parson” Brownlow, and Andrew Johnson opposed secession arguing that slavery was safer in the Union than out, reflecting the conservatism inherent in Appalachian Unionism.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011) 4-5. According to Gannon, the Won Cause represented Union veterans’ memory of the Civil War that celebrated emancipation as a fruit of their victory and refused reconciliation with their former enemies they viewed as traitors.

<sup>11</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001) 26-27.



GAR (Grand Army of the Republic). Samuel B. McGuire addresses the arguments of Gannon and Blight, asserting “East Tennessee’s GAR does not fit neatly in either scholarly paradigm. Instead, white comrades’ actions and rhetoric illustrates the complexity and messiness of national reunification throughout the postwar South.”<sup>12</sup> Demonstrating the complexities and messiness in Civil War and reconciliationist memory in the region that McGuire alluded to, both Republicans and Democrats used the memory of Andrew Johnson to advance their goals, from praising hard work to education and segregation. Furthermore, despite African Americans celebrating emancipation and joining GAR posts, their white comrades chose to cater to their former enemies, uniting in white supremacy. Democrats and conservatives increasingly used the memory of Johnson as a shield to establish the blueprint for racial segregation and the Lost Cause in East Tennessee. The shield used by Democrats hardened to the point that by 1890 the party took full control of the legislature, resulting in a twenty-eight percent decrease in eligible voters, beginning the Jim Crow period in the state.<sup>13</sup>

While Democrats and ex-Confederates in the region did not push an overtly Lost Cause memory of the war initially, their early vision focused on reconciliation between the two groups, typically honoring the bravery of men on both sides, reflected in Jones’s oration at the Johnson monument dedication. In a region where neighbors were often on opposite sides during the war, it made sense for whites to praise the bravery of their former enemies. Johnson himself pushed reconciliation in the region during the last few years of his life, instead of debates over the past. Central to Democratic and conservative interpretations of Reconstruction and reconciliation was

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel B. McGuire, “East Tennessee’s Grand Army: Union Veterans Confront Race, Reconciliation, and Civil War Memory, 1884-1913,” PhD diss., (University of Georgia, 2015) 162. McGuire also examines GAR posts in Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Harriman, examining two rural post locations and two urbans.

<sup>13</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 52-53.

Andrew Johnson. Although he was the most famous Unionist, Democrats praised Johnson's personal bravery and Reconstruction record, the few things ex-Confederates and Unionists could agree on. The memory of Johnson as a Democrat could remove the stain of disunion on the party and lure white Unionists into the fold. More importantly, by adopting the image of Andrew Johnson, ex-Confederates, conservative Unionists, and Democrats could use that image to shield themselves from federal intervention. With East Tennessee supplying one of the most famous Unionists, that image could be applied to display that not only could the region not be disloyal, but that it also deserved to not be punished and could be trusted to govern themselves, especially in regard to the white supremacist social order.

Despite the national opinion of Johnson at the time of his death, white East Tennesseans led by Martha Johnson Patterson, Andrew Johnson Patterson, and Walter P. Brownlow, slowly repaired the memory of Andrew Johnson across the state between 1878 and 1908. So much so that by the centennial of Johnson's birth in 1908, whites across the state began to remember Johnson positively for pulling himself out of poverty, his fight for the Union, and his defense of the white South during Reconstruction. Johnson's humble origins became a significant theme for his memory within the region, an especially potent memory during the Gilded Age, in which the region industrialized massively. The burgeoning tobacco industry in Greeneville while employing hundreds, destroyed much of the old town physically, especially around the Johnson homestead, leading to fears over the future of the site and a desire for a romanticized vision of the past. Despite the changes in social relations, industry and trade, and an increasing wage-gap, Johnson's memory united all factions and classes of whites in East Tennessee: conservative, Radical, poor, middle-class, Democrat, Unionist, and Confederate.

*Andrew Johnson and the Myth of Monolithic Unionism in East Tennessee, 1878-1900*

After the deaths of Andrew Johnson in 1875 and William Brownlow in 1878, a new generation led by brothers, Alfred and Robert L. Taylor, sons of conservative Unionist Nathaniel Greene Taylor, created a reconciliationist memory in East Tennessee.<sup>14</sup> Both Bob and Alf respected Andrew Johnson for his plebian politics, his conservative Unionist stance that sought protection for slavery *and* the Union, and his conciliatory Reconstruction policies in which he “unhesitatingly granted the pardon” for their uncle, Landon C. Haynes.<sup>15</sup> The pardoning process proved extremely valuable for Johnson’s memory in the eyes of many ex-Confederates and Lost Cause disciples. For instance, although Alf claimed that Johnson “unhesitatingly” granted a pardon for Haynes, Johnson had in fact sat on his pardon for over a year, deciding to parole him only in the spring of 1866. In one interview in 1865, Johnson said that petitioning Rebels had to wait and personally write to him to “realize the enormity of the crime they [Confederates] had committed.”<sup>16</sup> The delay in Haynes’s pardon resulted in his indictment for treason by his antebellum enemy and Republican Governor, William “Parson” Brownlow, who Landon feared did not hold “that tenderness of sensibility which his pious profession and Christian duties require him to do.”<sup>17</sup> Although Haynes and Johnson were antebellum rivals and opposed each

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<sup>14</sup> Robert L. Taylor, “Apprenticeship in the First District: Bob and Alf Taylor’s Early Congressional Races,” (*Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 1 1969) 28. Alf already had an impressive political resume for a 28-year-old in 1878; he was one of the few Republicans who voted in favor of Johnson for Senator in 1875. The Taylor and Johnson connection goes back to the antebellum days when Nathaniel Greene Taylor often faced Johnson for Congress. Nathaniel Greene Taylor later served as Commissioner of Indian Affairs during Johnson’s presidency. In a posthumously published biography of his brother, Alf claimed that he became a Republican because his father was a Whig, the predecessor party to the Republicans founded by Southerner Henry Clay in opposition to Andrew Jackson that sought national and state internal investments for roads, canals, railroads, and the general expansion of business. Bob Taylor, being the younger, took after his maternal uncle, Democrat Landon Carter Haynes, an antebellum Democratic rival of Andrew Johnson and later a Confederate Senator, see Alfred A. Taylor and James Patton Taylor, *Life and Career of Senator Robert Love Taylor (Our Bob)* (Nashville, TN: The Bob Taylor Publishing Co., 1913), 52.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *Life and Career of Senator Robert Love Taylor*, 52.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with George L. Stearns, October 3, 1865, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, ed. Paul H. Bergeron, vol. 9, (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1991) 179.

<sup>17</sup> Landon C. Haynes to President Andrew Johnson, 6 June 1866, Box 2, Folder 18, Mary Hardin McCown Archive, Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site, Johnson City, Tennessee.

other on issues from the Homestead Bill to the railroads, the ex-Rebel begged Johnson for a pardon declaring that he had “at all times agreed with you on all questions.” Further reflecting the change in sentiment ex-Rebels were beginning to express for Johnson in 1866, Haynes declared,

I cordially approve your policy as announced in your veto messages, speeches and official acts to restore the Southern States to their rights of representation in the Federal Congress, and to reinvest them with all their ancient constitutional privileges, as members of the Union. And I may be allowed to say, that I cannot express, the gratitude I feel, for the determined resolution you have shown, by Executive influence, and by the Presidential negative, to guard the Southern people against persecutions, and the States against Congressional legislation, fraught with ruin to them. I have not felt stronger sympathy with any public man, than I do with your Excellency, in your struggle for the Constitution of the Country, the existence of the States, and the liberties of the people. And I not only express my own, but the unanimous sentiments of the Southern people, “to the manor born”, when I say, that in you, the President, is their hope of safety, against faction and against all the calamities of present and future ruin.<sup>18</sup>

What this demonstrates is how Confederates like Landon C. Haynes, a man who opposed Andrew Johnson before and during the Civil War, began to rally and support Johnson for his amnesty policies as well as his vetoes against legislation like the Freedmen’s Bureau and Civil Rights Bills.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, it also demonstrates how the descendants of those who received pardons favorably remembered Johnson for preventing Brownlow and his allies from convicting ex-Confederates, as Bob and Alf Taylor warmly remembered Johnson.

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<sup>18</sup> Landon C. Haynes to President Andrew Johnson, 6 June 1866, Box 2, Folder 18, Mary Hardin McCown Archive, Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site, Johnson City, Tennessee.

<sup>19</sup> The Freedmen’s Bureau Act of 1866 was designed to extend the life of the Freedmen’s Bureau, an institution devoted to aiding African Americans in the transition from slavery to free labor in the South. Johnson vetoed the act and repudiated the Bureau and the government for not aiding poor whites. The Civil Rights Bill of 1866, Eric Foner argues, “represented the first attempt to give meaning to the Thirteenth Amendment, to define in legislative terms the essence of freedom.” Still, Johnson vetoed the measure, where he appealed to “fiscal conservatism, raising the specter of an immense federal bureaucracy trampling upon citizen’s rights, and insisting self-help, not dependence upon outside assistance, offered the surest road to economic advancement, Johnson voiced themes that to this day have sustained opposition to federal intervention on behalf of Blacks.” Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) 247-248.

Despite Bob winning the congressional seat in 1878 over Augustus H. Pettibone, resulting in the last Democratic congressional victory in the district, by 1882, Pettibone bounced back and secured his position within the district. Multiple reasons explain why this Northern transplant from Wisconsin was successful in the first district. First, Pettibone served in the U.S. Army during the Civil War, seeing action with a Wisconsin regiment in areas like Knoxville. Pettibone's wartime service connected him to many East Tennessee Unionists who adopted him as one of their own. Second, Gordon B. McKinney argues that mountain voters wanted someone who would "justify the sacrifices made during the Civil War and Reconstruction."<sup>20</sup> This meant that instead of focusing on national issues, Republicans would amplify the needs of East Tennessee, primarily their need for manufacturing investments and recognition of East Tennessee's contribution to the Union cause. Pettibone used his position in Congress to secure Yankee capital by amplifying and defending East Tennesseans' contributions to the Civil War. By adopting these positions, Pettibone fended off assaults by Democrats like Bob Taylor who derided him as a carpetbagger.<sup>21</sup>

When a Maryland Congressman claimed that all those who were within the lines of the Confederacy were Confederates, Pettibone unleashed a tirade upon him, reminding Congress that East Tennessee furnished "thirty regiments of soldiers" to the U.S. Army.<sup>22</sup> Using the images of King's Mountain and Johnson to project their own loyalty, Pettibone charged that East Tennesseans were

The descendants of the men who sought of their own accord the lone mountain wilderness rather than submit to British tyranny in the opening days of the Revolutionary war, and who under Sevier and Shelby charged up the slopes of King's Mountain under the blazing, deadly fire of the soldiers of Ferguson; whose sons in the next generation,

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<sup>20</sup> McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 76.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, *Life and Career of Senator Robert Love Taylor*, 127.

<sup>22</sup> "Hon. A. H. Pettibone's Speech in the Lynch vs. Chalmer Case," *The Greeneville Herald*, May 11, 1882, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584959252>.

animated by their iron leader, Andrew Jackson, drove before them in headlong rout the veterans of Welmington on the swampy plains of Chalmette in front of New Orleans; these men, my constituents, rallied around Andrew Johnson and William G. Brownlow in the opening days of our Civil War, and who kept in the darkest hour our nation's history, the fires of loyalty and liberty burning in the mountains—they have sent me here, and they bid me to stand for equal and exact justice to all men.<sup>23</sup>

The combined memories of King's Mountain, Andrew Jackson, and Andrew Johnson demonstrates how Pettibone sought to historicize East Tennesseans commitment to the Union.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, by using these combined images, Pettibone and other East Tennesseans used them as a screen against assaults that they were not loyal, and more importantly, that they could be trusted to govern themselves.

Back in East Tennessee in the same year, Pettibone attended the August 8<sup>th</sup> celebration in Greeneville. Pettibone's attendance at the celebration demonstrates that the holiday was not limited to just African Americans; white Unionists and Republicans also attended some of the celebrations. Furthermore, rather than standing idly aside, Pettibone engaged with the event, with him and "nearly all" of the African American population parading through the town with flags waving and music playing.<sup>25</sup> The event was a major celebration in Greeneville, often seeing hundreds of excursionists from cities across the South to visit the town to celebrate.<sup>26</sup> However, although the event had been celebrated for over a decade by 1889, whites in the region outside Greeneville were not quite clear on the origins of the event. The *Knoxville Evening Sentinel*

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<sup>23</sup> "Hon. A. H. Pettibone's Speech in the Lynch vs. Chalmer Case," *The Greeneville Herald*, May 11, 1882, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584959252>.

<sup>24</sup> For more analysis on the Battle of King's Mountain and its effects on Union memory in East Tennessee, see Tom Lee, "The Lost Cause that Wasn't," in *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War's Aftermath*, ed. Andrew L. Slap, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2010) 308.

<sup>25</sup> *Greeneville Herald*, August 10, 1882, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584958859>.

<sup>26</sup> "Emancipation Celebration," *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, August 11, 1887, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584632574>. This article is one of the many examples in which newspapers reported excursions to Greeneville to celebrate.

reported that African Americans in Greeneville celebrated the event in tribute to the “proclamation of President Lincoln emancipating the slaves which was uttered Sept. 22d, 1862.”<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the Johnson City *Comet*, co-owned and edited by segregationist Bob Taylor, patronized African American intelligence, and reflected Taylor and other white supremacists’ ignorance of emancipation in the region. The *Comet* asserted “a question of dates does not worry them [African Americans] in the least and notwithstanding the fact the proclamation of freedom was issued on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1863, and that the 8<sup>th</sup> of August is nowhere mentioned in connection with their freedom.”<sup>28</sup>

While whites debated over why August 8<sup>th</sup> was chosen, African Americans increasingly distanced themselves from Johnson at these celebrations by not referring to him at all. Because whites like Pettibone accepted August 8<sup>th</sup> by the 1880s, it is possible that African Americans distanced themselves from Johnson because by then the event was established and safe. Whereas in the 1870s African Americans likely felt compelled to connect the event to Johnson in order to have white support in the region. However, modern scholars like Bill Murrah assert that many African Americans in the region “identified with those people who were freed by Andrew Johnson and *we* collectively, were freed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1863.”<sup>29</sup> Similar to how Unionists in the region connected themselves to the most famous Unionist to display their loyalty, African Americans in East Tennessee connected themselves to the formerly enslaved people of Andrew Johnson, perhaps the most renowned African Americans in East Tennessee, a possible indication of a rejection of white leadership. Furthermore, formerly enslaved people like Sam Johnson

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<sup>27</sup> “Colored Celebration,” *Knoxville Evening Sentinel*, August 8, 1889, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584892590>.

<sup>28</sup> “Emancipation Day,” *The Comet*, August 10, 1893, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/174685024>.

<sup>29</sup> Black in Appalachia, “Bill Murrah-History of the 8<sup>th</sup> of August,” YouTube Video, 34:45, April 20, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXtR6ybv4-8&t=6s>.

became community leaders themselves, often organizing August 8<sup>th</sup> celebrations for the benefit of the African American community. Reflecting how instrumental Johnson's formerly enslaved people were to the event, in 1901 the *Morristown Republican* remembered that the celebration originated in Greeneville "and mainly through Sam Johnson."<sup>30</sup> The paper recounted Sam's life in starkly paternalistic language, describing Sam as Johnson's "true and faithful" slave following him during the war and through Reconstruction. The paper also noted that "no one takes greater pride in the name of Johnson than this old colored man."<sup>31</sup> However, Andrew Johnson was seldom mentioned at the celebrations. The *Morristown Republicans* comments could be an attempt to illustrate loyalty from the Johnson slaves as indicative of all formerly enslaved people's loyalty to their masters.

Meanwhile, Greeneville's prominent GAR presence contributed to the rise of the monolithic Unionist myth and the memory of Andrew Johnson. The GAR in Greeneville hosted yearly meetings, decorated U.S. veterans' graves and the Johnson monument during Memorial Day, and hosted one state-wide encampment in 1894 where they espoused their Unionism and pride in Andrew Johnson. Most GAR members also voted Republican, a dramatic reversal in Greene County considering how the area was previously a Democratic stronghold during Andrew Johnson's life albeit an Unionist one. Yet they continued to use the memory of the loyal Democrat to appeal to their Confederate neighbors and sow reconciliation.<sup>32</sup> As a congressman

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<sup>30</sup> "Emancipation Day at Greeneville," *Morristown Republican*, August 17, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586510286>.

<sup>31</sup> "Emancipation Day at Greeneville," *Morristown Republican*, August 17, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586510286>.

<sup>32</sup> McGuire, "East Tennessee's Grand Army," 88.



and commander of the Ambrose Burnside Post No. 8, one of the most prominent Posts in the state, Pettibone dedicated himself to providing pensions for Union veterans in his district.<sup>33</sup>

One clear example of the ties between Unionism and the memory of Andrew Johnson was the GAR state encampment hosted in Greeneville in 1894. Samuel McGuire argues that Frank Seaman, department commander and member of Knoxville's Ed Maynard post, "often spoke of mountaineers' wartime loyalty and service in abstract terms, but he also called attention to specific Unionist leaders from the highlands—especially Andrew Johnson."<sup>34</sup> During Seaman's commander's address he welcomed the veterans to Greeneville, a "progressive little city, where the very air is filled with loyalty to the old flag; even the stones within its borders contain sermons that would tell of sacrifice and devotion to the cause of the Union."<sup>35</sup> He further reminded the audience that "here, too, was the home and the scene of the early struggles of one whose career is an object lesson to every poor boy in this republic...However much men differed with him in political methods, no man ever questioned the loyalty, or charged there was eccentricity in the patriotism of Andrew Johnson." This memory of Johnson was especially potent during the Gilded Age in which the US experienced massive wealth inequality and gross political corruption. Therefore, the memory of Johnson, a poor boy who rose to the presidency who was portrayed as honest and incorruptible, provided a powerful lesson for other poor whites during the era when it seemed as if it was impossible to rise above one's station. Furthermore, the image of Johnson ascending the ranks reflected a deep respect for hard, honest work, in

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<sup>33</sup> McGuire, "East Tennessee's Grand Army," 88. McGuire's study shows East Tennessee had the largest GAR presence within the former Confederacy, in which, the Burnside Post was one of the oldest and most influential.

<sup>34</sup> McGuire, "East Tennessee's Grand Army," 171.

<sup>35</sup> GAR, Tennessee, *Eleventh Encampment* (1894), 49. The stones Seaman references could be the Johnson Monument in Greeneville, for no other Civil War monument had been erected during this time nor was there a national cemetery any closer than Knoxville.

which one pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps. Seaman then connected East Tennessee's war efforts to the region's "illustrious triumvirate," Admiral James G. Farragut, Brownlow, and Johnson, "the great commoner, who never for a moment forgot he was of the people."<sup>36</sup>

By connecting Johnson's early poverty to patriotism and common whites, Seaman and the GAR strengthened the foundation of memory first espoused in Greeneville; guaranteeing Johnson's legacy would last through the generations and the increasing industrialization of the town. Before 1887, the majority of town residents were small semi-subsistence farmers, with a few commercial farmers. Mitzi V. Bible argues that although average yeomen farmers raised enough crops for the home, their yearly cash income was roughly \$200 dollars. By 1887, burley tobacco cultivation dominated the local market. Soon after, town residents formed the Greeneville Tobacco Market Association and established Greene County as a major tobacco center, which harvested and sold roughly 1,250,000 pounds at market in 1891.<sup>37</sup> As evidenced with the tobacco trade, Greeneville, and the rest of Appalachia, increasingly faced rapid and unprecedented change. However, instead of passively allowing investors to destroy their town, Greeneville residents were at the heart of this change in their town and had a desire to feed the

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<sup>36</sup> GAR, Tennessee, *Eleventh Encampment* (1894), 50. Seaman used the combined images of the most famous East Tennesseans, Johnson, Brownlow, and Farragut to showcase East Tennesseans loyalty. Although born in the Knoxville area in 1801, Farragut only lived in East Tennessee for a relatively short time before his family moved to New Orleans before James became an apprentice in the United States Navy. Farragut later moved to Norfolk, Virginia before the Civil War yet he remained loyal to the Union, later securing important victories in the war by capturing New Orleans and Mobile, Alabama. By 1900, despite Farragut having only lived in East Tennessee for a few years in his childhood, East Tennesseans dedicated a monument at the birthplace of Admiral Farragut outside Knoxville; Kelli B. Nelson, "On the Imperishable Face of Granite: Civil War Monuments and the Evolution of Historical Memory in East Tennessee 1878-1931," Master's thesis, (East Tennessee State University, 2011) 42-43, Nelson analyses the history of Farragut, the planning of the dedication ceremony, and the dedication itself. Nelson argues that East Tennesseans dedicated a monument to Farragut in 1900 to uplift "their home as loyal to the American government."

<sup>37</sup> Mitzi V. Bible, ed., *Community in Transition: Greene County, Tennessee, 1865-1900* (Greeneville, TN: Greene County Historical Society, 1986), 27; Samuel B. McGuire, "East Tennessee's Grand Army," 88, McGuire gives an overview of Bible's study and incorporates it into how GAR members lived.

burgeoning trade markets in Knoxville and Asheville.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, praising Johnson, especially his rise out of poverty, was praising native East Tennesseans themselves. Gordon B. McKinney argues that during the 1880s and 1890s the increasing numbers of immigrant workers led to the emergence of the American Protective Association (APA). The APA directed attacks against the Catholic church and all “foreign influences.” McKinney suggests that the APA was strongest in “the cities of Kentucky and Eastern Tennessee.”<sup>39</sup>

Loyalty was also paramount in the GAR, which is why Seaman and others often spoke highly of Johnson, using his loyalty and fame to amplify their own. Newspapers reported how “nearly every stranger” visited the Andrew Johnson Monument during the encampment, and hundreds more received pictures of the Tailor Shop “as souvenirs.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, not only did the memory of Andrew Johnson serve the memory of the Union, but it could also be used for popular appeal.

*The Memory of a Benevolent and Heroic President and the Rise of Reconciliationist Memory in East Tennessee, 1900-1906*

The Johnson Memorial and tailor shop were the some of the first historical tourism destinations in Greeneville and East Tennessee. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the daughters of Andrew Johnson, Martha, and Mary, sought to regain title to their father’s tailor shop to preserve it. However, Mary Johnson Stover died in April 1883, leaving preservation efforts to Martha Patterson. By 1884, Martha received the full title to the shop and actively sought to

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<sup>38</sup> Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 119. By 1900, four major railroads ran through Southern Appalachia with the goal of connecting towns like Greeneville to the largest cities in the subregion, Knoxville and Asheville. The desire to connect with trade networks helped foster modernization in towns across the subregion.

<sup>39</sup> Gordon B. McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1978) 125.

<sup>40</sup> “Encampment Echoes,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, March 23, 1894, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584095266>.

preserve virtually everything that belonged to her father from straight razors to personal papers.<sup>41</sup> In 1900, Martha, the last surviving child of Andrew Johnson, willed the Johnson family cemetery plot to the U.S. Government. She willed the plot in the hopes that the federal government would preserve the Johnson monument and turn it into “a public park in Greeneville to honor the memory of Andrew Johnson.”<sup>42</sup> Martha’s wish to turn the cemetery into a public park mirrored the town’s embrace of historical tourism during this time. One newspaper article advertised the town as one marked by the history of “great men” renowned “as jurists and statesmen.”<sup>43</sup> Building on this point, the paper boasted that “it was here that Andrew Johnson spent the most of his eventful life and worked as a tailor,” reflecting the increasing desire to turn Johnson’s memory and belongings into tourism cash for Greeneville. The article concluded by remarking on the “imposing monument” of Andrew Johnson’s and how it was “only a stone’s throw” from where the “gallant leader of the Confederacy, General John H. Morgan met his tragic death,” demonstrating the growing Lost Cause romance in Greeneville concerning General John H. Morgan.<sup>44</sup>

The increasingly romantic attention paid to one of the most controversial and polarizing Confederate commanders also reflected the growing desire for reconciliation.<sup>45</sup> David Blight argues that after the Civil War, the white South lost everything except their unbroken belief in

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<sup>41</sup> Cameron Binkley, *Andrew Johnson National Historic Site Administrative History*, (Atlanta, Ga: Cultural Resources, Southeast Region, National Park Service, 2008) 5.

<sup>42</sup> Binkley, *Administrative History*, 5.

<sup>43</sup> “Andrew Johnson’s Tailor Shop,” *East Tennessee News*, Greeneville, July 13, 1899, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586555333>.

<sup>44</sup> “Andrew Johnson’s Tailor Shop,” *East Tennessee News*, Greeneville, July 13, 1899, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586555333>.

<sup>45</sup> Both contemporary accounts and modern scholars depict Morgan as a violent guerilla who robbed trains, burned bridges and homes, and murdered Unionists. Anne Marshall found that even at the time of his death in Greeneville, Confederate authorities had already begun investigating Morgan’s war crimes, see Anne Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) 172.

white supremacy. Thus, over time, it became easier to remember the battles and the deaths than what the battles were fought over and what they produced, emancipation.<sup>46</sup> This sentiment is mirrored in how the Greeneville paper described Morgan as a gallant leader who met a tragic death. Whereas during the war, Unionists despised Morgan for being a violent guerilla more than a soldier. Modern scholar Anne Marshall argues that when Morgan was killed in Greeneville, even Confederate authorities began investigating Morgan's activities as contrary to the laws of war.<sup>47</sup>

The death of Andrew Johnson's last surviving child in July 1901 produced an outburst of Unionist and Johnsonian sentiment in the region. Judge Oliver P. Temple, a Unionist historian, and no ally of Andrew Johnson's, wrote a tribute for Martha two days before she died. Temple remembered fondly how Martha had been born in the tailor shop and praised Martha's modesty and "force of character," which compensated for her "lack of outward beauty."<sup>48</sup> Although confined to her bed during her last few years, Martha often received visitors and reminisced "of her early career and the presidency with the utmost pleasure." Lastly, "she was a most thorough Christian, and preferred to spend time visiting the poor." Because Martha had been one of the most "esteemed women in East Tennessee," a "gloom" passed over the region when she died.<sup>49</sup> One acquaintance claimed that Martha's health disintegrated after Johnson left the office in 1869 and that he "often thought that the worry of the impeachment trial...had much to do with impairing her health." The paper further credited Martha for the "devotion which she exhibited toward her father, while he was living, and to his memory after he died, was of the highest type

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<sup>46</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> Anne Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) 172.

<sup>48</sup> Oliver P. Temple, "Mrs. Martha Patterson, Daughter of Ex-President Johnson, Dying at Greeneville," *Knoxville Sentinel*, July 9, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585846110>.

<sup>49</sup> "Mrs. Patterson's Life; Some Family History," *Knoxville Sentinel*, July 10, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585846158>.

of familial affection and seemed but little short of ancestral worship.” Martha’s defense of the “integrity” of Johnson’s character and his “supreme love of truth” provided an excellent service to her country. Newspapers also drew parallels between Johnson’s plebian support and Martha’s modesty that prevented her from living “above her people.” Martha’s refusal of a pension from her father’s death was also a source of great pride for people in the region, especially since the widows of Garfield and Grant had taken one.<sup>50</sup>

While the death of Martha spearheaded an explosion of remembrance for Johnson in East Tennessee, it also bolstered a sympathetic reassessment of Johnson nationally. Echoing Judge Temple’s comments on Martha, the Louisville *Courier Journal* likewise reported that Martha was the “favorite child” of Johnson and “possessed much of the character of her father.” For example, “the breadth and sweep of his [Johnson’s] reasoning faculties were hers [Martha’s], while his iron will, and indomitable energy were reproduced in her.”<sup>51</sup> The *Boston Globe* also remembered Martha warmly as the “Mistress of the White House,” who maintained the White House with her East Tennessee simplicity.<sup>52</sup> New York papers responded in a similar vein, remembering Martha as “her father’s adviser and confidante in all his political struggles, and a woman of commanding intellect and excellent judgement.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, the death of Johnson’s last surviving child not only spurred Tennesseans to remember Johnson favorably, but the rest of the nation. Her death helped soften the image of Johnson. Therefore, instead of being remembered as a traitor or a vindictive politician, Johnson was increasingly seen in a more benign light. While future writers and leaders expanded Johnson’s national popularity shortly after Martha died, it

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<sup>50</sup> Mrs. Martha Patterson Dies at Greeneville,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, July 11, 1901.

<sup>51</sup> “In Old Age, Death Claims Mrs. Martha Patterson,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 11, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/118797733>.

<sup>52</sup> “Was Mistress of White House,” *Boston Globe*, July 11, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/430784947>.

<sup>53</sup> “Personal,” *New York Tribune*, July 12, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/468675878>.

was Martha who established the foundation for the preservation of her father's estate and personal belongings such as papers, clothing, and other Johnsonian artifacts. Her son, Andrew J. Patterson, followed in his mother's footsteps, but instead of seeking to preserve the Johnson estate, Patterson sought to influence the popular memory across the state and country.

Shortly after Martha's death, after almost a decade of planning, East Tennessee's GAR dedicated the Knoxville Union Soldiers Monument in Knoxville's National Cemetery.<sup>54</sup> The day before the official dedication on October 24, Martha's son, Andrew Johnson Patterson, unveiled an exhibit to the thousands of Union veterans and Knoxvillians attending the dedication ceremony. It included "relics and heirlooms" from his grandfather including Johnson's diary, razor, hat, and tickets from the impeachment trial.<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, Patterson also opted to include a "lengthy petition from the citizens of South Carolina addressed to him [Johnson] and asking for the restoration of civil government in that state." While the newspaper does not include any more information on that petition, it is very likely that the petition was one sent by a white Charlestonian delegation that visited President Johnson in 1865. Although the petition has not survived the passage of time, the *National Republican* from Washington, D.C. in 1865 gave an overview of Johnson's interview with the white Charlestonians shortly after their petition was sent on June 21, 1865. During the interview, President Johnson advised the delegation to amend their state Constitution to abolish slavery or "remain under military rule."<sup>56</sup> When one of the delegates raised the point that "there is the fact that slavery is not mentioned at all in the Constitution of the State," Johnson sarcastically replied, "but there is the fact that it had existed

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<sup>54</sup> For a more detailed description of the years of planning behind the monument see, Nelson, "On the Imperishable Face of Granite," 46.

<sup>55</sup> "Many Relics from Life and Home of Andrew Johnson," *Knoxville Sentinel*, October 23, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585797003>.

<sup>56</sup> "Reconstruction in South Carolina—Views of President Johnson," *National Republican*, June 16, 1865, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/46382592>.

in the State, and you can amend the Constitution so that it will say it does not exist there.” One South Carolinian replied back to Johnson, likely repeating what was in the petition in the first place, that whites held a deep concern that African Americans were “inflamed by their newly conquered liberty,” and were “too apt to confound it with licentiousness; and to adopt the idea that freedom means exemption from labor.”<sup>57</sup>

Within the context of the Jim Crow South in the early 1900s, segregationists used the ghost of Reconstruction, and bayonet rule and African Americans voting to justify the social system.<sup>58</sup> Thus, Andrew J. Patterson’s decision to include the South Carolinian’s petition, the only document present (all other items on display were personal belongings like hats and razors), is telling for what he and other East Tennesseans valued in Johnson’s memory during the early 1900s: Johnson’s defense of civil government and the white South. Using the image of Johnson abolishing slavery and restoring civil government and the social order of South Carolina, while at a GAR dedication, demonstrates that the memory of Johnson’s loyalty could shield his hometown from federal reforms. Moreover, as Barbara Gannon and Samuel B. McGuire has found, the GAR celebrated emancipation as a fruit of their victory, yet that did not translate into social equality. Patterson’s exhibit perfectly demonstrates this shield in action. The South Carolinian petition captures exactly what white conservative East Tennesseans wanted to proclaim to the federal government: Johnson’s push to end slavery, while maintaining the racial hierarchy in the South. Because Johnson advocated abolition but not social equality, East

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<sup>57</sup> “Reconstruction in South Carolina—Views of President Johnson,” *National Republican*, June 16, 1865, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/46382592>.

<sup>58</sup> K. Stephen Prince, “Jim Crow Memory: Southern White Supremacists and the Regional Politics of Remembrance,” in *Remembering Reconstruction: Struggles over the Meaning of America’s Most Turbulent Era*, eds. Carole Emberton and Bruce E. Baker, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017) 23. Prince argues that this memory of Reconstruction was a “white supremacist memory” designed less to remember the past and more to shape the future of race relations, casting Reconstruction as “the most wrongheaded and unnatural experiment in US history.”



Tennesseans used the image of Johnson to demonstrate to the federal government that they could be trusted to manage their own social order.

Andrew J. Patterson chose the perfect location to display his grandfather's "relics."<sup>59</sup> During the dedication ceremony the following day, Newton Hacker, Greene County judge and member of a Jonesborough GAR post, called attention to the "leaders of the great Union cause in East Tennessee."<sup>60</sup> East Tennessee stood by the actions of "our Andrew Johnson, who stood in his place in the United States Senate, while his Southern colleagues were leaving that illustrious body, and made a speech that for pathos and sublime courage, has few parallels anywhere in history."<sup>61</sup> Although making no overtures to Johnson's Reconstruction record, Hacker did declare that Johnson "was from first to last a true Union man."<sup>62</sup>

Further cementing a favorable memory of Andrew Johnson was Reverend James S. Jones's *Life of Andrew Johnson* published in 1901.<sup>63</sup> A Unionist pastor from Greeneville, Jones was one of the few that Martha Patterson allowed to access her father's papers.<sup>64</sup> As a pastor from Greeneville who knew Johnson and Martha personally, his biography of the ex-president sought to repair the image of Johnson's character from one of a vindictive, alcoholic, traitorous

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<sup>59</sup> "Many Relics from Life and Home of Andrew Johnson," *Knoxville Sentinel*, October 23, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585797003>.

<sup>60</sup> "Federal Monument Exercises in National Cemetery Very Fitting," *Knoxville Weekly Sentinel*, October 30, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584935901>.

<sup>61</sup> Johnson gave numerous speeches for the Union in 1860 and 1861. One of the more famous speeches was on February 6, 1861, in which Johnson reaffirmed his stance on previous speeches for the Union declaring the supremacy of the "Constitution, and against the doctrine of nullification or secession, which I [Johnson] look upon as a great political heresy." Johnson further chided his seceding colleagues for threatening the institution of slavery, arguing that the greatest protection for the institution lay in the Constitution. For a full transcript of the speech published two weeks after, see "Speech of Andrew Johnson of Tennessee in the Senate of the United States," *Nashville Republican Banner*, February 26, 1861, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/604219206>.

<sup>62</sup> "Federal Monument Exercises in National Cemetery Very Fitting," *Knoxville Weekly Sentinel*, October 30, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584935901>.

<sup>63</sup> Rev. James S. Jones, *Life of Andrew Johnson: Seventeenth President of the United States*, (Greeneville: East Tennessee Publishing Company, 1901).

<sup>64</sup> "Provenance of the Andrew Johnson Papers," The Library of Congress, 1963, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/andrew-johnson-papers/articles-and-essays/provenance/>.

Southern Republican into a heroic, sober, loyal Southern Democrat. Before publication in book form, Jones published chapters in the *Knoxville Sentinel* from the end of July to the end of August 1901. In chapter four, Jones connected Johnson's Senate speech in defense of the Union during the secession crisis to his Reconstruction career, claiming that in the Senate speech Johnson "laid down principles which we find him seeking to put into effect when as President he contended that the Southern states had never been out of the Union."<sup>65</sup> Jones also reminded his readers that Abraham Lincoln chose Johnson because he was a Democrat, therefore Johnson did not "forsake the Republican party when he became President."<sup>66</sup>

In the final chapter, Jones defends Johnson's Reconstruction record declaring, "his efforts on behalf of the almost ruined South ought to insure him a place forever in the affections of all who love the Union, and especially of all those who were the beneficiaries of his [Johnson's] policy."<sup>67</sup> The beneficiaries of Johnson's policy represented the mass pardons of ex-Confederates. Jones's work shows how the memory of Johnson could appeal to both white Unionists and ex-Confederates. It must be remembered that many white East Tennessee Unionists grew uncomfortable with a connection to national Radical Republican leaders during Reconstruction due to national civil rights policies designed to place African Americans on a footing of equality.<sup>68</sup> Like Johnson in 1869, many East Tennessee Unionists likely judged Confederate crimes less harshly than Radical Republican crimes when he declared

The South was not so much opposed to the Constitution and its provisions. They feared to a very great extent that the provisions of the Constitution would not be carried out. They

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<sup>65</sup> Rev. James S. Jones, "Chapters from Life of Andrew Johnson," *Knoxville Sentinel*, Chapter IV, August 14, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584935105>.

<sup>66</sup> Rev. James S. Jones, "Chapters from Life of Andrew Johnson," *Knoxville Sentinel*.

<sup>67</sup> Rev. James S. Jones, "Chapters from Life of Andrew Johnson," *Knoxville Sentinel*, Chapter VII, August 14, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585849716>.

<sup>68</sup> McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans* 9. McKinney argues that immediately following Reconstruction, "only the fact that the Republicans were regarded as the defenders of the Union allowed them to retain a following among those mountain men who had opposed the Confederacy."

desired to separate for the better carrying of it out. The going out was a violation of the Constitution. The Radicals have also violated the Constitution. I prefer the charges [treason charges] against them today and put them upon trial before the American people, who I believe will render a correct verdict, which will not be an acquittal as it was in my case.<sup>69</sup>

Kathleen Zebley Liulevicius found that after the war, East Tennesseans filed the majority of treason petitions in Tennessee against their former Confederate neighbors.<sup>70</sup> Those charged with treason in East Tennessee often knew Johnson personally and feared that Republican Governor William Brownlow would not recommend a pardon for them. Most East Tennessee Confederates indicted for treason sought Johnson's pardon personally, rather than going through the state level process like Landon C. Haynes. In many cases, Liulevicius found that Brownlow did, in fact, decline to recommend a pardon for an individual only to have Johnson grant it anyway.<sup>71</sup> Those who received pardon under Johnson were grateful for his decision, such as high profile Confederates like General Gideon Pillow, who had "full confidence and support" for the Johnson administration.<sup>72</sup> Liulevicius correctly asserts that the power of Johnson's presidential pardon allowed ex-Confederates to create new lives without major punishment as well as reconstruct the Southern social order as more elites received pardons.<sup>73</sup> Lastly, Johnson's amnesty proclamations forgave thousands of Tennesseans for their role with the Confederacy,

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<sup>69</sup> "Andrew Johnson at the Capitol," *Nashville Union and American*, April 11, 1869, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/80672386/>. Johnson also boasted of having "pardoned more people than any man in the civilized world. With one single stroke of the pen the prison doors of 65,000 men were thrown open."

<sup>70</sup> Kathleen Zebley Liulevicius, *Rebel Salvation: Pardon and Amnesty of Confederates in Tennessee*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2021) 189. Middle and West Tennessee, areas with small Unionist sympathies, did not experience the sheer number of treason cases heard in East Tennessee due to the number of Unionists and Confederates living within close proximity of one another.

<sup>71</sup> Liulevicius, *Rebel Salvation*, 197.

<sup>72</sup> Gideon J. Pillow to Andrew Johnson, November 9, 1865, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, ed. Paul H. Bergeron, vol. 9, (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1991) 365-366; Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes Jr. and Roy P. Stonesifer Jr., *The Life and Wars of Gideon Pillow*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 306.

<sup>73</sup> Liulevicius, *Rebel Salvation*, 257.

without having to face trial, imprisonment, or execution. Therefore, it was only natural for former Rebels to warm to Johnson's memory after the Civil War and Reconstruction because of his benevolent policies towards them. Whereas the memory of Andrew Johnson previously focused on his Unionist stance while excluding his Reconstruction policies, the memory of a benevolent forgiving President was slowly emerging during this period due to the increasing drive for reconciliation between whites on both sides as well as a desire to maintain small government. By the end of the decade this Lost Cause memory of Johnson dominated East Tennessee.

One of the growing myths of Andrew Johnson during this period spearheaded by his family and Reverend Jones that is still an enduring myth in Greeneville is that Johnson simply tried enforcing Abraham Lincoln's Reconstruction policies. One Knoxville paper in 1906 claimed that one of Lincoln's greatest lessons to the American people was that "a self-made man, a man who came from the lowest stratum of our population, could rise to the needs of the nation, and save it from partition," much like Andrew Johnson.<sup>74</sup> The paper included growing Lost Cause ideas in the region, claiming that the South never had "any chance" in the war because of the immense resources of the North. Furthermore, Lincoln only issued the Emancipation Proclamation "for its necessity as a war measure," and his Reconstruction plan was "very different from that finally adopted," meaning the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments. The Radicals of the North were suspicious of Andrew Johnson, "another son of the plain people," because he was a Southerner and moved to block his attempts at implementing Lincoln's supposed Reconstruction plan.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> "Abraham Lincoln," *Knoxville Sentinel*, February 12, 1906, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585783862>.

<sup>75</sup> "Abraham Lincoln," *Knoxville Sentinel*.

*Walter P. Brownlow and the 1908 Centennial of the Birth of Andrew Johnson*

Through the two years of 1906 to 1908, Walter P. Brownlow, the nephew of former Republican Governor William “Parson” Brownlow, made local and national headlines for his sincere support for the Andrew Johnson National Cemetery and the Mountain Branch Home for Volunteer Soldiers.<sup>76</sup> After bitter party in-fighting between himself, Alf Taylor, and Augustus Pettibone, Brownlow secured the nomination to Congress in 1897.<sup>77</sup> Brownlow began defending Johnson relatively early in his career, presenting a copy of Rev. Jones’s biography of Johnson to President Theodore Roosevelt in 1901.<sup>78</sup> By 1906, Walter emerged as the foremost defender of Andrew Johnson in East Tennessee. Although his uncle had been one of Johnson’s preeminent political enemies, Walter Brownlow staunchly defended the image of Johnson, the most famous Unionist, to help secure federal favors for the first congressional district, especially for U.S. veterans.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, by defending the memory of Johnson, Brownlow was defending the memory of Unionism and U.S. veterans, an especially important political tool for Brownlow considering how most party in-fighting in East Tennessee stemmed from who could provide

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<sup>76</sup> Born in 1851 in Abington, Virginia, Brownlow received only three years of formal education before attempting to run away from home to join a federal cavalry unit. Failing to enlist due to his age, Walter lobbied his uncle for support in Nashville which William refused. After the war, Walter began making his political ascent by purchasing and editing the *Jonesboro Herald and Tribune*. For more biographical information on Walter Brownlow see Lee, “The Lost Cause that Wasn’t,” 314.

<sup>77</sup> McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 184-185. By 1894, after immense pressure from Brownlow and his allies, Alf Taylor decided not to run for reelection. However, the old Republican leadership in Tennessee led by men like Augustus Pettibone refused to seat Brownlow. After convincing the party to adopt a popular primary, Brownlow won the nomination in a close election in 1897. According to McKinney, the preeminent issue of the campaign was who could do the most for U.S. veterans.

<sup>78</sup> “State Exchanges,” *Knoxville Sentinel*, December 27, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585800646>.

<sup>79</sup> Lee, “The Lost Cause that Wasn’t,” 314.

more to U.S. veterans.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the bitter party internal strife alienated many Republican voters, yet by using a popular platform like Johnson and pensions for U.S. veterans, Brownlow maintained control of the party in the region. The divisions within the Republican party could also be offset by appealing to Democrats through protecting the memory of Johnson. Brownlow and Johnson's popularity soared during 1908, the centennial of Andrew Johnson's birth. However, the period between 1906 and 1908 was the last hurrah for explicit Union memory in East Tennessee. As we have seen, during this period white East Tennesseans increasingly began to focus on reconciliation. Kelli B. Nelson also notes that during this period, white East Tennesseans increasingly focused on reconciliation monuments, typically incorporating Confederate soldiers and Unionists, rather than solely dedicated to Unionists.<sup>81</sup> The reconciliationist atmosphere in East Tennessee was beginning to change the memory of Andrew Johnson from staunch Unionist to Reconstruction hero.

In July 1906, Walter P. Brownlow addressed the House of Representatives with a ringing defense of Andrew Johnson and Unionism in East Tennessee. Brownlow remarked how it had been thirty-one years since Johnson died, claiming that his loss was a blow to Tennessee and the nation "whose highest office he had so ably filled with incorruptible integrity."<sup>82</sup> The Congressman recounted Johnson's early life and career, emphasizing Johnson's connection with the "plain people" and his rise out of poverty. Brownlow praised Johnson's advocacy of the Homestead Bill in Congress against the wishes of local antebellum Democrat, Landon C. Haynes. Reflecting the disgust with Gilded Age political corruption, Brownlow admired Johnson

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<sup>80</sup> As late as 1900, Gordon B. McKinney argues that Walter Brownlow was still embroiled in bitter party strife, mainly because Brownlow represented the new business and professional wing of the party rather than the old party bosses. Moreover, a significant issue in the 1900 campaign stemmed from who provided more pensions to U.S. veterans. McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 186.

<sup>81</sup> Nelson, "On the Imperishable Face of Granite," 46.

<sup>82</sup> "Congressman Brownlow's Address in Congress on Behalf of Andrew Johnson Cemetery Bill," *Knoxville Sentinel*, July 7, 1906, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585650420>.

for being “incorruptible.” More importantly, “the greatest service Mr. Johnson rendered his country” was his loyalty to the United States Constitution. Brownlow then gave credit to the East Tennesseans who remained loyal like Johnson, claiming that “it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the aid given by the loyal men in the southern states...and in this work East Tennessee stands pre-eminent.” Repeating what Pettibone had said almost twenty years before, Brownlow declared that had it not been for the “35,000 volunteers” from East Tennessee Unionists, “secession would have been triumphant.” Like his uncle during the Civil War, Walter sought to illustrate that East Tennesseans were more than just victims to the Confederacy, but were central to the survival of the Union.<sup>83</sup> Brownlow ignored the contributions of African Americans to the U.S. Army and instead gave credit to white East Tennesseans claiming “that of the grand total of the Union army, nearly one-eighth came from the southern states.” However, the Unionists of East Tennessee would not have been as successful without Andrew Johnson, “one of its [East Tennessee’s] bravest and ablest leaders.”<sup>84</sup>

Rather than ignoring Johnson’s controversial presidential record, Brownlow argued that Johnson’s position against secession and Reconstruction was correct “and time has vindicated his judgment,” though he failed to go into any specifics on why Johnson was correct for opposing Reconstruction. It must be noted that Brownlow did not mention his uncle, who by this period had a very low reputation across the state for his policies as governor during Reconstruction. Walter P. Brownlow’s silence regarding his uncle could suggest that he was attempting to distance himself from the fighting Parson and connect himself to Johnson who was much less polarizing in Tennessee. Brownlow also changed the narrative of Johnson’s drunken vice-

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<sup>83</sup> Lee, “The Lost Cause that Wasn’t,” 304. Lee argues that William Brownlow sought to proclaim that “East Tennessee Unionists were more than mere victims; they were central to the preservation of the Union.”

<sup>84</sup> “Congressman Brownlow’s Address in Congress on Behalf of Andrew Johnson Cemetery Bill,” *Knoxville Sentinel*, July 7, 1906, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585650420>.

presidential inauguration speech claiming, “the spirit of the speech” was aimed at fighting “plutocracy.” Johnson reminded the heads of government that “the people were the source of power...by some such sentiments were then deemed so out of place that it was regarded as evidence of intoxication.” Reflecting the animosity held toward Gilded Age trusts and the desire to use the memory of Johnson as a tool, Brownlow argued that Johnson would have opposed “the trusts if trusts had then been organized,” because Johnson “was a demagogue in the higher and nobler sense—a demagogue who believed in the people.” Brownlow maintained that although Johnson was a demagogue, so was Thomas Jefferson, because the two Presidents firmly believed in small government, a hatred of the cities, and the power of the people, albeit only white people.<sup>85</sup> Finally, Brownlow concluded the address arguing that “it is the duty of patriotism to cherish and perpetuate the memories of the mighty dead. Personality is power. Dead or alive it draws.”<sup>86</sup>

Congressman Brownlow made a robust case for the vindication of Andrew Johnson, and although Congress accepted the cemetery, they did so free of cost. Brownlow sought federal appropriations for the cemetery in February 1907. When a Michigan Congressman sought to strike out the appropriation for the cemetery because only two U.S. soldiers were buried there, Johnson’s sons, Brownlow issued “a ringing oration of five minutes on the patriotism of Andrew Johnson,” who he called “the greatest patriot of the Civil War.”<sup>87</sup> Further repeating the monolithic Unionist myth, Brownlow claimed that his home district in Tennessee, where

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<sup>85</sup> Thomas Jefferson was one of Johnson’s idols along with Andrew Jackson. While some historians have argued that Johnson was the last Jacksonian president, Hans L. Trefousse asserts that Johnson was more of a Jeffersonian “Old Republican” in which Johnson shared the same ideology of Jefferson. See Hans L. Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1989) 53.

<sup>86</sup> “Congressman Brownlow’s Address in Congress on Behalf of Andrew Johnson Cemetery Bill,” *Knoxville Sentinel*, July 7, 1906, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585650420>.

<sup>87</sup> “Andrew Johnson Eulogized: Congressman Calls Him the Greatest Patriot of the Civil War,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1907.



“Greeneville is the center,” sent “more soldiers to the Union service during the dark days of the rebellion than any Congressional district in the United States...yet we were 100 miles inside the Confederate lines.”<sup>88</sup> Brownlow recounted the perils Unionists faced leaving the mountains and how they were “followed by bloodhounds” on their way to the U.S. Army.<sup>89</sup> Brownlow then ridiculed the Michigan Congressman, “here from this Northern section of the country comes the opposition to doing honor to these people of the mountains, who were loyal to the cause of the Union.”<sup>90</sup> Although “Brownlow, Maynard, and Nelson stood shoulder to shoulder with Johnson in his fight to preserve the Union,” those men “did not deserve the credit that Johnson did, because they were Whigs and had been educated along the lines of the preservation of the Union, while Johnson had been a Breckinridge and state’s rights democrat.”<sup>91</sup> The paper remarked that the notion to strike out the appropriation “was defeated in a vast chorus of noes.” Brownlow’s mythologized Unionist speeches and defense of Johnson, Tom Lee argues, “was more than a bid for funds and northern benevolence; it was a rallying point for East Tennesseans jealous of their pride and sensitive to slights made against them, and thus a means of maintaining unity.”<sup>92</sup> This sentiment is reflected not only in Brownlow’s defense of Johnson, but Jones’s appeal to ex-Confederates to remember Johnson had pardoned them and sought to alleviate Radical Reconstruction.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> “Brownlow’s Tribute to East Tennesseans,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, February 24, 1907, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585728747>.

<sup>89</sup> “Andrew Johnson Eulogized,” *New York Times*.

<sup>90</sup> Andrew Johnson Eulogized: Congressman Calls Him the Greatest Patriot of the Civil War,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1907.

<sup>91</sup> “Brownlow’s Tribute to East Tennesseans,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, February 24, 1907, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585728747>.

<sup>92</sup> Lee, “The Lost Cause that Wasn’t,” 315.

<sup>93</sup> Rev. James S. Jones, “Chapters from Life of Andrew Johnson,” *Knoxville Sentinel*, Chapter VII, August 14, 1901, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585849716>.

In 1908, the centennial of Andrew Johnson's birth, Walter P. Brownlow published "Defense and Vindication of Andrew Johnson" in the *Taylor-Trotwood Magazine* edited by State Historian John Trotwood Moore and Senator Bob Taylor.<sup>94</sup> In the article, Brownlow earnestly defended the character of Andrew Johnson against the charges of ex-Senator William M. Stewart from Nevada.<sup>95</sup> Brownlow claimed that Stewart's false charges that Johnson had been a drunkard and a traitor represented a "gross injustice" to "the character of a former President of the United States."<sup>96</sup> Although the assassination of Lincoln had been tragic, it was not as great of a "calamity" as Stewart claimed because Andrew Johnson ascended the presidency. Without engaging any specifics, Brownlow defended Johnson's actions during Reconstruction as similar to Johnson's defense of the Union, claiming, "Mr. Johnson did nothing inconsistent with his subsequent conduct when the Confederates laid down their arms." Rather than defending Johnson's constitutional arguments because "the ablest lawyers" already had, Brownlow defended Johnson's character against all charges by Stewart. Principally, Johnson was not a drunk, and "few men gave greater evidence of love of country than did Andrew Johnson." Johnson "gave evidences of patriotism far more exalted than did Mr. Stewart, who denounced secession from the safe retreat of the sagebrush in Nevada."<sup>97</sup>

Brownlow included numerous statements and passages from former cabinet officials, William "Parson" Brownlow and Charles Dickens defending Johnson's character against charges of alcoholism, cowardness, and complimenting the ex-president's style of dress. Brownlow then

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<sup>94</sup> Walter P. Brownlow, "Defense and Vindication of Andrew Johnson," in *The Congressional Record* 43, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909). The magazine article was also included in this edition of *The Congressional Record*.

<sup>95</sup> William M. Stewart, *Reminiscences of Senator William M. Stewart, of Nevada* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1908). Stewart served as U.S. Senator for Nevada during Johnson's administration, later voting to impeach Johnson. Stewart made numerous charges against Johnson in his memoirs, prompting the reply by Brownlow.

<sup>96</sup> Brownlow, "Defense and Vindication of Andrew Johnson," 3197.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 3197-3198.

built on the Lincoln connection arguing that Johnson “tried to carry out Lincoln's ideas of Reconstruction” and failed in carrying out Lincoln’s plan because he did not enjoy the same “prestige and popularity” Lincoln enjoyed. While all vague statements, Brownlow’s defense of Johnson mirrored many white East Tennesseans’ remembrance of Andrew Johnson, Unionism, and Reconstruction. Newspapers in the region credited Brownlow for his defense of Andrew Johnson, declaring that Brownlow “is entitled to a great deal of credit for what he has done for the name and fame of Andrew Johnson.”<sup>98</sup>

East Tennesseans rejoiced in Brownlow’s success for turning the Johnson cemetery into a National Cemetery, reflecting the great pride East Tennesseans held for the Great Commoner. Echoing Brownlow’s sentiments during the centennial, the *Bristol Herald Courier* praised “Uncle Sam” for maintaining the Johnson cemetery and paying “tribute to his [Johnson’s] memory in making his burial place a national cemetery.”<sup>99</sup> Now under administration by the War Department, the Andrew Johnson National Cemetery became a rallying point for holidays such as the Fourth of July and Memorial Day. At the Fourth of July celebration during the Johnson centennial, the National Cemetery hosted “patriotic music and speeches, two balloon ascensions,” and a flag raising to honor Johnson.<sup>100</sup>

The memory of Andrew Johnson, the South’s most famous Unionist, reinforced the myth of monolithic Unionism to Northerners, giving the false impression that all in East Tennessee were loyal. Crucially, the memory of monolithic Unionism and Andrew Johnson, as demonstrated, were not the same. By 1908, Northerners largely bought the myth of monolithic

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<sup>98</sup> “What Brownlow Has Done for the Name and Fame of Andrew Johnson,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, March 3, 1907, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584079825>.

<sup>99</sup> “Uncle Sam Honors Johnson’s Memory,” *Bristol Herald Courier*, May 3, 1908, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584296644>.

<sup>100</sup> “Fourth of July,” *Knoxville Sentinel*, July 1, 1908, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586480594>.

Unionism but still viewed Johnson as a vindictive, accidental President who was too lenient on ex-Confederates, such views may explain why the industrialization of the town, especially in regard to tobacco production, which local residents developed rather than outside sources. Whereas the memory of Andrew Johnson reinforced monolithic Unionism nationally, in East Tennessee the memory of Johnson also praised his Reconstruction policies of pardon and amnesty while condemning Radical Reconstruction. This is crucial for it demonstrates how white East Tennesseans used the memory of Andrew Johnson to not only seek Yankee capital, but to appeal to ex-Confederates and conservatives for reconciliationist purposes. Writers like Rev. James Jones and orators like Walter P. Brownlow defended Johnson as the bravest and ablest Unionist leader during the war who simply tried enforcing Lincoln's plans of Reconstruction against a Radical Republican juggernaut bent on revolutionizing the South's social order. The praise of Johnson's Reconstruction record by Unionists did help sow reconciliation in East Tennessee with former Rebels at the expense of the monolithic Unionist myth. After 1908 the memory of Andrew Johnson increasingly shifted from defense of Union to the defense of the white South during Reconstruction. What the memory of Andrew Johnson during this period demonstrates is how the memory was employed by all factions of East Tennesseans from Unionists and Confederates to African Americans to suit their purposes and arguments. More importantly, the memory of Andrew Johnson and its conservative nature reflects that of East Tennesseans politics and society as well as their memory of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

The 1908 centennial of Johnson's birth represented the last open defense of Unionism combined with the memory of Andrew Johnson. Although specific towns and cities continued to openly celebrate their Unionist heritage, like Greeneville's Union Soldiers' Monument dedicated in 1919, in East Tennessee as a whole, Unionism was fading, especially combined with the

memory of Andrew Johnson. However, the waning of Unionism and the rise of reconciliation and Lost Cause sentiment in the region did not mean Johnson's popularity would sink again; rather, Johnson's popularity in the across the state after 1908 began to soar thanks to popular depictions of the Civil War and Reconstruction like D.W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), Claude Bower's *The Tragic Era: The Revolution After Lincoln* (1929), and the film *Tennessee Johnson* (1942). As demonstrated, Johnson's memory proved remarkably adaptable and could be used for any political or social purpose. This adaptability allowed the memory of Johnson to spread across the state. Similarly, the spread of August 8<sup>th</sup> celebrations across the state demonstrates how although African Americans remembered the event in their own way, African Americans in the region connected emancipation to Andrew Johnson. After 1929, the white memory of Johnson improved across the nation, with scholars using the interpretations first espoused by Rev. Jones and John Trotwood Moore in which instead of praising Johnson the Unionist, writers increasingly pushed the image of the defender of the white South. This heroic national interpretation of Johnson lasted until 1958, while in Greeneville, that interpretation has never truly faded.

#### CHAPTER 4. THE ZENITH OF THE MEMORY OF ANDREW JOHNSON, 1909-1958

In 1909, the Andrew Johnson National Cemetery hosted its first memorial celebration. East Tennessee native and New York State Representative Martin W. Littleton correctly prophesized to the thousands of East Tennesseans in attendance that “the day would come when the entire country would do homage to his [Johnson’s] memory.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the country had begun a remarkable transformation concerning the memory of Andrew Johnson thanks in large part to Walter P. Brownlow and State Historian John Trotwood Moore. After 1908, the memory of Andrew Johnson moved beyond the myth of monolithic Unionism in East Tennessee to a defense of the white South during Reconstruction. At the core of this new memory of Andrew Johnson was a white nationalist patriotism. Lost Cause advocates increasingly lauded Johnson’s Reconstruction career as patriotic and heroic. The principal reason behind this was the increasing patriotism in the region that World War I wrought, compelling white East Tennesseans, both descendants of Unionists and Confederates, to display their readiness to serve. Moreover, the Andrew Johnson National Cemetery began burials for veterans of World War I, the first large scale war since the Civil War, connecting their sacrifices to Andrew Johnson by being buried on the same ground. Before 1908 white East Tennesseans used the memory of Johnson to display their loyalty and expand the monolithic Unionism myth. After 1908 white East Tennesseans used the patriotism of Andrew Johnson to reflect their own, asserting that they were the descendants of both the victors of King’s Mountain and Johnson. However, during the age of Jim Crow, the memory of Johnson and his patriotism reflected Johnson’s white nationalistic desires, which

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<sup>1</sup> “Honor Andrew Johnson,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1909.

often coincided with whites' racial attitudes of the time and reflected the deep paranoia in white society over racial and class fears in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the rise of Lost Cause sentiment, the memory of Andrew Johnson remained strong across the state. It proved profitable for tourism and for businesses to associate themselves with the Great Commoner. East Tennessee companies used Johnson's name and whites' memory of him for ads in newspapers. The Interstate Land Corporation from Bristol regularly advertised in Greeneville papers claiming "Andrew Johnson's Presidential actions have been justified by time. So will yours if you buy a farm from us."<sup>3</sup> With historical tourism on the rise during this period, Greenevillians realized the opportunity to capitalize on Johnson. Moreover, the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park less than two hours away from Greeneville prompted local citizens, businesses, and politicians to cash in on a historical site located so close to a new national park. Thus, town residents ardently strove to garner state support for historical preservation efforts in order to transform the town into a historical tourist attraction with Johnson as the crown jewel for East Tennessee's growing historical tourism industry.

*Tennessee Gives Tribute to Andrew Johnson and the Growth of the Lost Cause, 1909-1923*

One explanation for why the Lost Cause expanded in East Tennessee after 1910 was the death of Walter P. Brownlow. Following his death, Lost Cause advocates dominated interpretations of the Civil War and Reconstruction in the region. Perhaps one of the most impactful events that transformed a Unionist heritage into reconciliation was *The Birth of a*

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout Johnson's career he regularly expressed his desire for a white man's government. In 1866, Johnson declared that "this is a country for white men, and by God, as long as I am President, it shall be a government for white men." See "Freedom: A History of US," (PBS), accessed April 10, 2022, <https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/historyofus/web07/segment2b.html>.

<sup>3</sup> *Greeneville Searchlight*, September 23, 1915, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584960300>. The Interstate Land Corporations advertised the same message for over two years in *The Greeneville Searchlight*.

*Nation* (1915), directed by D. W. Griffith. Papers in Knoxville, the largest city located near Greeneville, reported how “although moving picture shows had been heard of and read about in Knoxville, none had ever been seen before.”<sup>4</sup> For three weeks, audiences from across East Tennessee filled Staub Theatre, one of the few movie theatres in the region, to catch a glimpse of their first movie and the “activities of the Ku Klux Klansmen, whose activity was most pronounced in the Reconstruction days and served to bring order out of chaos.”<sup>5</sup> Until 1915, the Ku Klux Klan in East Tennessee, if existing at all, lurked in the shadows.<sup>6</sup> However, the popularity of *The Birth of a Nation* as well as economic and racial fears led to the resurgence of the Klan across the nation and in East Tennessee.<sup>7</sup> Reflecting the sentiment that allowed the growth of the Klan, the paper credited the redemption “of a white government,” reflecting their white nationalism, and noted that “Knoxvillians manifested their approval last night most unmistakably.”<sup>8</sup> As East Tennessee increasingly wrestled with national issues such as women’s rights, labor conflicts, and racial anxieties, the notion of a white supremacist patriotism became paramount for interpretations of the Civil War and Reconstruction. This theme is reflected in the *Knoxville Journal and Tribunes* declaration that the movie “appeals to every good sense of patriotic feeling and is an inspiration to anyone to realize the marvelous heritage which belongs

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<sup>4</sup> “‘The Birth of a Nation,’ Greatest Triumph of Film Art, Opens Staub’s Run,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, October 12, 1915, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584874159>.

<sup>5</sup> “‘The Birth of a Nation,’ *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*.

<sup>6</sup> One of the primary reasons for the quelling of the Klan was the Reconstruction state government under William “Parson” Brownlow, who raised a state guard in 1867 and 1869 to quell the Klan and largely succeeded in doing so; see Ben H. Severance, *Tennessee’s Radical Army: The State Guard and Its Role in Reconstruction, 1867-1869* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005). Severance’s account is the only full monograph study on the Tennessee State Guard during Reconstruction. Long depicted as an arm of Brownlow’s tyranny, Severance demonstrates that the State Guard acted justly and legally to protect African American voters, rather than just as a cruel instrument of Radical power.

<sup>7</sup> For more analyses on the resurgence of the Klan in East Tennessee cities like Johnson City and Bristol see, Tom Lee, *The Tennessee-Virginia Tri Cities: Urbanization in Appalachia, 1900-1950*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005) 116-118.

<sup>8</sup> “‘The Birth of a Nation,’ *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*.



to the American citizen today.”<sup>9</sup> The patriotism in the film lauded by newspapers was a white supremacist patriotism that saw the actions of the Klan as heroic and just for their defense of the Southern racial order, similar to how reconciliationists viewed Confederates. At the same time, the memory of emancipation and African American voting was seen as unpatriotic and, more importantly in this new nationalist memory, a dangerous and failed social experiment.

Not all in East Tennessee enjoyed *The Birth of a Nation*, especially the African American population in Chattanooga, where the largest concentration of African Americans resided in East Tennessee and wielded a considerable amount of political influence. Black Chattanoogaans rightfully recognized that the movie bared an “unholy message of human hate” and held an “unusually powerful appeal” to “racial prejudice.”<sup>10</sup> They further feared that the movie would have a negative effect “upon the friendly relations that exist here between the white and colored people” and subsequently asked that the movie “be barred” from the city.<sup>11</sup> African Americans viewed the second part of the movie that glorified the Klan during Reconstruction as especially dangerous because it would intensify “the prejudice of white people against colored people...these scenes still have power to influence the younger generation in favor of the mob spirit and lynch law.” However, an ordinance existed in the city prohibiting the suppression of any movie not banned by the national board of censors. Thus, the movie remained in the city, despite the wishes of some of the most influential Blacks and whites in the city. Nevertheless, Chattanooga’s African American community correctly predicted the film’s impact. After 1915, East Tennessee increasingly experienced racial violence. Only a few years after the film, the

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Birth of a Nation’ Continues Its Run,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, October 13, 1915, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584874179>.

<sup>10</sup> “‘Birth of a Nation’ as Viewed by Reputable Colored Men,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, October 18, 1915, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/605602128>.

<sup>11</sup> “‘Birth of a Nation,’” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, October 18, 1915.

entire African American population in Unicoi County was expelled by local whites in what is known as the “Erwin Expulsion.”<sup>12</sup> In 1919, Knoxville, long a model for the New South because of the absence of racial violence, experienced a race riot that left an unknown total of dead and was only stopped by the interference of the National Guard.<sup>13</sup>

While the African American population and some influential whites supported the prohibition of the movie, many whites enjoyed the film, especially its interpretation of Reconstruction. An editorial in the *Chattanooga Times* one week after a committee failed to expel the film in the city praised the film for “truthfully and graphically” portraying “one of the most important, saddening and momentous periods in the history of America.”<sup>14</sup> Questioning the position of the censor committee and others who viewed the movie as potentially harmful for race relations, the editorial argued that Northern histories of the war “made their [Southern] fathers and mothers out as criminals and traitors.” The writer then used his own experiences during Reconstruction to justify his views. According to the writer, most whites were disenfranchised in the first election he witnessed, while all Blacks voted. Furthermore, the writer supposedly witnessed the state legislature composed of Blacks and carpetbaggers and claimed that the depiction offered by the film of the era “is not overdrawn.” The “carpetbaggers told the negroes that everything in the south belonged to them, and that the white people should be eliminated, and if necessary, killed.” Thus, these conditions “gave birth to the Ku Klux Klan,” which was “the salvation of the south.” The writer then claimed without any evidence that the

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<sup>12</sup> For an in-depth analysis on the Erwin Expulsion see, Black in Appalachia, “The Erwin Expulsion of 1918,” YouTube Video, 5:56, accessed Nov 12, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xVCONdWEiE&list=LL&index=5>.

<sup>13</sup> Black in Appalachia, “Knoxville’s Red Summer: The Riot of 1919,” YouTube Video, 26:47, September 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qI2cUkhGEY&list=LL&index=3>.

<sup>14</sup> “‘Birth of a Nation’ Teaches Real History: No Good Reason Why Such Picture Should be Suppressed,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, October 24, 1915, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/605602591>.

film depicted every instance he witnessed correctly and displayed the “good and bad side of the negro character.” Concluding his argument, the editorialist proposed that the film would “do more to vindicate the south than anything that has occurred since the civil war.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, while some white East Tennesseans and African Americans recognized the dangers inherent in the film, many white East Tennesseans accepted the film as truth, transforming the memory of Reconstruction in the region.<sup>16</sup>

A nostalgic atmosphere existed across the country, especially so in East Tennessee due to industrialization, which helped *The Birth of a Nation* attain white popular appeal. Greeneville, like the rest of East Tennessee, experienced economic growth with tobacco warehouses, stores, and factories dotting the landscape, as well as logging corporations and others stripping Greene County’s forests to feed the rising industrial and economic order of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> However, the tobacco trade dominated the town and changed the face of Greeneville. Between 1913 and 1916, the town built thirty-one new business buildings in and around downtown with many involved in the tobacco trade and around the Johnson homestead.<sup>18</sup> This is largely because in 1910, Greeneville produced over a million pounds of tobacco, the first time in its history. More importantly, as Tom Lee argues, in 1913 with the production of the “Camel” cigarette, the first blended cigarette, “the future of Burley tobacco and with it the future of Greeneville as a

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<sup>15</sup> “Birth of a Nation,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, October 24, 1915.

<sup>16</sup> John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery, *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013) 2. John David Smith argues that *The Birth of a Nation* and scholarly works by Dunning School historians “dominated the popular understanding of Reconstruction.”

<sup>17</sup> One of Greeneville’s tobacco factories was the Unaka Tobacco Works which produced plug, twist, and smoking tobacco. Greeneville’s rise in tobacco production and trade mirrors that of East Tennessee’s tobacco boom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Tom Lee, “Southern Appalachia’s Nineteenth-Century Bright Tobacco Boom: Industrialization, Urbanization, and the Culture of Tobacco,” *Agricultural History*, 88, no. 2 (2014), 185.

<sup>18</sup> “Passing of the Andy Johnson School,” *The Greeneville Searchlight*, October 19, 1916. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584965925>. This article recounts the school debate in 1914 and how it led to the new school built in Greeneville in 1916.

tobacco market was virtually assured.”<sup>19</sup> Greeneville largely accepted this transformation because its residents could not only escape farm labor and low income, but the tobacco trade could also supplement low wage industrial jobs like textiles.

The effects of industrialization in Greeneville, in which the town became more of a trade center than a village, with tobacco warehouses on every street corner, prompted fears from out-of-town residents on the future of Andrew Johnson sites like the tailor shop and homestead. One Greeneville newspaper attributed the first preservation efforts to the Women’s Patriotic Club of Raleigh. Kathleen Randolph of Raleigh claimed the shop stood “neglected” and was a “rapidly decaying monument to the unassailable dignity and worth of honest toil,” for it was here “like Cincinnatus of old,” Andrew Johnson worked as a mechanic. Randolph noted that the shop was a spot for “many pilgrimages from people of every walk of life,” yet, there had been “no movement looking to the protection and preservation” of the shop.<sup>20</sup> Randolph finished her editorial by including stories of Johnson’s plebian origins and outlook and stories of Johnson tailoring coats for contemporary politicians while ignoring his controversial Reconstruction record, demonstrating a deep respect and value for hardworking, self-made men.

Further fears arose when Andrew Johnson Patterson opted to place the Johnson homestead on the market in December 1919. The vast growth of Greeneville’s tobacco trade had destroyed the section of town in which the homestead was located. Instead of green rolling hills surrounding the homestead, concrete and brick warehouses surrounded the building. The *Greeneville Daily Sun* reported that Patterson sought to sell the property to a tobacco company

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<sup>19</sup> Lee, “Southern Appalachia’s Nineteenth-Century Bright Tobacco Boom,” 199.

<sup>20</sup> Kathleen Randolph, “Andrew Johnson Was a Tailor and a Good One—and He Was Proud of It,” *The Greeneville Searchlight*, September 28, 1916, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584965799/>. Reprinted from the *Raleigh News Observer*.

where they would build a tobacco warehouse on the site of the Johnson home. Because Greeneville held a “pride in having this historic home,” the paper urged the citizens to “take some action looking to the preservation” of the home and Greeneville’s other historic treasures.<sup>21</sup> The state of Tennessee heard the pleas from East Tennesseans and purchased the tailor shop in 1921, bestowing legal custodianship to the Andrew Johnson Mothers’ Club the following year.<sup>22</sup>

The purchase of the tailor shop by the state fostered even greater pride in the town of Greeneville. One newspaper regularly posted a list of items every resident should know, asking, “What year did Andrew Johnson come to Greeneville? What city offices did he hold? What year did he become President? What year did Johnson die? Who owns the National Cemetery where he is buried?” Along with a host of other local historical and social topics, the paper wanted citizens of the town to answer all the questions “accurately and promptly without a great deal of thought.”<sup>23</sup> Tennessee’s purchase of the tailor shop ensured its protection for generations of Tennesseans to see where Johnson began his rise out of poverty. Over the next two years, the state constructed a memorial building out of brick to surround the tailor shop, thus preserving the structure. The dedication of the memorial building stirred excitement within and around the community. One paper noted that not only would it be appropriate that the memorial building’s dedication be on Memorial Day, but the dedication ceremony “planned to make this a red-letter day in the history of Greeneville, when the city county, state and nation will assemble here to do

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<sup>21</sup> “Johnson Home On the Market,” *Greeneville Daily Sun*, December 23, 1919, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584820385>.

<sup>22</sup> Cameron Binkley, *Andrew Johnson National Historic Site Administrative History* (Atlanta, Ga: Cultural Resources, Southeast Region, National Park Service, 2008).5-6. Influential white women within the community, including Andrew J. Patterson’s wife and daughter, ran the Andrew Johnson Mothers’ Club. The club was previously known simply as the Mothers’ Club, until they accepted custodian rights of the tailor shop, in which they changed the name of their club. Before custodianship of the shop, the club regularly met once a month to discuss Bible Studies, town improvements, and historical preservation.

<sup>23</sup> “Know Your Town,” *The Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, October 13, 1922, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584820910>.

honor to Greeneville's most illustrious citizen of all time."<sup>24</sup> Rail companies also benefitted from the event as the Southern Railway and the Southeastern Passenger Association ran special trails from Knoxville, Bristol, and Asheville for the ceremony, providing passengers with lower rates for round trip tickets to attract as many visitors as possible.<sup>25</sup>

On Memorial Day 1923, *The Greeneville Democrat-Sun* published an eight-page newspaper solely dedicated to the memory of Johnson and the memorial dedication. Every town street and "on almost every building tonight is the Red White and Blue, with here and there a bit of Confederate gray." Remarkably, no debates arose, reflecting how much Confederate sentiment had grown in the town that gray was displayed openly.<sup>26</sup> The paper included a list of items the town was proud of: the capital of the Lost State of Franklin, the home of Andrew Johnson, and the spot where General Morgan fell.<sup>27</sup> The paper delighted that now the state "gives tardy recognition to Andrew Johnson" and Tennesseans from across the state who "have come to do honor to the memory of our first citizen."<sup>28</sup> For Greenevillians, Andrew Johnson represented a way to promote themselves to a national audience, proving to the rest of the state and nation that they were still relevant. Demonstrating the growth of the Lost Cause and contempt for Radical Reconstruction, the paper asked visitors to "consider the injustice the South has done him," meaning the charges against Johnson by white Southerners as being a traitor and abolitionist, and to remember the "sacrifice Andrew Johnson made for them [the white South]" during

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<sup>24</sup> "Tailor Shop Dedication On May Thirtieth," *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, April 14, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585395610>.

<sup>25</sup> "Special Trains for 'Andrew Johnson Day,'" *Morristown Gazette Mail*, May 8, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586809815>.

<sup>26</sup> "Johnny Reb Makes Celebration Complete," *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, May 30, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585398384>.

<sup>27</sup> "We Live in Greeneville and We're Proud of it!" *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, May 30, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585398455/>.

<sup>28</sup> "Andrew Johnson," *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, May 30, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585398384>.

Reconstruction. Johnson defended the South from the “fury” of Radical Republicans and kept the region from being “annihilated,” reflecting white fears of race insurrection. More importantly, had Johnson not fought back, “the white people of the South would have been driven from their homes by confiscation of their property, and the armed supremacy of an undeveloped and backward race.” Alluding to Johnson’s Reconstruction record even further, the paper argued that Johnson “demonstrated time and again that he was the friend of the South,” and not one “false” to the land of his birth.<sup>29</sup>

Quincy Marshall O’Keefe, editor of the *Greeneville-Democrat Sun* and member of the Andrew Johnson Mothers’ Club, wrote the last article in the paper. Because her father, John Coleman Marshall, was a captain in the Confederacy, she was “by every tradition, environment, inheritance, and sympathy, a part of the Confederacy.”<sup>30</sup> O’Keefe implored former Confederates to remember that Johnson “was not false to the heavenly vision” to save the white South and preserve a white man’s government. O’Keefe even credited Martha Patterson for her views on Reconstruction, claiming that Andrew told Martha that he intended to veto the “bills passed by Congress to utterly undo the people of the prostrate South,” clearly referring to the Freedmen’s Bureau, Civil Rights, and Military Reconstruction acts. Lastly, O’Keefe wanted her readers to know that “America cannot forget her fate hung in the balance.” For a “second Haiti had by this time spread between the North and West, a second Haiti but many times magnified, a population that would have become the plaything of every schism of and assault that Socialism chose to make on good government.” The “second Haiti” O’Keefe alluded to reflected white fears from

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<sup>29</sup> “Andrew Johnson,” *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, May 30, 1923.

<sup>30</sup> “A. Johnson, Tailor,” *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, May 30, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585398455/>; For an overview of O’Keefe’s life see “Biography: Quincy Marshall O’Keefe,” *Greeneville Sun*, July 1, 1979, [https://www.greenevillesun.com/features/biography-quincy-marshall-o-keefe/article\\_10223e20-8750-11e6-90cd-ebf5b061dc8f.html](https://www.greenevillesun.com/features/biography-quincy-marshall-o-keefe/article_10223e20-8750-11e6-90cd-ebf5b061dc8f.html).

the antebellum days through the 1920s and 1930s of a massive race war that would resemble the successful slave uprising on Haiti at the end of the eighteenth century. Moreover, to further cast Reconstruction as unnatural, O’Keefe illustrated a centralized socialist government implementing racial equality, an especially acute fear during the Red Scare of the 1920s. Thus, films like *The Birth of a Nation* tapped into this fear which only made the focus on race even more potent and volatile. It was Andrew Johnson, the tailor, who rescued “them [the white South] from their sins.”<sup>31</sup> What this sentence captures is how by the 1920s, using the false pretense of patriotism, Confederate sympathizers argued that although in hindsight it was better that the Union remained intact, while simultaneously arguing that Reconstruction was the most unnatural and corrupt mistake in U.S. history—Andrew Johnson fit this argument almost perfectly for his stand against secession and fight against Reconstruction.

The event was immensely popular, and all living descendants of Johnson attended; even William Johnson, son of Dolly Johnson, the first enslaved woman Andrew Johnson purchased, though this was likely an attempt to depict the loyal slave image. The largest event ever held in the town up to that time, fifteen thousand visitors and Governor Austin Peay attended the ceremony. Each of Greeneville’s citizens appointed themselves “a committee to receive the guests.”<sup>32</sup> The local American Legion chapter and Boy Scouts helped visitors with questions and directions. Ironically, the dedication day was drenched in rain, compelling the town to host most of the celebration at Bernard’s Tobacco Warehouse No. 2, the same warehouse in which African Americans celebrated August 8<sup>th</sup>.<sup>33</sup> Prominent speakers such as Congressman Reece lauded Johnson’s memory as an inspiration “for the youth without great advantages,” if they have

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<sup>31</sup> “A. Johnson, Tailor,” *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, May 30, 1923.

<sup>32</sup> “Tailor Shop Dedication Marks Epoch in County’s History,” *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, May 31, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585398466/>.

<sup>33</sup> “Tailor Shop Dedication Marks Epoch in County’s History,” *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, May 31, 1923.



“ambition and a determination to rise.” Reece further boasted that Johnson’s principles of loyalty and “intense Americanism,” meaning Johnson’s patriotism, had been “absorbed by his [Johnson’s] section.” Reece argued that this was demonstrated in how East Tennesseans like himself had answered the nation’s “calls to arm” in the Great War. Reece used Johnson’s early notions of nationalism and ardent patriotism to argue that East Tennesseans absorbed those values which compelled them to heed the nation’s call and volunteer in the First World War.<sup>34</sup>

Townpeople delighted in how much press the event enjoyed. The *Greeneville Democrat-Sun* advertised to its town that news of the ceremony spread across the country and the Associated Press meaning “Greeneville received more advertising than she has had in all the years of her history put together.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, newspapers from across the country reported on the event. The *Charlotte Observer* took special notice of the event since Johnson was born in Raleigh and the paper delighted in how “fully fifteen thousand persons” attended the event.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, papers from Atlanta, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and as far away as Ogden, Utah reported on the event.<sup>37</sup>

The tailor shop ceremony represented the renewed utility of Andrew Johnson’s memory on the state level. Whereas during the last decades of the nineteenth century favorable memory of Johnson isolated itself to East Tennessee, patriotism fostered by the Great War and the growth of a Lost Cause memory of Reconstruction that praised white nationalism produced a favorable memory of Johnson across Tennessee. As demonstrated, patriotism was crucial to the memory of

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<sup>34</sup> “Tailor Shop Dedication Marks Epoch in County’s History,” *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, May 31, 1923.

<sup>35</sup> “Hon. J.W. Howard Receiving Congratulations Today,” *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, May 31, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585398480/>.

<sup>36</sup> “Thousands Witness Dedication of Andrew Johnson Memorial,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 31, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/616645907>.

<sup>37</sup> “Andrew Johnson Shop Memorial is Dedicated,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 31, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/26944428>; *Harrisburg Telegraph*, May 31, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/41461028>; “Pres. Johnson’s Shop Preserved,” *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, May 31, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/27070024>.

Johnson, evidenced in Reece's assertion that Johnson's patriotism descended the generations, making them ready for World War I. However, the unifying aspect of Johnson's memory for whites during this period was Johnson's white nationalism. Like *The Birth of a Nation*, East Tennesseans viewed Johnson's attempts to prevent African American social and political advancement as noble and patriotic, for any attempt to implement racial equality represented the twin evils of white Southern society—centralized power and racial equality.

Under the care of the Andrew Johnson Mothers' Club, the tailor shop became a communal shrine and a marker of Greeneville's place in a vastly changing and expanding world. Shortly before the Mothers' Club attained custodianship of the shop, they invited other women's clubs in the community such as the Cherokee Club, the Businesswomen's Club, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), the Eastern Star, and the Women' Auxiliary of the American Legion to meet for the planning of the tailor shop dedication and afterwards advertise the town as the home of Johnson.<sup>38</sup> The Mothers' Club used the shop for communal events and holidays, even creating two holidays, Andrew Johnson Day on August 26, the day in which Johnson first arrived in the town in 1826, followed by Andrew Johnson Tailor Shop Day celebrated on November 6, though it is unclear why the town chose that date. The club regularly posted advertisements in regional newspapers inviting East Tennesseans to "make a pilgrimage to the 'Tailor Shop,'" reflecting the romantic sentimental attachment to the memory of Andrew Johnson.<sup>39</sup>

The chair of the Mothers' Club—Martha Johnson Patterson, wife of Andrew Johnson Patterson—often led the club's events along with her daughter, Margaret. At events like Andrew

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<sup>38</sup> "Mother's Club to Entertain Other Organizations," *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, April 2, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585394619>.

<sup>39</sup> "Invitations Issued," *Bristol Herald Courier*, August 25, 1929, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585433971>.

Johnson Tailor Shop Day, the women lectured on Johnson's history, especially as a "glorious inspiration of such a life to any American boy who has the same privilege of advancing himself to the highest office in the gift of man," repeating the dominant ideas surrounding Johnson such as a hard work ethos that leads to social mobility.<sup>40</sup> The Mothers' Club celebrated each of their events in patriotic décor, especially at the 1927 Andrew Johnson Day celebration.

*Defenders of Johnson's Memory: John Trotwood Moore and Andrew Johnson Patterson*

Shortly after the tailor shop dedication, Tennessee State Librarian and Archivist John Trotwood Moore began publishing popular Lost Cause poems, novels, and historical sketches on famous Tennesseans in local and national newspapers like *The Saturday Evening Post*. Born in 1858 to a prominent Alabama planter family, the federal government arrested his father during Military Reconstruction and removed him from his office as Judge of the First Judicial Circuit of Alabama for refusing to seat African Americans on juries. Moore admired his father and hung his father's removal papers on the wall of his library for it was "the only degree, the only diploma" he wanted to pass to his son."<sup>41</sup> Appointed Tennessee's State Librarian and Archivist in 1919, Moore acted as a spokesman for the Old South, defending a Lost Cause vision of loyal and faithful slaves, paternalistic masters, and social harmony. Fred Arthur Bailey contends that Moore "dedicated his ebullient personality, his unflinching energy and his evangelistic zeal to the cause of a distinctive historiography defined and dictated by the South's upper classes."<sup>42</sup> According to Bailey, what made Moore so appealing to popular audiences was his "blended style of a novelist with the musings of a historian and the rage of a reformer to produce what he

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<sup>40</sup> "Andrew Johnson Tailor Shop Day Celebrated by Mother Club," *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, November 7, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585405589>.

<sup>41</sup> Fred Arthur Bailey, "John Trotwood Moore and the Patrician Cult of the New South," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 1, (Spring 1999) 17.

<sup>42</sup> Bailey, "John Trotwood Moore and the Patrician Cult of the New South," 16.

[Moore] coined ‘historionized fiction.’”<sup>43</sup> When writing of the Civil War era, Moore argued that Radical Republicans punished the white South with the humiliation of restricting its racial hierarchy and social order. Moore regularly wrote of Andrew Johnson, whom he admired as a lifelong Democrat and defender of the South’s social order during Reconstruction. Moore’s admiration of Johnson demonstrated how the memory of Johnson had shifted to white nationalist hero. Had Johnson supported civil rights, it is likely that Old South patricians like Moore would have damned him as a traitor and abolitionist, just as they had William Brownlow.

One of Moore’s first attempts to popularize the memory of Andrew Johnson was when he published W.E. McElwee’s manuscript in 1923.<sup>44</sup> Loaded with historical inaccuracies designed to make Johnson more heroic and appealing, McElwee claimed that a deep state conspiracy existed to execute Mary Surratt, one of those convicted in the wake of Lincoln’s assassination, and had Johnson interfered he faced execution himself “and a riot that would have probably ended in war.” If Johnson had removed troops from the South, “the order would not have been obeyed and it would have precipitated the contest with Congress which finally came.” If Johnson truly did argue these positions, it is likely due to his attempts to win over ex-Confederates and to cast the Radicals as the true threat to the racial hierarchy. Moore argued that the manuscript would clear up misconceptions about Johnson surrounding Surratt and troop removal from the South. By publicizing a false memory, Moore accelerated the transition process for Lost Causers across the state and country to remember Johnson favorably, for most viewed his execution of Surratt as unjust and vindictive and that Johnson personally failed to remove federal troops from the South.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>44</sup> “Story Last Days of President Johnson,” *Chattanooga News*, May 21, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/603408548>, McElwee engaged in a conversation with Andrew Johnson on July 29, 1875, before Johnson arrived in Greeneville.

Meanwhile, one of the first mentions of Moore in Greeneville newspapers was his effort with Tennessee's Department of Education to foster "love and reverence for the State Flag and State's history" with a poem dedicated to Tennessee's history. One stanza in the poem attributed the three stars on Tennessee's flag as "three hero-stars that led the fight, Their souls with Courage steel'd: And one was Jackson's, one was Polk's, and one was Johnson's shield."<sup>45</sup> What connected the three Presidents besides the fact that they were Tennesseans was their unyielding commitment to the Democratic party, conservatism, and nationalism. Tying in reconciliation and Tennessee's revolutionary past, Moore wrote that Tennessee's stars were within a "circle for Unity" and they "rose above King's Mountain heights," as Tennesseans fought with their flag from New Orleans to "Mexico to Flanders' Field." In 1924, between November 6 and November 8, 1924, the Tennessee chapter of the DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) met in Greeneville to dedicate a memorial at Tusculum College, marking it as the oldest chartered institution west of the Alleghenies.<sup>46</sup> Although Moore addressed the dedication ceremony, no surviving words exist of his speech on the 6<sup>th</sup>. Nevertheless, shortly after Moore's visit to Greeneville at the end of 1924, he began corresponding with Andrew Johnson Patterson.

Moore and Patterson began their correspondence when Austin Powers Foster, Assistant State Librarian and Archivist, produced a biographical draft on former U.S. Senator Joseph S. Fowler. Foster claimed that Fowler's vote against impeachment saved Johnson from removal and Foster later became a political enemy of Johnson's in the 1870s. Patterson wrote directly to Moore claiming that Foster went "out of his way to attack the memory of Andrew Johnson in his

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<sup>45</sup> "The Flag of Tennessee," *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, November 20, 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585297637>.

<sup>46</sup> "Prominent Speakers from Over State Will Come to Greeneville for State D.A.R. Conference," *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, October 24, 1924, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585424517>.

attempt to show Andrew Johnson an ingrate.”<sup>47</sup> The original intent for a study into Senator Fowler in 1925 had been Congress’s request for the burial location of Fowler to finish its own biographies of its members. Rather than reply to Congress’s simple question, Foster “went out of his way to make a lot of misstatements.” How Patterson obtained the draft is questionable, nevertheless, he circled a section in the draft in which Foster claimed Fowler “married Maria Louisa Embry, a widowed daughter of President Andrew Johnson, and was a member of the Senate at the time of the impeachment of the President, whom by his [Fowler’s] vote, he saved from conviction.”<sup>48</sup> Patterson argued to Moore that Fowler “was elected to the Senate with Andrew Johnson’s aid” and “Fowler had no more right to claim his vote saved Andrew Johnson from impeachment, than Henderson or other Republicans who voted the same way.” What chiefly angered Patterson was Foster’s false claim that Senator Fowler “married the daughter or any relative of Andrew Johnson.” Patterson apologized for the lengthy letter but he felt “outraged at the Foster statements.” The last surviving grandchild felt acutely proud of his grandfather and was surprised that Moore had an assistant “so ignorant of history, and who would try to vent some animus on the memory of Andrew Johnson.”<sup>49</sup>

During this period, Greenevillians increasingly realized the profit potential for advertising their town as a historical tourist destination. In one editorial, a citizen argued that by renaming Greeneville’s streets to names that have historical significance would be “the first step toward being a real city.”<sup>50</sup> By renaming the streets, citizens would preserve, perpetuate, and “call attention to the historical traditions which cling around the atmosphere of Greeneville.” The

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<sup>47</sup> Andrew Johnson Patterson to John T. Moore, 19 October 1925, Box 16, File 5, John Trotwood Moore Papers, 1849-1957, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

<sup>48</sup> A.P. Foster Biographical Draft of Senator Fowler, Box 16, File 5, John Trotwood Moore Papers, 1849-1957, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

<sup>49</sup> Andrew Johnson Patterson to John T. Moore, 19 October 1925.

<sup>50</sup> “Movement to Lift City from Small Town Class,” *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, March 14, 1924, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585310988>.

editorial claimed that every visitor to the town was fascinated to discover the town was the capitol of Franklin and many made “pilgrimages to the tailor shop and tomb of the Great Commoner, Andrew Johnson.” Despite the state’s memorial building, “his native town has done practically nothing to show her appreciation of him.” It would be “fitting” to honor Johnson by renaming the street where the tailor shop was located to “Johnson Street” because “every hick town has a Main and Depot Street.”<sup>51</sup> While efforts at renaming city streets failed, the Andrew Johnson highway did succeed, along with the Andrew Johnson Hotel in Knoxville, built in the mid-1920s to accommodate visitors from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Jack Neely argues that the Hotel’s original name was the Tennessee Terrace, but planners decided to change the name to the Andrew Johnson Hotel after the release of the McElwee manuscript, which portrayed Johnson as a “self-made American hero” in the 1920s.<sup>52</sup> The phenomena of naming important landmarks after Andrew Johnson in the 1920s represent the vast changes in sentiment toward the former President and Reconstruction, in which Johnson now not only had a political and social appeal, mainly the ghost of Reconstruction, in which African Americans voted and federal troops were stationed in the South, but a popular appeal as well. The popular appeal of Johnson is mirrored in the popular memory of Reconstruction like *The Birth of a Nation*, in which mass white audiences lauded the bravery of the Ku Klux Klan and Andrew Johnson for fighting against Radical Reconstruction.

*Jim Crow and the White Popular Memory of Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction, 1925-1935*

Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, East Tennessee experienced what Kelli Nelson describes as a “conservative backlash to the changes occurring in the 1920s.”<sup>53</sup> The death

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<sup>51</sup> “Movement to Lift City from Small Town Class,” *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, March 14, 1924.

<sup>52</sup> Jack Neely, “Gay Street's Wallflower: The Andrew Johnson Hotel,” Knoxville History Project, May 8, 2018, <https://knoxvillehistoryproject.org/andrew-johnson-hotel/>.

<sup>53</sup> Nelson, “On the Imperishable Face of Granite,” 81.

and misery that World War I wrought destroyed any optimism born out of the Progressive Era, leading many Appalachian whites to search for traditional social, racial, and gender roles. Although East Tennessee had largely industrialized by this period, most factories did not provide the economic prosperity they promised and did not provide a comfortable living wage, committing many families to “a life of struggle, hardship, and despair.”<sup>54</sup> More despair fell upon rural mountaineers who had moved to urban areas in search of jobs only to lose their former independence and land. Nelson further argues that white Appalachians, seemingly losing their identity to outside forces, began to focus on issues that they could control: religion, family, and racial stability.<sup>55</sup> The attempts to control the three bedrocks of white Appalachian society demonstrated itself in the ways in which families concentrated on Christianity and a familial structure in which women were subservient to their husbands who acted as the breadwinner and protector. At the same time, African Americans faced intimidation and violence if they did not respect the status quo designed by white supremacists. Lastly, the search for traditional religious values in East Tennessee during this period is further demonstrated through the “Monkey Trial” in 1925 when the state of Tennessee ruled the teaching of evolution in the state illegal.<sup>56</sup> The search for traditional values in East Tennessee is also shown in how Greenevillians and East Tennesseans remembered the Civil War during this period. According to Nelson, the United Daughters of the Confederacy’s (UDC) romantic view of courageous Confederate soldiers,

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<sup>54</sup> Ronald Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), xxiv.

<sup>55</sup> Nelson, “On the Imperishable Face of Granite,” 81.

<sup>56</sup> In March 1925, Tennessee passed the Butler Act into law which forbade teaching evolution in state public schools. Shortly after the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and John Thomas Scopes agreed to challenge the new law. The case made national headlines largely because of who Clarence Darrow, Scopes’s attorney, defended Scope against in court—three-time presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan. Despite the defense offered by Darrow, a jury decided to convict Scopes on July 21, 1925. See Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).



dignified Southern women, and loyal slaves “were images that fit Appalachian needs and helped white citizens find power in history where none existed in the present.”<sup>57</sup> Andrew Johnson also fit Appalachian needs and helped white Appalachians find power in history during this period. The memory of a white nationalistic hero who rose out of poverty through hard work and his own ability, then stood against disunion, centralized power, and racial equality served as a powerful tool for white Appalachians.

1926 was a crucial year for the development of a popular memory of Johnson across Tennessee, beginning with the centennial celebration of his arrival in Greeneville. Organized and led by the Andrew Johnson Mothers’ Club, the guardians of Johnson’s memory within the town, residents assembled at the tailor shop “to do honor to his [Johnson’s] memory.”<sup>58</sup> Dr. Daniel A. Cannady of Tusculum College gave the keynote oration on “Tennessee’s Place in History.” Reflecting the growing theme of patriotism surrounding Johnson and East Tennessee, Cannady gave instances “where Tennesseans had come to the front and by their undaunted courage and rugged strength of character, assisted the nation in meeting great crises.” Cannady alluded to the patriots of Kings Mountain who “turned the tide of the Revolution” to the Great War where “Tennesseans played such an important part in breaking the Hindenburg line,” demonstrating the nationalist wave in the region following the first World War. Although the speech focused on Tennessee’s history, that history centered around Johnson, who Cannady “declared a true patriot, a true friend of the South,” and “a man of invincible courage.”<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, although a large portion of the speech was dedicated to Johnson and the military prowess of East Tennesseans,

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<sup>57</sup> Nelson, “On the Imperishable Face of Granite,” 82-83.

<sup>58</sup> “Centennial of Johnson’s Arrival in Greeneville is Celebrated Here Tuesday,” *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, October 6, 1926, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585404043>.

<sup>59</sup> “Centennial of Johnson’s Arrival in Greeneville is Celebrated Here Tuesday,” *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, October 6, 1926, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585404043>.

Cannady did not address the Civil War. Instead, Cannady alluded more to Johnson's Reconstruction record, arguing that Johnson was in the "most difficult place an American statesman has ever been placed in." Cannady's speech demonstrates the memory of Johnson in East Tennessee, a powerful image of patriotism, hard-work, white supremacy, and conservatism. Crucially, the same themes Cannady declared became mainstream across the country in just four years.

Shortly after the centennial of Johnson's arrival in Greeneville, the Supreme Court, on October 25, 1926, decided that the Tenure of Office Act was unconstitutional, and that the President has the absolute right to remove cabinet officials.<sup>60</sup> This decision exonerated Johnson on the national level in the eyes of many whites in the late 1920s. Not long after the Supreme Court decision, Dunning School historian Claude G. Bowers wrote to Moore for information on Andrew Johnson for his upcoming book. In 1927, Moore began sending magazines articles and documents concerning Johnson to Bowers. One of which was the "vandal attack of that senatorial Ananias, [Senator William M.] Stewart," who he compared to the Biblical character, Ananias, who was struck dead because he lied. Moore also included a copy of Walter P. Brownlow's reply to Stewart in 1908, which Moore described as the "cleanest knock-out" dealt to Stewart's slanderous charges.<sup>61</sup>

Demonstrating how the memory of Andrew Johnson was spreading outside of Tennessee, Raleigh, North Carolina, the birthplace of Andrew Johnson, as shown in the previous chapter, kept a watchful eye on all developments of Andrew Johnson. During the spring of 1928, Robert

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<sup>60</sup> "Myers v. United States," Legal Information Institute (Cornell Law School), accessed January 10, 2022, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/272/52>.

<sup>61</sup> John T. Moore to Claude G. Bowers, 27 June 1927, Box 15, Folder 6, John Trotwood Moore Papers, 1849-1957, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

W. Winston, a North Carolinian which brought increased attention to Johnson in Raleigh, published *Andrew Johnson: Plebeian and Patriot*.<sup>62</sup> Winston dedicated the prefatory note to Andrew J. Patterson who gave him “free access to President Johnson’s old home and to his heirlooms.” Without Patterson, Winston would not “have discovered the real flesh and blood Andrew Johnson.”<sup>63</sup> Raleigh newspapers praised the book for its “attempts to restore the reputation of an American political leader who suffered the curious fate of dying hated by thousands of people in the North and South.” The paper also remarked correctly how Winston’s text “is the first of a number of biographies of Johnson” in production, giving special emphasis on Claude Bowers, “who is at work on a study of the Reconstruction period, and will treat Johnson in detail there, and with very much the same spirit as Winston, that is, as a man who has long been completely misunderstood, and who will eventually achieve a place in American history by the sides of Jackson and Jefferson,” the two heroes of the Democratic party, small government, and white supremacy.<sup>64</sup> In September of the same year, the *News and Observer* reprinted Claude Bowers’s review of Winston’s text in the *New York Weekly*. In the review, Bowers, in language similar to Moore, criticized the early historiography of Johnson as “the propaganda of partisan hatred,” but praised Winston for producing an “unbiased history.”<sup>65</sup> Bowers gave specific credit to the nationalization of Johnson’s memory to the Supreme Court decision that “vindicated him [Johnson] on most of the contentions which made him anathema to

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<sup>62</sup> Robert W. Winston, *Andrew Johnson, Plebeian and Patriot* (New York: Henry Holt, 1928).

<sup>63</sup> Winston, *Andrew Johnson*, vi. Winston used a lot of the Andrew Johnson papers in possession of the Patterson family.

<sup>64</sup> “First Full Life of Johnson is Out,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 11, 1928, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/651051488>.

<sup>65</sup> The praising of “unbiased” histories reflects the drive by East Tennessee’s UDC to educate the region with Lost Cause history. Kelli Nelson found that these women concentrated on providing Lost Cause books to libraries and schools “to ensure youth’s access to their versions of Southern history,” as well as monuments to serve as educational tools. See Nelson, “On the Imperishable Face of Granite,” 83.

the hypocrites and corruptionists who sought his impeachment and crucifixion has made an impression” on the favorable memory of Johnson. Demonstrating Bowers’s and Winston’s political bias, Bowers praised Winston for proving Johnson “one of the most courageous and consistent Democrats in our history...He was a Jeffersonian with Jacksonian courage.”<sup>66</sup>

Meanwhile, at the beginning of September 1928, the city of Raleigh itself contributed to the memory of the Great Commoner, dedicating a tablet marking the birthplace of Johnson within the city. The day before the unveiling of the tablet, the *News and Observer* published an article giving details of the ceremony the next day and a brief history of Johnson. The article addressed that when Johnson died, he was universally hated across the country, yet now “the American public has come to full realization of the unselfish patriotism, the strength and the wisdom with which he labored to bring a Union out of the contending factions immediately after the Civil War.”<sup>67</sup> The paper credited the growing public interest in Johnson to the Supreme Court decision and the biographies coming out on Johnson like Winston’s and Bowers’s upcoming work. “Today he [Johnson] is honored by millions in the North and the South alike,” because Americans now realized that Johnson underwent impeachment solely because “he consistently endeavored to carry out Lincoln’s policy of Reconstruction in the face of a dominant Radical element in Congress set on crushing the South.” Again, we see the power of connecting Johnson to Lincoln to seem more justified in his course. The paper further praised the city and the state for rising to “proudly to acclaim his birth in its capitol city—a part of the nationwide wave of public sentiment that has raised Andrew Johnson to a place among its heroes.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> “Bowers Reviews Winston’s Book,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, September 9, 1928, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/651030856>.

<sup>67</sup> Bess Davenport Thompson, “Raleigh Honors Once Truant Apprentice Boy Who Became President of the Nation,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, September 2, 1928, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/651029615>.

<sup>68</sup> Thompson, “Raleigh Honors Once Truant Apprentice Boy Who Became President of the Nation,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, September 2, 1928.

Just one day after the tablet dedication, the Andrew Johnson Memorial Commission in Raleigh, who raised the funds for the tablet, invited descendants of Andrew Johnson to discuss restoring the birthplace of Johnson. Descendants such as Andrew J. Patterson and his daughter Margaret, and Johnson's great-grandchildren, Martha Landstreet Willingham, and Ralph M. Phinney, all attended the meeting, as they had attended the tablet ceremony the day before. Mrs. Josephus Daniels had a direct link with the Johnson descendants and "claimed it was her privilege" to welcome the family of Johnson since "it was her grandfather, Governor Jonathan Worth, who welcomed President Johnson to Raleigh when he visited here in 1867." The planners decided to restore the birthplace home and convert it to a library and museum of Johnsonian documents and furniture donated to them by Johnson's family.<sup>69</sup> The tablet dedication and the plans to restore Johnson's birthplace demonstrate that the ideas first espoused by East Tennesseans were now no longer isolated to the mountains of Tennessee; rather, the memory of Andrew Johnson as the heroic defender of the white South and Lincoln's Reconstruction policies were now mainstream. With the white supremacist memory of Andrew Johnson now immensely popular, the tablet dedication also demonstrates the increasing drive to turn Johnson's memory into a profit through historical tourism.

Although scholarly writers like Robert Winston produced accounts favorable to Johnson, Moore was instrumental in the nationalization of the memory of Johnson. Aside from offering advice to historians like Bowers, one of the most impactful defenses of Johnson was Moore's use of popular newspapers like *The New York Times* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. In January 1927, Moore published an article for *The New York Times*. In this article, Moore described how

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<sup>69</sup> "Plan to Restore Johnson's House," *Raleigh News and Observer*, September 4, 1928, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/651030013>.

the Tennessee State Museum had in its possession a coat tailored by the former President while governor for a fellow self-made politician.<sup>70</sup> Moore also used Johnson's own words to illustrate his rise from "indentured apprentice, journeyman, and then the proprietor of my own shop," reflecting Johnson's plebian pride and work ethic. Still, Moore was dissatisfied. In a letter to Andrew J. Patterson, Moore wrote that he "was greatly disappointed" in the *Times* article "as they cut it just exactly half in two, leaving out the most important, my vindication of him [Johnson] politically and the Supreme Court's opinion." He further claimed to Patterson that had he known the paper would cut his vindication of Johnson, he would not have released it.<sup>71</sup>

Moore got the chance to voice his interpretation of Johnson fully in an article in the *Saturday Evening Post*. The article expanded the popular memory of Andrew Johnson by reaching millions of readers in a common platform—popular magazines, rather than scholarly published books. The *Saturday Evening Post* entertained an estimated three million subscribers with perhaps up to ten million who did not subscribe but read the paper anyway.<sup>72</sup> Moore illustrated the early years of Johnson's life with an early twentieth century view that believed "environment wields the heaviest mallet that hammers out the statues of our souls," and since Johnson was "a slave-bound boy for six years to a journeying tailor" he held a deep contempt "for those he termed aristocrats." Although Moore himself was a member of the South's patrician class, he praised "Johnson's pride in proclaiming that he was a plebian is only equaled by his contempt for the class he called the aristocrats."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> "President's Coat Kept in Museum," *New York Times*, January 2, 1927, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1927/01/02/96628868.html?pageNumber=168>.

<sup>71</sup> John T. Moore to Andrew J. Patterson, 1 February 1927, Box 12, Folder 2, John Trotwood Moore Papers, 1849-1957, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

<sup>72</sup> *The Neosho Times*, May 2, 1929, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/2166908>.

<sup>73</sup> John Trotwood Moore, "The Rail-Splitter's Running Mate," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 30, 1929, 24.

Rehearsing now dominant themes surrounding Johnsonian memory, Moore argued that Johnson “stood impeachment, ostracism and ruin rather than betray his own and Lincoln's principles.”<sup>74</sup> The idea that Johnson tried enforcing Lincoln’s Reconstruction policies was vastly important for the memory of Andrew Johnson. By linking Johnson to Lincoln, Moore and others praised Johnson for his association with Lincoln, a key reconciliationist and patriotic element of the time, while also undermining the image of a vindictive and cruel Johnson through ties to the fatherly and conciliatory Lincoln. Ironically, despite Moore and other writers’ praise for Johnson being a self-made man, Moore never bestowed that credit upon Lincoln who was also undeniably self-made. Moore did applaud Lincoln’s racial views arguing that “though Johnson owned slaves and Lincoln did not, even on this question which precipitated the war, despite their differing parties and environments, they held the same views.” According to Moore, both Lincoln and Johnson viewed Blacks as political and social inferiors. Furthermore, by attempting to carry out Lincoln’s Reconstruction plan, the Radicals impeached Johnson and “walked the red-heated plowshares of hate.”<sup>75</sup>

Taking the Lincoln and Johnson myth further, Moore argued that both Lincoln and Johnson were martyrs—“Lincoln, for the cause; Johnson a martyr to Lincoln.”<sup>76</sup> Because the Radicals crucified Johnson, Moore argued that “Booth's bullet may have been Immortality's ministering angel to the martyred President.” Although Johnson’s memory had long been associated with that of Lincoln, like Reverend Jones’s biography of Johnson, Moore’s article pushed that memory to the mainstream to where it would be adopted by Dunning School historians like Claude Bowers. Moore argued that the horrors of Radical Reconstruction justified

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<sup>74</sup> Moore, “The Rail-Splitter’s Running Mate,” 24.

<sup>75</sup> Moore, “The Rail-Splitter’s Running Mate,” 25.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

Johnson's policies arguing that had Johnson succeeded, there would have been "no military rule for the next decade in the South, no satrap government; no infamous and corrupt era of Reconstruction; no Force Bill in its attempt to place 'black heels on white necks,' no Iron-clad Oath disfranchising white Anglo-Saxon for negro domination, no Ku Klux, no Solid South, no half century of hate and bloody shirts."<sup>77</sup> For Moore and other white Americans during the 1920s, an acute racial paranoia existed largely due to the First World War which convinced African Americans to fight for their rights at home as well. Because the fear of Reconstruction was especially acute, Moore focused his ire on the Radicals and African Americans while praising white conservative Anglo Saxons and Andrew Johnson.

By presenting Johnson as a sober, heroic defender of the white South, the Constitution, and Lincoln's policies, Moore established the memory of Andrew Johnson nationally for the next ten years. Moore's social upbringing and the eras in which he lived are also reflected in his praise for Johnson. Moore craved the image of an idealized antebellum South, and in order to achieve this aim, Moore became an ardent advocate for lynching, the ultimate symbol for white racial control over African Americans. Fred A. Bailey argues that Moore's other great enemy was soulless Yankee capitalism.<sup>78</sup> Johnson, the defender of the white South and white Southern labor, represented a twin defender of Anglo-Saxon purity and economic dominance, which is why he praised Johnson so deeply. Though Rev. Jones had already published a biography on Johnson, it was Moore who had the bigger platform with popular newspaper articles in the *Saturday Evening Post* and *New York Times*. The reach of the *Post* article was far-flung. One Missouri paper argued that the article did "justice to a statesman of commanding genius

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>78</sup> Bailey, "John Trotwood Moore and the Patrician Cult of the New South," 25.



and...will remove prejudice from the minds of thousands of people.”<sup>79</sup> When writing to Andrew J. Patterson a month after the publication of the *Post* article, Moore expressed his delight with the paper for allowing him twice as much space as regular articles. Still, he was disappointed that the paper did not air his views on “Parson Brownlow...the meanest scalawag that ever inflicted the South with his fanatical policies,” but at least “they treated me fairly well on Grant.”<sup>80</sup> In reply to Moore, Patterson offered his sincere thanks for Moore’s “magnificent defense of Andrew Johnson...the best defense ever published.”<sup>81</sup>

Moore himself was surprised by the vast support for his article. In a letter to Claude Bowers shortly after publication, Moore wrote “I expected a lot of knocks, especially from the irreconcilable among my own people [meaning white Southerners/Tennesseans], but was never more surprised than at the reception this article was given all over the United States...even here in Tennessee from friends of mine whose grandsires Andy put in the penitentiary for preaching secession.” Moore went on to explain to Bowers that the chief reason for his letter was “to tell you that if the public’s reception of my article is any indication of the popular sentiment now turning toward Johnson you should have no hesitancy in hurrying up your book.”<sup>82</sup>

Moore was correct. The public did receive Bowers’s account favorably, and it dominated the historiography of Reconstruction and Andrew Johnson for the next thirty years. Its interpretation still exists in the popular memory of Andrew Johnson in East Tennessee today.

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<sup>79</sup> *The Neosho Times*, May 2, 1929, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/2166908>.

<sup>80</sup> John T. Moore to Andrew J. Patterson, 1 April 1929, Box 12, File 2, John Trotwood Moore Papers, 1849-1957, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

<sup>81</sup> Andrew J. Patterson to John T. Moore, 29 April 1929, Box 12, File 2, John Trotwood Moore Papers, 1849-1957, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

<sup>82</sup> John T. Moore to Claude G. Bowers, 9 May 1929, Box 15, File 6, John Trotwood Moore Papers, 1849-1957, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville. Just two months after his defense of Johnson, John Trotwood Moore died. East Tennessee newspapers praised Moore for “his chief love of the Old South” and publications of Tennessean heroes like Andrew Jackson and Andrew Johnson. See, “Historian and Archivist Dies,” *Knoxville Journal*, May 11, 1929, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586405609/>.

Claude Bowers's *The Tragic Era* received favorable reviews from across the state. The Nashville *Tennessean* applauded Bowers for showing Reconstruction "for what it was—a conspiracy of mad partisans [Radical Republicans] willing to go any length for power," which included "negro suffrage...confiscation of Southern property, subjection of the states under military rule." Further praise was bestowed upon Bowers for "vindicating Andrew Johnson" and for demonstrating how "within eight hours of Lincoln's death a caucus of Radicals was framing plans 'to rid the government of the Lincoln influence.'" <sup>83</sup> As we have seen, it became crucial to connect Johnson with Lincoln to show that Radical Republicans were the real traitors. Moreover, tying Johnson to Lincoln also tied Johnson to the myth of Lincoln's generosity which not only repaired the memory of Johnson in the South but Lincoln as well, since many white Southerners by this time believed that if Lincoln had lived Radical Reconstruction would not have happened. In East Tennessee, the *Bristol Herald Courier* lauded the text as "among the half-dozen best books of the year. It is brilliant, dramatic, and above all, trustworthy." <sup>84</sup> Despite Bowers's account being over-friendly towards Johnson, the *Chattanooga News* argued that Bowers could "have done even more justice to perhaps the bravest and most devoted exponent of the Constitution who ever sat in the seat of Washington." Still, the paper credited Bowers for his treatment of Johnson which "reveals much of the flavor of the tailor statesman's greatness." <sup>85</sup>

What linked all of the reviews of Bowers's text together was their universal praise for his Dunning School interpretation of Reconstruction that cast Radical Republicans such as Thaddeus Stevens and Benjamin Butler as crazed partisans bent on humiliating the white South with racial

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<sup>83</sup> Donald Davidson, "A Conspiracy of Partisans Willing to do Anything," *The Tennessean*, September 15, 1929, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/169931089>.

<sup>84</sup> Nelson P. Lawrence, "The Tragic Era, Claude G. Bowers, Among Six Best Books of Year, Nathaniel Lawrence's Review says," *Bristol Herald Courier*, October 13, 1929, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585752878>. Lawrence taught English at the University of Virginia.

<sup>85</sup> "'The Tragic Era' Recalls Time When Hate was King," *Chattanooga News*, September 14, 1929, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/604048072>.

mixing and African American suffrage. At the heart of this interpretation lay race, or more precisely, a fear of it. This is demonstrated in the immense popularity and praise of Bowers's work. Like Moore's condemnation of the Radicals and African Americans, Bowers and other Dunning School historians spewed a hatred of Radical Republicans for their attempt to implement a bi-racial democracy and civil rights for African Americans. Naturally, with this hatred of social mixing forced by the federal government, the memory of Johnson also represented a symbol against centralized power. Dunning School historians argued that Reconstruction was the greatest use of centralized power and a drastic mistake that almost ended in the destruction of the Constitution. This interpretation of Reconstruction and the Radicals redeemed Johnson and cast him as the defender of small government and the South's racial order.

Similarly, another text on Johnson appeared in 1929, this time by Republican attorney and World War I veteran from New York, Lloyd Paul Stryker. Stryker's *Andrew Johnson: A Study in Courage*, was not a scholarly study like ivy-league trained Bowers's. Rather Stryker's text was a popular history that repeated many of Moore and Bowers's defense of Johnson through assaults on Radical Republicans as tyrannical and corrupt revolutionaries.<sup>86</sup> In the introduction, Stryker, like Moore, argued that had Abraham Lincoln lived, he would have "been crucified by the Radicals in Congress. Andrew Johnson suffered that crucifixion for him."<sup>87</sup> The *Chattanooga Daily Times* praised Stryker's work as "one of the greatest efforts toward giving the American people a true picture of the great Tennessean and a merciless review of that unspeakable period known in history as 'Reconstruction.'" Repeating the same condemnation of the Radicals as Bowers and Moore, the paper applauded Stryker for proving Thaddeus Stevens,

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<sup>86</sup> Lloyd Paul Stryker, *Andrew Johnson: A Study in Courage* (New York: Macmillan, 1929).

<sup>87</sup> Stryker, *Andrew Johnson*, vii.

Benjamin Butler, and other Radicals were “hypocritical lovers of the Union” who “devoutly sought to destroy” the Constitution. Further reflecting why Tennesseans accepted this memory of Reconstruction, the *Daily Times* thanked Stryker for the “great service” he performed for the South, by demonstrating that after the Civil War the “Southern states accepted defeat in good faith and were planning to recoup their losses when the unholy conspiracy was formed in Congress by Republican corruptionists to force the heel of the ex-slave upon the neck of the Southern white man.”<sup>88</sup> What the *Daily Times* review demonstrates is that although the memory of Johnson was powerful in regards to arguments against federal interventionism, the memory of a defender of the white social order proved much more valuable during the age of Jim Crow. Similar to how Lost Cause disciples favored Northerners who bought into the myth that the Confederacy did not secede over slavery and its troops were noble and courageous, Tennesseans enjoyed the new era developing in which writers even from the North praised Johnson as a hero. Indeed, popular audiences in the North also enjoyed Stryker’s text. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* commended Stryker for removing “the webs of myth and the dust of tradition” behind Johnson and placing him in his correct position as “the champion of Lincoln’s causes and ideals.”<sup>89</sup>

Meanwhile, one of the most visceral signs that Lost Cause sentiment began to dominate Civil War memory in the region was the appearance of Confederate monuments across East Tennessee. Kelli B. Nelson attributes the rise of Lost Cause sentiment in the region to the rise of modernism and fears that many mountaineers began to lose independence as they moved from the farms to the cities.<sup>90</sup> One of the largest leaps for East Tennessee’s UDC in the contest for

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<sup>88</sup> William W. O’Guin, “True Picture of Famous Tennessean,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/604169830>.

<sup>89</sup> “Andrew Johnson A Study in Courage,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 8, 1929, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/172678588>.

<sup>90</sup> Nelson, “On the Imperishable Face of Granite,” 82.

memory in East Tennessee was the erection of a Confederate monument in Johnson's hometown of Greeneville. The monument's origins, however, are less than clear. Nelson speculates that the monument may have been "placed in secret" when prominent urbanites Mary Vestal Monday of Knoxville and Johnson City historian Samuel Cole Williams of Johnson City placed the monument on the front lawn of the Greene County courthouse, adjacent to the Union Soldiers' Monument built in 1919.<sup>91</sup> Whether or not Monday and Williams placed the monument in secret is unclear. Nevertheless, as previously shown, Greeneville, like Andrew Johnson and the Confederacy, supported states' rights, limited government, and white supremacy. Thus, the Morgan monument in Greeneville, the Union bastion hometown of Andrew Johnson, mirrored a local form of reunion and the Lost Cause. The now mainstream interpretation of Johnson as a hero during Reconstruction further contributed to a warmer feeling towards Confederate memory as many now saw the Radicals as the true criminals of the period.

Before the unveiling ceremony, local newspapers described General John Hunt Morgan as "one of the most picturesque figures of the Confederacy," and one of the most "dashing" and "fearless" leaders.<sup>92</sup> The monument depicts General Morgan as a heroic soldier, and speakers at the dedication argued that Morgan "made life possible for the Southern sympathizers living in those sections loyal to the Union."<sup>93</sup> In contrast, numerous contemporaries and scholars described Morgan and his troopers as violent guerillas who robbed trains, burned bridges and

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 93

<sup>92</sup> "Tennessee Division U.D.C. Will Unveil Monument to Gen. John H. Morgan in Greeneville, Sunday," *Johnson City Chronicle*, May 9, 1931, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585764730>.

<sup>93</sup> Mrs. Wade Barrier of the Johnson City UDC wrote an article for the *Confederate Veteran* describing the Morgan monument and unveiling. She also recorded the speech of Edith O'Keefe Susong, newspaper and businesswoman in Greeneville and descendant of Confederate Q.M. O'Keefe. Mrs. Wade Barrier, "Where Morgan Fell," *Confederate Veteran* 39 (December 1931), 451-452.

homes, and murdered Unionists.<sup>94</sup> The last sentence of the monument's inscription reads, "His Heroism is a Heritage of the South."<sup>95</sup> Nelson persuasively argues that "the Morgan monument represented an important step in Civil War memory in East Tennessee," and "represented East Tennesseans' glorification of Morgan as a hero and the East Tennessee UDC's efforts to solidify Confederate history in the region."<sup>96</sup>

Kelli Nelson argues that by placing a Confederate monument in a town rich with Unionist heritage and the hometown of arguably the most famous Southern Unionist, "the women of the UDC complicated the federal image of the town and gained a victory for Confederate memory."<sup>97</sup> However, as demonstrated in white East Tennesseans and the rest of the country's interpretation of Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction, the monument may not have been that large of a victory. Instead, the monument was an affirmation of the contempt for Reconstruction and attempts to undermine white Southern heritage, as noted in the inscription on Morgan's monument that "His Heroism is a Heritage of the South."

In the same edition of the *Confederate Veteran* magazine that recorded the Morgan monument unveiling, a book review by Matthew Page Andrews praised Tennessean George Fort Milton's *The Age of Hate: Andrew Johnson and the Radicals*, published the year before.<sup>98</sup> Andrews explains how the text is "essentially a biography of Andrew Johnson...in the midst of the awful aftermath of war, an era of demolition, to which, unfortunately, Radicals and historians

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<sup>94</sup> Anne Marshall argues that when Morgan was killed in Greeneville, even Confederate authorities began investigating Morgan's activities as contrary to the laws of war. Anne Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) 172.

<sup>95</sup> Nelson, "On the Imperishable Face of Granite," 94.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

<sup>97</sup> Nelson, "On the Imperishable Face of Granite," 96.

<sup>98</sup> George F. Milton, *The Age of Hate: Andrew Johnson and the Radicals*, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1930). Milton, a native of Chattanooga and editor of the *Chattanooga News*, was a staunch conservative Southern Democrat who used the memory of Johnson to combat federal power.

alike have attached the name of ‘Reconstruction’—a period which owns a parallel only in a combination of the menace of San Domingo, the Parisian commune in the Reign of Terror, and the ruthless rise of Russian Bolshevism.”<sup>99</sup> By depicting Reconstruction as a mix of San Domingo (the Haitian Revolution), the French Revolution, and the Russian Revolution that ushered in the world’s first socialist state, Andrews confirmed what Stephen Prince argues as a “reading of Reconstruction that vindicated the conduct of the white supremacist South and presented a powerful argument against further federal interventionism.”<sup>100</sup> At the heart of this reading of Reconstruction in East Tennessee was Andrew Johnson, the Great Commoner who heroically defended the Constitution from the horrors of a racial, social, and political revolution.

Greeneville’s Lost Cause disciple, Quincy Marshal O’Keefe, also reviewed Milton’s text and compared it to Bowers’s for the *Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, in which she praised both works as “authoritative” on Johnson and Reconstruction. Crucially, O’Keefe credited Milton for using the W.E. McElwee manuscript published by John Trotwood Moore in 1923 that exonerated Johnson for the execution of Mary Surratt. O’Keefe claimed that Johnson only sought to prevent a “bloodier revolution than the one just ended,” similar to the French revolution and had to execute Surratt, to the anger of the Southern people. Reflecting Jim Crow sentiment, O’Keefe declares that the “greatest contribution the ‘Age of Hate’ makes to an intelligent understanding of the character of Andrew Johnson and of the Reconstruction period” is the exposure of the “so-called Black Codes enacted in the Southern states during the period...they are tremendously enlightening as to the psychology of the ‘ex-secessionists’ and give a grim picture of conditions

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<sup>99</sup> Matthew Page Andrews, “The Age of Hate, Andrew Johnson and the Radicals,” *Confederate Veteran* 39 (December 1931), 88-89.

<sup>100</sup> K. Stephen Prince, “Jim Crow Memory: Southern White Supremacists and the Regional Politics of Remembrance,” in *Remembering Reconstruction: Struggles over the Meaning of America’s Most Turbulent Era*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017) 23.

with which they were faced.”<sup>101</sup> O’Keefe’s silence for the plight of African Americans is deafening; instead she illustrates the lives of white Southerners as the most disrupted and that they were fully justified in enacting the Black Codes that were just small steps below enslaved status.

Although the 1930s saw numerous favorable scholarly treatments on Andrew Johnson by white scholars, one writer rejected the interpretation of Reconstruction as a disaster and Johnson as a hero. Chapter eight, the longest chapter in W.E.B. DuBois’s *Black Reconstruction*, focuses on “The Transubstantiation of a Poor White.”<sup>102</sup> Instead of a courageous constitutional President, DuBois castigated Johnson as “the most pitiful figure of American history,” who chose to support wealthy white Southerners over African Americans due to his intense belief in white supremacy.<sup>103</sup> Johnson’s ascendancy to the White House made him “the real emancipator of four millions of Black slaves,” and Johnson was a “champion of labor and the exploited.” However, Johnson’s racial bias prevented him from starting “a nation towards freedom.”<sup>104</sup> Lisa J. McLeod argues that DuBois’s assessment of Andrew Johnson is “tremendously significant in illustrating how the maintenance of white identity and white supremacy required that whites not only deny their material interests but also compromise their ability to accurately perceive the world around them,” because as a previous poor white, Johnson and other poor whites of the South should have allied themselves with freed African Americans simply out of economic interests.<sup>105</sup> DuBois asserted that Johnson acted as the catalyst for poor white Southerners to deny material

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<sup>101</sup> Quincy Marshall O’Keefe, “Authoritative Life of Johnson,” *Greenville Democrat-Sun*, December 13, 1930, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585448965>.

<sup>102</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1935) 288.

<sup>103</sup> DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*, 22.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>105</sup> Lisa J. McLeod, “Transubstantiation of Andrew Johnson: White Epistemic Failure in Du Bois’ Black Reconstruction,” *Phylon* 51, no.1 (2014): 91.



interests and their rational thinking in favor of white supremacy. Thus, despite the rise in heroic studies of Johnson praising him for the defense of the white South, clearly, as DuBois elegantly and persuasively demonstrates, the memory of Andrew Johnson was not universal during the 1930s.

Shortly after the Morgan Monument unveiling, the sole surviving grandchild of Andrew Johnson died on June 25, 1932. For years, he had set aside a room in the Johnson homestead as a historic shrine filled with Johnson relics, letting “thousands” visit the “mecca” annually.<sup>106</sup> Greeneville papers lamented Patterson’s loss because his “life and memory linked this community with one of the most glamorous pages of American history.”<sup>107</sup> The paper also credited Patterson for advising Johnson biographers like Winston and Bowers who “were able to give a personal slant to the matters which they recorded.” The loss of the “last of the Great Commoner’s descendants” meant the loss of a “voice of authority” because “what was a matter of personal recollection will now become legend.” Now the grandson rested “on the magnificent hill where lie the remains of Johnson, staunch supporter of the Union at a time when less courageous hearts faltered and quailed.”<sup>108</sup>

*Margaret Johnson Patterson Bartlett, B. Carrol Reece, and the National Park Service, 1934-1958*

With the deaths of figures like Andrew Johnson Patterson and John Trotwood Moore, Congressman B. Carroll Reece and Patterson’s daughter, Margaret Johnson Patterson Bartlett, quickly took up the mantle of Johnson’s legacy. Born and raised in East Tennessee, B. Carroll

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<sup>106</sup> “Andrew Johnson Patterson,” *Knoxville Journal*, June 28, 1932, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586413201>.

<sup>107</sup> “Andrew Johnson Patterson,” *Greeneville Sun*, June 27, 1932, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585652489>.

<sup>108</sup> “Andrew Johnson Patterson,” *Knoxville Journal*, June 28, 1932.

Reece held a master's degree in economics and served in World War I. First elected to Congress from the first congressional district of Tennessee in 1920, Reece held the position until 1930, when he lost his only re-election campaign in his long career due to party in-fighting. After winning reelection in 1932, he remained in the seat until 1962. A fierce Republican, Reece emerged as a conservative Congressman opposed to New Deal policies and isolationism. Although a fiscal conservative, Reece distinguished himself from other Southern Congressman by supporting the abolition of the poll tax and the implementation of antilynching legislation. He also voted in favor of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960.<sup>109</sup> Meanwhile, Margaret Johnson Patterson Bartlett, the great-granddaughter of the 17<sup>th</sup> President, took up her father's position as the leading authority on Johnson in Greeneville. An ardent Democrat like the rest of her family, she deeply admired Franklin D. Roosevelt, and constantly deplored the "common error to believe that Andrew Johnson was nominated for the Vice-Presidency in a Republican Convention."<sup>110</sup> Margaret, who "was born a Democrat, reared a Democrat," and hoped "to die a Democrat," worked with a fierce Republican like Reece to protect Johnson's memory.<sup>111</sup>

Shortly after Andrew J. Patterson died, Congressman Reece and Senator Kenneth McKellar co-sponsored legislation to transfer the Johnson homestead and tailor shop to the federal government to transform the home into a "national shrine."<sup>112</sup> Although Congressman Reece deeply admired Andrew Johnson, he may have had another reason for paying attention to Greeneville. Fashion Suzanne Bowers argues that Reece faced "opposition from the Democratic

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<sup>109</sup> For an analysis of B. Carroll Reece's life and career, see Fashion Suzanne Bowers, "Republican, First, Last, and Always: A Biography of B. Carroll Reece," Ph.D. diss., (University of Tennessee, 2007).

<sup>110</sup> President Andrew Johnson was a Democrat, Kin Declare," *Knoxville Journal*, January 26, 1941, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586713018>.

<sup>111</sup> President Andrew Johnson was a Democrat, Kin Declare," *Knoxville Journal*, January 26, 1941.

<sup>112</sup> "Johnson Shrine Bills to Receive Consideration," *Greeneville Sun*, May 7, 1934, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585726381>.

Party, especially in Greene County,” thus, co-sponsoring legislation to federally recognize Greene County could have benefitted him.<sup>113</sup> The Johnson site incorporated into the National Park system could also benefit Reece and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, a park Reece had tremendous influence in creating, being one of the Congressmen who sponsored the bill. Reece was so adamant about securing parks within East Tennessee that he threatened not to support any park if the federal government “did not accede to the wishes of the people of Tennessee, especially eastern Tennessee.”<sup>114</sup> Greeneville delighted in the idea of having a national park within their town. The *Greeneville Sun* enjoyed the prospects of reviving the “romance of the Reconstruction period,” that connected the town with “Tennessee’s most famous statesman of the Reconstruction period.” Although the paper did not mention what the “romance” of Reconstruction was, it could possibly mean the romantic sentiments of the era first espoused by *The Birth of a Nation* in which the KKK and violence against African Americans was seen as noble. The act passed in early 1935, but price disagreements with the Johnson family and the delay by Tennessee to transfer ownership of the tailor shop to the federal government prevented the acquisition by the National Park Service until 1941.<sup>115</sup>

In order to transfer the Andrew Johnson homestead to the federal government, Reece negotiated a compromise between the government, Martha Patterson, and her daughter, Margaret. Congressman Reece proposed that Martha become a custodian of the site along with a purchase amount of \$44,000.<sup>116</sup> Martha agreed, providing Margaret also received an appointment

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<sup>113</sup> Bowers, “Republican, First, Last, and Always,” 6. Bowers also maintains that Reece learned a valuable lesson in his early years representing the first congressional district. Namely that a contradiction existed in the district that although opposed to government interference and control, East Tennesseans only opposed those notions unless it brought investments to them, and “only then if it did not bring policies that altered their existing social balance,” 60.

<sup>114</sup> “Smoky Road Parley Draws Over 2,500,” *Johnson City Chronicle*, July 13, 1930, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585683666>.

<sup>115</sup> Binkley, *Andrew Johnson National Historic Site Administrative History*, 6.

<sup>116</sup> Binkley, *Andrew Johnson National Historic Site Administrative History*, 7.

as a custodian. Following the compromise, Tennessee transferred the deed of the tailor shop to the federal government on February 15, 1941, for inclusion in the proposed Andrew Johnson National Monument. To garner national support and recognition by President Franklin Roosevelt, Reece delivered an address on the floor of the House of Representatives, like Walter P. Brownlow before him, defending Andrew Johnson and calling for the adoption of the Andrew Johnson Memorial. The *Johnson City Press* correctly noted that “few historians today place credence in the trumped-up charges of misconduct in office brought against him by fanatical partisans who resented his continuation of Abraham Lincoln’s policy.” Instead, the paper agreed with Reece that Johnson was a “conscientious, high-minded chief executive, who took a sensible, humane attitude toward Reconstruction” and would have prevented the horrors of Carpetbagger rule.<sup>117</sup> The paper further noted that Reece had “an overwhelming majority” of citizens in upper East Tennessee supporting the proposal. Greeneville citizens had long wanted more recognition of the Johnson site because they recognized that the town had “one of the greatest assets for attracting tourists in the entire state of Tennessee.”<sup>118</sup> Although by 1942 the U.S. government focused on the Second World War, President Roosevelt signed a presidential proclamation establishing the Andrew Johnson National Memorial, with the National Park Service managing the National Cemetery, Homestead, and Tailor Shop on April 27, 1942.<sup>119</sup>

Congressman Reece and Margaret Johnson Patterson Bartlett were not the only well-known figures in the region connected to Andrew Johnson. The formerly enslaved people of Andrew Johnson also became minor celebrities within the region, with William Johnson visiting

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<sup>117</sup> “Reece Speech Does Justice to President Andrew Johnson,” *Johnson City Press*, March 13, 1941, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/587078412>.

<sup>118</sup> “Local Clubs Hear Speaker Discuss Tourist Industry,” *Greeneville Sun*, June 16, 1941, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/587094414>.

<sup>119</sup> Binkley, *Andrew Johnson National Historic Site Administrative History*, 7.

President Franklin Roosevelt in the White House in 1937.<sup>120</sup> However, William's fame was not of his own; whites were interested in him precisely because Andrew Johnson enslaved him, using William as a symbol of Johnson's paternalistic slaveholding and the later act of emancipating William. When President Roosevelt visited the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1936, William Johnson sought to meet him but could not get close enough. Upon hearing William's story, renowned journalist Ernie Pyle published it in his newspapers for Roosevelt to see.<sup>121</sup> After William visited Roosevelt, he "emerged the happiest and proudest man in the United States," carrying with him a gift by the President, a silver-headed cane engraved with "Franklin D. Roosevelt." He proudly boasted that the cane would make "the white folks in Knoxville...go wild." William reported that "Mr. Roosevelt is my kind of white folks," probably because the President invited William to sit and talk inside the White House for over thirty minutes during the age of segregation. Although the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* was happy to see William meet Roosevelt, the article reflected the racist patronizing attitude of the time by describing William, a 79-year-old man, in childlike language as if William was something to show off as an ex-slave of a former President. The paper described William as "trembling with excitement" and how "William Andrew was inside the big mansion before he could say Jack Robinson...and a few minutes later he was not only shaking hands with the President, he was sitting down and talking to him—talking to him for half an hour about the old days back in Tennessee when he was just a little boy in the home of another President." Noticeably, the paper

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<sup>120</sup> William Andrew Johnson may have been the grandson of Andrew Johnson as well, something newspapers and scholarly books never addressed during the period. The NPS still does not mention this possibility in interpretations of Andrew Johnson and slavery despite the death certificate of William's listing his father as Robert Johnson, the troubled alcoholic son of Andrew Johnson. See, Sarah Fling, "The Formerly Enslaved Households of President Andrew Johnson," The White House Historical Association, accessed January 15, 2022, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/the-formerly-enslaved-households-of-president-andrew-johnson>.

<sup>121</sup> "Ernie Pyle's Story Gets Results! Ex-Slave of President Johnson Meets FDR After All," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, February 17, 1937, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/772719619/>.

said William was just a little boy in Johnson's home, not an enslaved child.<sup>122</sup> However, William was not childlike. When Ernie Pyle asked him, "if he wasn't better off when Andrew Johnson owned him," William replied, "yes, we were mighty well off then. But any man would rather be free than be a slave."<sup>123</sup>

In January 1943, William Johnson fell ill. Congressman Reece sought medical assistance for William by asking Congress to authorize William's treatment at the veteran's hospital in Knoxville.<sup>124</sup> Despite being ill for four months, William never allowed the Roosevelt cane "to get out of his sight."<sup>125</sup> Following his death, Margaret Johnson Patterson claimed, "I have often heard my father say that William had a black skin but there was never a whiter person on the inside," which probably meant how William stayed close to Johnson and the family while never engaging in activities contrary to Jim Crow. Patterson's comment is especially ironic since they were probably first cousins.<sup>126</sup>

Although one of the most famous formerly enslaved people in the region had died, African Americans continued to celebrate August 8<sup>th</sup> in the region. African American memory of Johnson in East Tennessee largely stayed the same that it had since the 1880s, while acknowledging that Andrew Johnson freed his slaves, African Americans identified with the enslaved people freed by Johnson and the date in which Johnson freed them, rather than Johnson himself. In fact, during August 8<sup>th</sup> celebrations African Americans did not mention Johnson at

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<sup>122</sup> "Ernie Pyle's Story Gets Results! Ex-Slave of President Johnson Meets FDR After All," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, February 17, 1937, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/772719619/>.

<sup>123</sup> *Ernie's America: The Best of Ernie Pyle's 1930s Travel Dispatches*, ed. David Nichols, (New York: Random House, 1989) 305.

<sup>124</sup> "Medical Help for Ex-Slave Being Sought," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, January 22, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/772574440>.

<sup>125</sup> "Ex-Slave of Andrew Johnson Dies in Knoxville Yesterday," *Greeneville Sun*, May 17, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/587098211>.

<sup>126</sup> "Negro Once Servant of Johnson Dies," *Knoxville Journal*, May 17, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586885791>.

all. At times, famous African Americans like heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson attended celebrations in East Tennessee, drawing favorable attention from white newspapers.<sup>127</sup> Greeneville continued its strong tradition of celebrating August 8<sup>th</sup> throughout the 1950s and 1960s largely through the efforts of the Negro Women Civic Club founded in 1950, whose main purpose was to “make our city [Greeneville] a better place for all mankind and to create a better understanding between the races. Our slogan, ‘A Better Greeneville.’”<sup>128</sup> The club regularly hosted large dinners in which everyone from the community was invited and sponsored most of the events for August 8<sup>th</sup> such as the parade, music concert, beauty pageant, and dance at Bernard’s Warehouse No. 2.<sup>129</sup>

Over time however, the origins of the event became less clear to whites. It is noteworthy how in 1935, when scholars openly celebrated Johnson’s contempt for civil rights legislation, the *Greeneville Sun* reported that August 8<sup>th</sup> arose because Sam Johnson and other formerly enslaved people in the region did not want to celebrate Emancipation Day on January 1 because of the winter.<sup>130</sup> What is also striking is how the paper described Sam Johnson as a “bodyguard” to the former President rather than a slave, possibly projecting the Lost Cause image of loyal slaves. By attributing the reason for the celebration to the weather rather than Johnson’s personal act of emancipating his own enslaved people, the author distanced Johnson from emancipation in the

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<sup>127</sup> “Jack Johnson to appear at Emancipation Celebration at Arena,” *Bristol News Bulletin*, August 8, 1938, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584170688>.

<sup>128</sup> “Negro Women Organize Local Civic Club,” *Greeneville Sun*, June 15, 1950, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585500096>. A parallel organization to the Andrew Johnson Mothers’ Club, the African American club regularly hosted and planned August 8<sup>th</sup> events and other holiday celebrations. The club also raised money for African American businesses and even a pool for both whites and Blacks to swim in. For more information on the club see, East Tennessee PBS, “East Tennessee Voices: Greeneville’s 8<sup>th</sup> of August,” YouTube Video, 29:55, August 9, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BSK8rtyI3U>.

<sup>129</sup> “Emancipation Day Celebration Climaxed Monday With Parade, Concert and Dance,” *Greeneville Sun*, August 10, 1955, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585602311>.

<sup>130</sup> George W. Clem, “Eighth of August Celebration Here” *Greeneville Sun*, August 6, 1935, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585632415>.

age of Jim Crow. During this time, Greeneville prided itself as a home for both Union and Confederate memory. The town boasted its North and South memorials on the same ground, arguing that “it is natural that Greeneville, the home of Andrew Johnson, should be the most neutral point in the state.”<sup>131</sup> Thus, connecting the Great Commoner to emancipation could destroy the delicate reconciliationist atmosphere in Greeneville. Conversely, in 1949, shortly before a drastic change in scholarly and national opinion of Johnson, the *Greeneville Sun* attributed the celebration not to the weather, but to “the freeing of Andrew Johnson’s slaves on that date.”<sup>132</sup>

As the National Park Service began managing Andrew Johnson National Memorial, World War II was still raging, seeing just a few thousand people visit the site between 1943 and 1945. Still, Johnson’s popular appeal was so high that in 1943 Johnson had his own biopic movie, *Tennessee Johnson*. Local newspapers pleaded with citizens to watch the movie because “many people do not like to remember that Andrew Johnson, a southerner, took sides against his own people in the war.”<sup>133</sup> The film presented the image of Johnson as a man who pulled himself out of poverty and was immensely courageous for enduring impeachment just like Lincoln would have by attempting to carry out lenient Reconstruction policies. Despite not being a production of the War Department, themes of the War permeated the film, focusing heavily on the supposed unity in which Johnson sought to keep the country together.<sup>134</sup> With the start of

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<sup>131</sup> Ferol Frost Hubbs, “North-South Memorials on Same Ground,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, undated, Newspapers Scrapbook, ANJO Archives.

<sup>132</sup> “Monday Big Day for Greeneville Negroes,” *Greeneville Weekly News-Bulletin*, August 11, 1949, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585914341>.

<sup>133</sup> “Andrew Johnson,” *Elizabethton Daily Star*, August 16, 1943.

<sup>134</sup> For an overview of the film see, “Tennessee Johnson,” Turner Classic Movies (Turner Classic Movies), accessed February 2, 2022, <https://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/92547/tennessee-johnson#overview>.



peace, tens of thousands of visitors began to visit the site, with Margaret Johnson Patterson Bartlett happily sharing stories of her great-grandfather with visitors.<sup>135</sup>

Despite the happy appearances within the Johnson Site, there were problems beneath the surface. After having sole possession of the Homestead all her life, Margaret was hesitant to follow NPS guidelines, often writing Congressman Reece to plead her case to the federal government. Superintendent Benjamin H. Davis wrote Congressman Reece in October 1953 defending his decision of forbidding the leasing of rooms in the Johnson Homestead.<sup>136</sup> Margaret complained to Reece that employees of the site were trying to “needle” her, causing Reece to write directly to the regional director of region one in the NPS.<sup>137</sup> When Gordon Lee Sneddon became superintendent of the site in early February 1958, Reece wrote directly to him claiming, “I am fully aware of Mrs. Bartlett’s foibles,” but viewed her position as a direct descendant as extremely valuable. Reece pleaded with Sneddon to “simply show an interest and give her some attention” because “she does come from a rather proud family, and it naturally hurt her feelings to be put in a position where she feels demeaned.”<sup>138</sup>

Due to the numerous architectural changes on the Homestead over the decades, the NPS deemed it impossible to interpret the home until remodeled to the last years of Johnson’s life 1869 to 1875. Restoration began in 1956.<sup>139</sup> It is noteworthy that the NPS chose the period 1869-1875, the years Johnson sought vindication for his Reconstruction policies, to interpret the Homestead, since he had lived there since 1851. However, Johnson did not live in Greeneville

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<sup>135</sup> Binkley, *Andrew Johnson National Historic Site Administrative History*, 7-8.

<sup>136</sup> Benjamin H. Davis to Carroll Reece, 16 October 1953, Box 57, file 1, Interpretation Files, Andrew Johnson National Historic Site (hereafter ANJO) Archives.

<sup>137</sup> Regional Director, Region One to Superintendent Benjamin H. Davis, 23 October 1953, Box 57, file 1, Interpretation Files, ANJO Archives.

<sup>138</sup> Carroll Reece to Gordon L. Sneddon, 8 February 1958, Box 57, file 2, Interpretation Files, ANJO Archives.

<sup>139</sup> Binkley, *Andrew Johnson National Historic Site Administrative History*, 7.

from 1861 until 1869. Although it is unclear why the NPS chose the period 1869-1875, it is highly probable that the period was chosen due to the immense popularity Johnson had received over the last few decades for his role during Reconstruction, while in 1869 to 1875 Johnson constantly sought to justify his policies. By this time, the memory of Andrew Johnson was dominated by Reconstruction memory, rather than being remembered for his role against secession, the memory intensely focused on his impeachment.

As a reward for his efforts in establishing the national memorial, the NPS chose Congressman Reece to deliver the keynote address at the dedication of the completed restored home in 1958. Reece expressed his great pride and joy in the restoration of the “National shrine.”<sup>140</sup> Reflecting the “great man” historical sentiment of the time, Reece used the site to connect with Johnson telling his audience that “here this man lived,” and “here he determined to devote his life and his energy— regardless of cost to himself— to the Constitution and the Federal Union.” Rehearsing the themes now dominant, Reece declared that Johnson had “unconquerable courage...incorruptible integrity...and sacrificial devotion to duty as he saw his duty.” In language similar to his predecessor, Walter Brownlow, Reece called Johnson “the greatest martyr and unsung hero in American history.”<sup>141</sup>

The dedication and restoration were a success, complete with romantic depictions of young descendants using Johnson’s tailor shears to cut the ribbon to the home. Greeneville citizens delighted that the “unsightly Victorian veneer” of the home was gone and predicted the “shrine will undoubtedly prove a great drawing card to bring many of the three million visitors

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<sup>140</sup> “Man of Indomitable Courage and Incorruptible Integrity” address by B. Carroll Reece at the dedication of the restoration of the Andrew Johnson Homestead, Acc. #3, Box 1, File 19, B. Carroll Reece Papers, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University.

<sup>141</sup> “Andrew Johnson Home Opened as U.S. Monument,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, April 27, 1958, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/773408048>.

that visit the Great Smokies every year to this city.”<sup>142</sup> However, in crucial ways, the dedication ceremony in 1958 marked the zenith of Andrew Johnson’s appeal outside East Tennessee. Increasing pressure to destroy the Jim Crow system and implement civil rights gradually changed popular sentiment of Johnson across the country. Following Eric McKittrick’s *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (1960), scholars increasingly viewed Johnson critically.<sup>143</sup> Despite the shift that occurred, Greeneville, Margaret Johnson Patterson Bartlett, and the NPS continued to espouse the themes first adopted by Walter Brownlow and continued through the efforts of John Trotwood Moore and B. Carroll Reece. Thomas J. Brown argues that “civic monuments, military cemeteries, and battlefield parks made the war a prominent feature of the national landscape, and community rituals in honor of fallen soldiers and in celebration of emancipation made the war a prominent feature of the national calendar.”<sup>144</sup> Adhering to this model, Greenevillians rallied around the Johnson Site and the memory of Johnson, the town’s most famous citizen and one of the region’s well-known Civil War figures, in order to stay connected to the national story in a rapidly changing country.

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<sup>142</sup> “Cheerful Chatter,” *Greeneville Sun*, April 19, 1958, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/587050920>.

<sup>143</sup> Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960) 4. McKittrick argued Andrew Johnson “threw away” his own power and blocked the reconciliation of North and South. In McKittrick’s study, the works of Bowers, Stryker, Winston, and others a more recent analysis on the Dunning School and its scholarly interpretation of Andrew Johnson, see John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery, *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013) 25. John David Smith argues that Dunning School scholars viewed Johnson as courageous and noble for attempting to implement Lincoln’s “mild restoration program and then bravely attempting to forestall Radical control.”

<sup>144</sup> Thomas J. Brown, “Civil War Remembrance as Reconstruction,” in *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States*, ed. Thomas J. Brown, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 206.

## CHAPTER 5. CARETAKERS OF JOHNSON'S MEMORY: THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AND THE TOWN OF GREENEVILLE, 1958-2022

The Civil Rights Movement prompted another evolution in Andrew Johnson's memory. Rather than a heroic defender of the Constitution and the white South, scholarly assessments of Johnson increasingly associated him with white supremacy.<sup>1</sup> The impeachment and resignation of Richard Nixon also prompted a reevaluation of Johnson's impeachment with scholars arguing that not only were the Radicals cautious instead of zealous, but that Johnson's attempts to undermine Congressional authority pushed them to impeach him.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, scholars applauded Radical Republicans and African Americans for their efforts to establish a biracial democracy.

Despite profound changes in both the historiography of Reconstruction and race throughout the country, Greenevillians continued to defend the troubled legacy of their most famous citizen to connect themselves to the national story and to assert their conservatism on issues from race to fiscal spending.<sup>3</sup> The foremost figure behind Greeneville's interpretation of Johnson from 1958 until 1993 was Margaret Johnson Patterson Bartlett, great-granddaughter of Andrew Johnson. East Tennesseans such as Congressman Jimmy Quillen and local historians Richard H. Doughty and Dr. Robert Orr also rallied around Andrew Johnson well into the

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<sup>1</sup> This view is echoed through numerous scholarly accounts during the 1960s. See LaWanda Cox and John Cox, *Politics, Principle, and Prejudice, 1865–1866: Dilemma of Reconstruction America*. (New York, NY: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963); John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> For examples of scholars who wrote on Johnson's impeachment and attributed the trial to Johnson's own actions see Michael Les Benedict, *The Impeachment and Trial of Andrew Johnson* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1973); Hans L. Trefousse, *Impeachment of a President: Andrew Johnson, the Blacks, and Reconstruction* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Thomas J. Brown, "Civil War Remembrance as Reconstruction," in *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States*, ed. Thomas J. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 206. Brown argues that "civic monuments, military cemeteries, and battlefield parks made the war a prominent feature of the national landscape, and community rituals in honor of fallen soldiers and in celebration of emancipation made the war a prominent feature of the national calendar." Adhering to this model, the Andrew Johnson Site connected Greeneville to the national calendar.

twenty-first century. However, their interpretations resembled that of the romantic and heroic descriptions of Johnson espoused by John Trotwood Moore, Claude Bowers, and other Dunning School historians.

*East Tennessee's Defense of Andrew Johnson, 1958-1992*

Until the 1970s, the Johnson Site did not engage in any official interpretation with visitors. However, many visitors asked Margaret Bartlett questions while wandering freely through the Homestead. Though no formal interpretation or tours existed, Park Historian Hugh Lawing published multiple accounts both for the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* and regional newspapers to promote tourism at the site between 1958 and 1970. In 1961, Lawing published an article on the Johnson Site courting tourists with romantic sentiments of democracy and class. Lawing focused on Johnson's "democratic principles and humble origin," claiming that the NPS represented both in the Tailor Shop and Homestead.<sup>4</sup> Conveniently ignoring Johnson's proslavery outlook and contempt for racial equality, Lawing declared that Johnson believed "in dealing fairly with all classes." Although Lawing ignored race, it is possible that this reflects the Civil Rights atmosphere in Greeneville in which Blacks and whites had good relations. Many African American residents today remember that although "segregation is segregation and it did exist here," African Americans held the right to vote and remembered seeing the larger struggles of the movement on TV that did not reflect their experience in the town.<sup>5</sup> Lawing further acknowledged that although the site was dedicated "to the memory of one of the more

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<sup>4</sup> Hugh A. Lawing, "Andrew Johnson National Monument," (*Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 20, no. 2 1961) 103.

<sup>5</sup> Black in Appalachia, "Gene Maddox-8<sup>th</sup> of August, Greeneville, TN," YouTube Video, 30:51, April 20, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_qFJdHSnsk&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_qFJdHSnsk&t=2s); Schools in Greeneville and across Tennessee did not integrate until 1965. This confirms Maddox's memory that although Blacks held limited rights in Greeneville during the 1960s like the vote, schools did not integrate there until 1965. See "The George Clem School Wolverines-Greeneville," accessed May 1, 2022, <https://georgeclem.school.blogspot.com/search?q=Clem>.

controversial Presidents in all of America's history," it was even more dedicated "to a man who in state and nation devoted his every effort for the elevation of man; who knew the joy of triumph and endured the scorn of a powerful political faction whose malicious assaults are mainly responsible for one of America's great heroes of democratic government being denied...the place in our heritage of which he is so deserving."<sup>6</sup> Celebrating the centennial of Johnson becoming President in 1965, Lawing described the "fearlessness" of the "great patriot" and praised Lincoln for showing "a great deal of wisdom in choosing Andrew Johnson" as Vice President.<sup>7</sup> Although these themes were prevalent throughout the first half of the twentieth century they were quickly falling out of vogue in scholarly assessments of Johnson by 1965.

Jimmy Quillen also defended the memory of Andrew Johnson and, like his predecessors in Congress, sought financial aid for the Johnson Site. As a State Senator in 1961, Quillen introduced a bill to the General Assembly seeking to separate East Tennessee from the rest of the state and form the State of Franklin. Johnson attempted the same measure in 1841, which almost succeeded.<sup>8</sup> Quillen recognized the difficulties inherent in forming a new state and contended that the measure was largely to "rekindle some interest in the State of Franklin" and East Tennessee.<sup>9</sup> Both Johnson's and Quillen's attempts to recreate the State of Franklin reflect the animosity East Tennesseans held toward the rest of the state. During the antebellum period, East Tennesseans resented the growing wealth, status, and political power of Middle and West

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<sup>6</sup> Lawing, "Andrew Johnson National Monument," 119.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh A. Lawing, "Andrew Johnson Becomes President," *Greeneville Sun*, April 13, 1965, Newspapers Scrapbook, ANJO Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Hans L. Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1989) 48. Trefousse argues that Johnson's attempt to form the State of Frankland "was a good example of Johnson's interest in the peculiar needs of the mountain region, which, because of the three-fifths clause for counting slaves for purposes of representation in both the state and national constitutions, had long considered itself discriminated against."

<sup>9</sup> "The 51<sup>st</sup> State? Lost State of Franklin Had Brief, Colorful Existence," *Bristol Herald Courier*, May 5, 1961, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586718201>.

Tennessee, thus attempting to form their own state in 1841 and in 1861 after Tennessee seceded from the U.S. During the 1960s, East Tennesseans resented the rest of the state primarily for its Democratic voting record. Quillen remarked that his debate on State House floor would “tell the members that they never seemed to want us Republicans from East Tennessee anyway,” meaning that the General Assembly should let the East leave.<sup>10</sup> Tom Lee argues that Quillen’s efforts to create a new State of Franklin “utilized the history of East Tennessee in a struggle against perceived inequity” and was “a symbol of resistance to faraway state governments on behalf of liberty.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, Quillen tapped into a long tradition spearheaded by Andrew Johnson that viewed East Tennessee as a separate region with a separate history from the rest of the state that had only hindered the mountain region rather than helped. Despite Quillen’s measure failing, it represented how East Tennesseans still clung to the same ideas espoused by Andrew Johnson during this time.

After achieving election to Congress in 1962, one of Quillen’s first successful measures obtained funding to purchase the Johnson Early Home in Greeneville.<sup>12</sup> Greenevillians applauded the measure because the early home represented where Johnson “began his career as an illiterate,” where he slowly moved his way up the political ranks and represented a true vision of “American democracy.”<sup>13</sup> Despite Quillen praising “American democracy,” his political record only sought to prevent true democracy. Although filling the former seat of B. Carroll Reece, Quillen did not distinguish himself from other Southern politicians of his time as Reece

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<sup>10</sup> “Would You Like Living in State of Franklin?” *Johnson City Press*, March 5, 1961, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/587283869>.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Lee, “The Lost Cause that Wasn’t: East Tennessee and the Myth of Unionist Appalachia,” in *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War’s Aftermath*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 315.

<sup>12</sup> Cameron Binkley, *Andrew Johnson National Historic Site Administrative History* (Atlanta, Ga: Cultural Resources, Southeast Region, National Park Service, 2008). 8.

<sup>13</sup> Juanita Glenn, “First President Johnson Story Told at Greeneville Monument,” *Knoxville Journal*, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/588138789>.

had. Instead, Quillen and other Republicans in the region rallied “to its banner conservative Southern white Democrats unhappy with the Administration’s Civil Rights programs.”<sup>14</sup> Quillen justified his stance against federal civil rights as standing against “an all-powerful centralized government” demonstrating East Tennessee Republican conservatism in the 1960s.<sup>15</sup>

Although Quillen pushed back on civil rights and voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Greenevillians attempted to display Johnson as progressive in a civil rights atmosphere to lure visitors to the town. In 1963, the *Greeneville Sun* claimed that Johnson was responsible for passing the Thirteenth Amendment and even the Fourteenth Amendment, an amendment Johnson protested vehemently and urged Southern governments not to ratify. At the same time when Lyndon B. Johnson began to seek national civil rights legislation, the *Greeneville Sun* argued that Andrew Johnson’s administration held “many progressive gains of national importance,” though the paper did not mention what those progressive gains were.<sup>16</sup> According to the paper, the only reason Radicals charged the “progressive” Johnson with impeachment was that Johnson attempted to carry out Lincoln’s Reconstruction policies, likely the pardon and amnesty of Confederates, ignoring Johnson’s contempt for African Americans and numerous attempts to undermine congressional authority.<sup>17</sup> What this article demonstrates is how by the 1960s, Greenevillians were taking steps to make Johnson more suitable for the time, meaning that his image would not be one of a white supremacist President. The image of Johnson defending the white South and vetoing civil rights bills prompted town residents to cast Johnson

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<sup>14</sup> “Political Implications Seen,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, October 8, 1963, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/773424403>.

<sup>15</sup> “Quillen, Bright Give Views,” *Johnson City Press*, August 1, 1964, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/589399964>.

<sup>16</sup> Howard Hill, “More Information on Andrew Johnson,” *The Greeneville Sun*, December 5, 1963, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584886972>.

<sup>17</sup> Howard Hill, “More Information on Andrew Johnson,” *The Greeneville Sun*, December 5, 1963.



in a more benign light toward African Americans and civil rights. This proved necessary due to likely visitation pool to the Johnson home during this period. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park regularly recorded millions of visitors to the park, often visitors from larger cities like Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.<sup>18</sup> From the inception of the Johnson site into the NPS system, one of the primary goals was to attract visitors from the Great Smoky Mountains to Greeneville to see the Johnson home. At a time when increasing numbers of Americans began to support civil rights, the white supremacist Johnson could no longer appeal to outside visitors. This is similar to how organizations like the SCV (Sons of Confederate Veterans) created the myth of Black Confederate soldiers in the 1970s to cast the Confederacy as more progressive.<sup>19</sup> This was necessary in Greeneville, for the site brought thousands of visitors every year. In fact, during the 1950s, the approximate average number of visitors was 37,425. However, during the 1960s, numbers rose remarkably high with a 5,900 increase between 1960 and 1961 alone. 1964, the year in which the Civil Rights Act prohibited public segregation, the site recorded 50,600 visitors, not seeing numbers like that again until 1972.<sup>20</sup>

By the 1970s, the town of Greeneville increasingly coordinated with the Johnson Site to foster more historical tourism. At the Kiwanis Club of Greeneville's meeting in April 1972, NPS superintendent Lloyd Abelson addressed the club, emphasizing, "we have something that very few other towns have, and we should take greater advantage of the fact that Andrew Johnson

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<sup>18</sup> "Stats Report Viewer: Great Smoky Mountains National Park," National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior), accessed May 5, 2022, [https://irma.nps.gov/STATS/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20\(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)?Park=GRSM](https://irma.nps.gov/STATS/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year)?Park=GRSM).

<sup>19</sup> Kevin Levin, *Searching for Black Confederates: The Civil War's Most Persistent Myth*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019) 3-4. Levin argues that claims of Black Confederate combat troops did not surface until the late 1970s when Confederate apologists began the myth of Black Confederate troops to demonstrate that the war could not have been about slavery and that the Confederacy was more progressive than the Union.

<sup>20</sup> For a list of visitation statistics at the Johnson Site from 1942 until 2006 see Binkley, *Administrative History*, 135-136.

lived in Greeneville.”<sup>21</sup> The town listened and worked directly with the site to establish the Greene County Heritage Trust and later designate the town as a National Register historic district.<sup>22</sup> Despite the newfound alliance, the site experienced a drop in visitation numbers mainly due to interstates I-40 and I-81 passing by Greeneville during the late 1970s. The site remedied the issue by pleading for increased signage on the interstate and highway 11-E.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the 1970s, the history of Andrew Johnson underwent further historical scrutiny due to the impeachment and resignation of Richard Nixon. Scholars such as Michael Les Benedict and Hans Trefousse updated the historiography of impeachment by correctly attributing Johnson’s impeachment to his actions that undermined Congressional authority and increased racial violence in the South rather than an act by vengeful Radicals.<sup>24</sup> Still, scholarly accounts of Johnson and Reconstruction were largely ignored in Greeneville and East Tennessee. Reflecting either ignorance or disregard for new scholarly assessments of Johnson and impeachment, Congressman Quillen and Margaret Bartlett dedicated a plaque to Senator Edmund Ross in 1973 at the Memorial Building, demonstrating the longevity of the Dunning School’s popular appeal, which applauded Ross for his vote saving Johnson.<sup>25</sup> During the dedication ceremony, Quillen praised Ross as a “great defender of democracy as was Andrew Johnson.” Quillen further argued that Ross deserved a special place in Greeneville’s memory of the era and Johnson because “had Ross cast his vote differently, there probably would not have

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<sup>21</sup> “Kiwanians Hear Ableson on AJ History,” *Greeneville Daily Sun*, April 14, 1972.

<sup>22</sup> Binkley, *Administrative History*, 48.

<sup>23</sup> Binkley, *Administrative History*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Les Benedict, *The Impeachment and Trial of Andrew Johnson*, 6-7; Hans L. Trefousse, *Impeachment of a President: Andrew Johnson, the Blacks, and Reconstruction*, (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1975) xiv. Although the two authors agreed that Johnson was a white supremacist, Benedict believed that the Radicals did have a solid legal ground for impeachment. In contrast, Trefousse believed the Radicals did not have any reasonable indictable offense charged against Johnson.

<sup>25</sup> Binkley, *Administrative History*, 45-46.

been an Andrew Johnson National Historic Site.”<sup>26</sup> Perhaps Quillen was right; the memory of Johnson in Greeneville focuses heavily on his success during the impeachment trial against the Radicals and his later vindication by achieving national office afterward. However, had Johnson been impeached and removed from office rather than achieving acquittal and eventually returning to the Senate, the memory of Andrew Johnson might not have been as endearing as it is.

Meanwhile, the *Greeneville Sun* was surprised that in July 1974, Margaret was not watching every minute of the impeachment proceedings against Nixon. Margaret remarked that one of the reasons why she was not keeping up with every detail about the trial was because “I [Margaret] come from a long line of Democrats...My grandfather was a Union Democrat—a unique type from East Tennessee, yet one who was dedicated to the preservation of the Union.” She was not overly concerned with what occurred to a Republican President, and she also made the point to differentiate Johnson’s brand of Democratic politics from other Southern Democrats who mostly seceded while Johnson remained loyal.<sup>27</sup> Despite Bartlett’s busy schedule in Greeneville and her indifference to the Republican party, she did keep an eye on the proceedings, albeit not obsessing over the details like the paper assumed she would. When the paper asked Bartlett’s opinion of Nixon’s impeachment, she argued that it was politically motivated, as was her grandfather’s, declaring that “it has long since been made a note of historical accuracy that Andrew Johnson’s impeachment was politically motivated.” While the books her father and herself had read in the first half of the twentieth century supported Martha’s arguments, Benedict’s and Trefousse’s texts demonstrate that this view was not historically accurate in 1974.

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<sup>26</sup> “Plaque Unveiled to Senator Voting Against Impeachment,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/773947234>.

<sup>27</sup> Bill Anderson, “Andrew Johnson’s Kin Views Nixon,” *Greeneville Sun*, July 31, 1974.

The authors did not introduce any new sources from the Johnson apologists, instead, the two historians read the same primary sources and determined that it was Johnson who was to blame for his impeachment, not Congress. Further reflecting her outdated views on Johnson's impeachment, Margaret blamed a "Radical North" for his impeachment and "smiles broadly when it is remarked that the Supreme Court legally vindicated Johnson years later," reflecting how important the Supreme Court decision was for the memory of Andrew Johnson.<sup>28</sup>

During the bicentennial of Greeneville in 1975, Richard H. Doughty published a history of Greeneville from 1775 to 1875. Although a history of the town, Johnson was a significant part of the book. Doughty claimed that Johnson rose to power in Greeneville because he acted so much like Andrew Jackson that the citizens "were consoled with the hope that he might save the country" because Johnson was the "successor to Jackson." Rehashing themes prevalent from Judge Robert Taylor's speech in 1958, Doughty declared Johnson "the Father of Public Education in Tennessee." Interestingly, the author chose to "pass over" the dilemma of impeachment, refusing to tangle himself with the historiography.<sup>29</sup> Like writers of the 1920s and 1930s, Doughty defended Johnson's character and compared him to loved Presidents of the time like Andrew Jackson. However, unlike previous writers, the author did not amplify Johnson's Reconstruction record, focusing instead on his rise out of poverty, his role in education, and how his national prominence put Greeneville on the map. Thus, reflecting the desire to make the memory of Johnson feasible after the Civil Rights era.

Perhaps one of the most significant contributions to the modern interpretation of Andrew Johnson within Greeneville was the work of Margaret Johnson Patterson Bartlett. Cameron Binkley, a former Johnson Site historian, wrote that between 1942 and 1976, Bartlett "was a key

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<sup>28</sup> Anderson, "Andrew Johnson's Kin Views Nixon," *Greeneville Sun*.

<sup>29</sup> Doughty, *Greeneville*, 81.

influence on the creation and operation of the historic site...she always insisted that her full name, Mrs. Margaret Johnson Patterson Bartlett, be used to connote her direct link to her famous ancestor.”<sup>30</sup> Margaret served as a park guide interpreting her great-grandfather and home of her birth. As demonstrated in chapter three, Margaret emphatically believed that Johnson acted rightly during Reconstruction. Thus, very little critical interpretation existed during her lifetime at the site. Binkley later wrote that Margaret “was well known for her pronouncements on every aspect of Johnson and his legacy. Her views, undoubtedly genuine and steeped in oral tradition, may or may not have been aligned with then-current scholarship.”<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, visitors found her a leading authority because she was “the last direct descendent of President Andrew Johnson” and was “highly influential in prompting action to preserve Johnson's physical legacy and commemorating his historical one.”<sup>32</sup> Many visitors remarked that Bartlett’s stories about Johnson “almost made it seem as if Johnson were there in person.”<sup>33</sup> Binkley later declared that Margaret “will forever retain a special place in the annals of NPS history for her lifelong enthusiasm and efforts to preserve the legacy of President Andrew Johnson”<sup>34</sup> Retiring fully in 1976, Margaret maintained regular contact with the site and other defenders of Johnson’s memory until she died in August 1992. The NPS held Margaret’s funeral at the Homestead, later burying her in the Johnson family plot on Monument Hill. Binkley remarked that Margaret’s death “marked the end of an era for Greeneville, which lost its living link to the town’s most famous citizen.”<sup>35</sup> This sentence is crucial for it displays how Greeneville lamented Martha’s loss because it also represented the living connection to Johnson,

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<sup>30</sup> Binkley, *Administrative History*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>33</sup> “Margaret Patterson Bartlett: A. Johnson Would be Proud,” *Greeneville Sun*, October 12, 1976.

<sup>34</sup> Binkley, *Administrative History*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

Greeneville's call to fame, was now lost. Despite Margaret's death in 1992, she had a remarkable influence on her cousin, Ralph Phinney, Park Historian Hugh Lawing, and Dr. Robert Orr. Each continued to defend Johnson's legacy into the twenty-first century.

*The Andrew Johnson National Historic Site and Greeneville's Interpretation of Andrew Johnson,  
1992-2008*

Although no significant changes occurred at the site until the 1990s, crucial alterations in the historiography and memory of Johnson and Reconstruction occurred on the national level.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the NPS and descendants of Andrew Johnson clung to outdated interpretation. Ralph M. Phinney, the closest relative of Margaret Bartlett and executor of the Margaret Bartlett estate, wrote an editorial in the *Greeneville Sun* advocating for a life-size statue of Johnson in the town, the revitalization of downtown, and the renaming of Greeneville High School to Andrew Johnson High School.<sup>37</sup> By 1995, Phinney succeeded in securing a statue in Greeneville and at the Tennessee State Capitol. At the dedication speech in Greeneville, Phinney paid tribute to Bartlett, who carried "the Johnson torch" for forty years and waged "a constant crusade of dedication to the preservation and perpetuation of the name and political career of her great-grandfather." Phinney also remarked that Bartlett wished for a monument to Johnson because she wanted a tangible memory "that you could see and touch," Bartlett was "the author of this statue...I'm carrying out her wishes."<sup>38</sup> Greeneville citizens were proud of Phinney's work, remarking that "these compelling twin memorials to our most distinguished son is a tribute to the

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<sup>36</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) 177. Foner's work is one of the most important texts that cast Reconstruction in a new light and viewed it as the most progressive era in U.S. history. Moreover, Foner did much to counter the Lincoln and Johnson myth arguing that "if in Lincoln, early poverty and the struggle for success somehow produced wit, political dexterity, and sensitivity to the views of others, Johnson's personality turned in upon itself."

<sup>37</sup> Ralph M. Phinney, "Statue of Andrew Johnson," *Greeneville Sun*, February 23, 1991.

<sup>38</sup> John M. Jones Jr., "Irreplaceable Ralph Phinney," *Greeneville Sun*, October 15, 1998.

vision, diplomacy, and determination of Ralph Phinney. There simply would have been no statues without him, and they will be his enduring legacy, just as they will be Mrs. Bartlett's."<sup>39</sup>

While Phinney was pushing for a more tangible Johnsonian memory, the NPS began important changes to the site. In 1993, park managers incorporated guided tours of the Homestead. Over the next few years, the NPS established an interpretative plan focusing on three themes:

- (1) The Presidency and the U. S. Constitution, national reunification following the Civil War, impeachment, the pardoning of ex-Confederate soldiers, Black Codes and the Freedman's Bureau.
- (2) Johnson as the Common Man, the Champion of the Working Class; the Homestead Act and Civil War demobilization, Johnson's office succession and his role as Governor of Tennessee.
- (3) Family life, Johnson's humble origins, migration, women's role, tuberculosis, and disease.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, while the Johnson Site began interpreting the Black Codes and Freedmen's Bureau, it is evident that the themes first espoused by Walter Brownlow and John Trotwood Moore were still held in high esteem by NPS employees. Themes of reunification, Johnson as a common man, and a failed impeachment still dominated the memory of Johnson in Greeneville. Still, there were drastic changes. The site was one of the first historic sites in East Tennessee to hold an exhibit on "the relationship of slavery to the Civil War."<sup>41</sup> However, the shift to guided tours did not come without controversy. Both current and former NPS employees expressed their doubts over the measure. Then superintendent Mark Corey "professed unease that this change might be sensitive with the local community." While Corey did not acknowledge what exactly would have been sensitive, it is possible that a more critical interpretation could offend town residents.<sup>42</sup> It was not

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<sup>39</sup> "Andrew Johnson and Ralph Phinney," *Greeneville Sun*, August 1, 1995.

<sup>40</sup> Binkley, *Administrative History*, 98.

<sup>41</sup> Binkley, *Administrative History*, 85.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

Corey's decision to implement guided tours, rather the NPS ordered the transition. The decision prompted the ire of retired Park Historian Hugh Lawing, who "originally drafted the interpretive plaques posted at the Homestead and who oversaw interpretation at the site for many years."<sup>43</sup>

However, as shown earlier, Lawing's borderline heroic interpretation of Johnson was seriously outdated by the 1990s. Thus, guided tours began despite Lawing's and Corey's reservations.

With the interpretative changes in the mid-1990s, the site also had to update its interpretative panels, especially concerning impeachment. One of the planned interactive exhibits featured a ballot box for visitors to act as a senator during the impeachment trial of 1868. By 1998, the new impeachment exhibit dedication ceremony was held on May 23, 1998, to mark the 130<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Johnson's acquittal. Amazingly, at the same time, President Bill Clinton also faced charges of impeachment. "It was thus an exceptional coincidence" that Senator Fred D. Thompson "cast the first symbolic ballot in the ballot box of the exhibit."<sup>44</sup> The event had immense interpretative appeal because Thompson went on to vote for real in the Senate during the impeachment of Clinton. In both instances, Thompson voted "not guilty."<sup>45</sup> The panels and interactive booth, still in use today, while addressing issues such as the vetoes of the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights Bills, does not focus on the core issues of impeachment—race, the degradation of the presidency, and the undermining of Congressional authority. Thus, voting "Not Guilty" is an easier decision for visitors. Reflecting this, in both 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, visitors voted overwhelmingly "Not Guilty" for Johnson in the mock impeachment ballot box.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>44</sup> Binkley, *Administrative History*, 102.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>46</sup> "Impeachment Vote Favors Andrew Johnson—Again," *Greeneville Sun*, June 7, 2012, [https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/impeachment-vote-favors-andrew-johnson---again/article\\_c3b09101-cfef-5dfc-8258-25d0e3f349f9.html](https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/impeachment-vote-favors-andrew-johnson---again/article_c3b09101-cfef-5dfc-8258-25d0e3f349f9.html).



In both instances, “Not Guilty” votes reached into the thousands while Guilty votes recorded 432 and 506, respectively. Further mythologizing the process, each year, on May 26, the anniversary of the Senate vote that acquitted Johnson, the Johnson Site regularly records Johnson as “Not Guilty.”<sup>47</sup>

While Greeneville and the Johnson Site remained outdated in their interpretations of Johnson, so too did historians in the region. None was stauncher in their antiquated interpretation than Dr. Robert Orr, professor of history at Walters State Community College who knew Margaret Bartlett well before she died. In 1991, the Greene County Heritage Trust working with the Johnson Site, produced a documentary on Andrew Johnson entitled *His Faith...Never Wavered*. Orr researched for the film and wrote the script. The locally-made documentary focuses heavily on Johnson’s beginnings in poverty and his rise politically. Although the film did not assault the legacy of Radical Republicans directly, it sympathetically depicts Johnson during impeachment as a besieged President trying to uphold the Constitution.

Over a decade later, the Bartlett-Patterson Corporation, a non-profit connected to Margaret Bartlett and her family’s estate, published Orr’s defense of Johnson. In the foreword of the book, Orr remarked that because there had only been 43 Presidents, Greeneville “should be very proud of the fact that one of them [Presidents] is a native son of our town.” Orr also praised Margaret Bartlett, claiming that “our town has also been blessed by the remarkable life of an amazing lady” who devoted her life to “a better understanding of President Andrew Johnson.” Thus, Orr simply fulfilled “Mrs. Bartlett’s wishes.”<sup>48</sup> In an attempt to cast Johnson in a positive

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<sup>47</sup> “Impeachment Vote Favors Andrew Johnson—Again,” *Greeneville Sun*, June 7, 2012, [https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/impeachment-vote-favors-andrew-johnson---again/article\\_c3b09101-cfef-5dfc-8258-25d0e3f349f9.html](https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/impeachment-vote-favors-andrew-johnson---again/article_c3b09101-cfef-5dfc-8258-25d0e3f349f9.html).

<sup>48</sup> Robert Orr, *President Andrew Johnson of Greeneville, Tennessee*, (Knoxville: Tennessee Valley Publishing, 2005) vii.

light, Orr devoted one chapter entirely to Johnson as an “abolitionist in disguise,” arguing that “Johnson advanced the cause of emancipation by any legal means available” before the Civil War.<sup>49</sup> The author further distorted the truth about Johnson and his enslaved people in order to make Johnson more equitable, claiming that Johnson was only following the tradition among East Tennessee emancipationists which meant “buying slaves to keep them from being sold to a commercial plantation in the cotton states.” Orr’s reasonings for these false claims was because Johnson lived in East Tennessee, which Orr depicted as having abolitionist sympathies even in the 1850s, thus, Johnson secretly advocated abolition through gradualist approaches.<sup>50</sup> Instead, Johnson was an ardent supporter of slavery, evidenced in a speech he delivered in 1858 where Johnson declared, “I wish to God every head of a family in the United States had one [slave] to take the drudgery and menial service off his family.”<sup>51</sup> What Orr’s work demonstrates is the attempt to cast Johnson as more progressive than Radical Republicans, a secret abolitionist in the South who was only waiting for the right moment to become a Moses to African Americans, making the memory of Johnson more appealing in the twenty-first century and removing the stain of white supremacy from Greeneville’s hero.

Greeneville received the book warmly, with seventy people attending a two-hour book signing by Orr at the Margaret Bartlett House, a home modeled exactly like her great-grandfather’s. Like the Johnson statue located on East Depot Street, the book was “an important part of Margaret Johnson Patterson Bartlett’s vision and determination to preserve Johnson’s

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<sup>49</sup> Orr, *President Andrew Johnson of Greeneville*, 18.

<sup>50</sup> Orr, *President Andrew Johnson of Greeneville*, 15.

<sup>51</sup> Andrew Johnson’s Speech on Homestead Bill, May 20, 1858, in the *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, eds. LeRoy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, vol. 3, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972) 165.

name.”<sup>52</sup> Marinella Charles, a resident of Greeneville and regent of the Nolachuckey Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), asserted that the book “is an insightful glimpse into the personal and professional attainments of the 17<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, a man we proudly claim as a native son.”<sup>53</sup> However, one must consider that if Orr had published a more balanced history of Johnson, one that accurately depicted his racial views, support for slavery, and contempt for civil rights, would Marinella and others proudly claim Johnson as a native son?

Local scholars were not the only one’s defensive of Johnson’s memory; local citizens and especially superintendents of the site defended the NPS’s interpretation of Johnson. In 2006, Mark Corey wrote John Beck of the Southeast Regional Office that “we [the Site] do not go out of our way to highlight some of the more unkind stories that contemporary historians have written about Johnson. As my mother told always told me, there are always at least two sides to a story.”<sup>54</sup> Corey’s answer is a puzzling one, for it is difficult to sympathize with the story of Reconstruction that viewed African American voting as a nightmare and Johnson’s actions as having saved the Union again. Moreover, Corey and writers like Orr chose only one story, the heroic story, while ignoring the story of African Americans in Reconstruction.

2008 marked the bicentennial of Johnson’s birth, which consisted of numerous lectures, panels, and demonstrations in Greeneville concerning Johnson. In July, Reconstruction scholar Andrew L. Slap of East Tennessee State University and two other professors visited the Johnson

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<sup>52</sup> “Orr’s Andrew Johnson Book Introduced,” *Greeneville Sun*, June 13, 2005, [https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/orrs-andrew-johnson-book-introduced/article\\_b5e0e762-c3cd-5955-b69e-1363bed0e6f7.html](https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/orrs-andrew-johnson-book-introduced/article_b5e0e762-c3cd-5955-b69e-1363bed0e6f7.html).

<sup>53</sup> “Reception to Celebrate Andrew Johnson Biography by Historian Robert Orr,” *Greeneville Sun*, June 9, 2005, [https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/reception-to-celebrate-andrew-johnson-biography-by-historian-robert-orr/article\\_38b53117-fb28-5224-90c4-69ccca1fcdff0.html](https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/reception-to-celebrate-andrew-johnson-biography-by-historian-robert-orr/article_38b53117-fb28-5224-90c4-69ccca1fcdff0.html).

<sup>54</sup> Mark Corey, e-mail to Cameron Binkley and John Deck, December 20, 2006, in Binkley, *Administrative History*, 110.

Site to analyze the site's interpretation. Slap correctly noted that the NPS needed to reflect the profound changes in the historiography over the past sixty years. In Slap's view, the site still maintained a heroic interpretation of Johnson, one who fought a "juggernaut" of Northern Congressmen.<sup>55</sup> Slap further argued that it is a "disservice [to history] to wipe out [in park displays and interpretation] the issue of white superiority." Leigh Fought, who teaches at Montgomery College and specializes in the history of women and slavery, addressed the lack of women in the interpretation and how she would like the site to engage more with Martha Patterson Johnson. Despite the historians' well-found concerns and assertions, some Greenevillians still displayed antipathy towards modern scholarly interpretations of Johnson. Larry Keller, a local storyteller, said words such as "'racist' and 'white supremacist' are 'things I don't want to believe' about Johnson," reflecting just how deep the heroic myth of Johnson had permeated Greeneville.<sup>56</sup>

*The Modern Memory of Andrew Johnson in Greeneville, 2008-2021*

By 2008, the national memory of Johnson was at one of its lowest points and only sinking further. However, Greeneville continued to honor and celebrate the memory of Johnson as if it was the 1908 centennial. The clash between the two memories is visible in the bicentennial celebration in December 2008. Superintendent Lizzie Watts declared that "the most important part of the bicentennial is to make people realize that history is a part of our heritage." Paul Bergeron, editor of the Andrew Johnson papers at the University of Tennessee, harkened back to the heroic interpretations of Bowers and Moore, claiming that those who are critical of

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<sup>55</sup> Tom Yancey, "Three Visiting Historians Praise Andrew Johnson Historic Site," *Greeneville Sun*, July 7, 2008, [https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/three-visiting-historians-praise-andrew-johnson-historic-site/article\\_5d0d19e5-b43b-5477-bd88-f1fdff6e571b.html](https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/three-visiting-historians-praise-andrew-johnson-historic-site/article_5d0d19e5-b43b-5477-bd88-f1fdff6e571b.html).

<sup>56</sup> Yancey, "Three Visiting Historians Praise Andrew Johnson Historic Site."

Johnson “don’t look at his earlier career or the things that he did during the Civil War which were heroic and noble.” Bergeron further passed the buck on Johnson, declaring that although he “truly was a racist,” Johnson “was in the majority as far as Americans at that time were concerned.”<sup>57</sup> However, David Bowen had already shown that even Johnson’s contemporaries, who were a “different sort of racist,” viewed Johnson’s racism as extreme.<sup>58</sup>

Robert Orr’s interpretations of Johnson also dominated the ceremony. A few months before the celebration, Orr vaguely claimed that Johnson “did more to advance Civil Rights than many recognize” and that Johnson’s supposed program of granting “full civil rights to African Americans are among the greatest accomplishments of U.S. history,” without mentioning what that program was. Reflecting the sentiments that have been dominant in Greeneville for over a century, Orr further espoused a false history of Reconstruction, arguing that Radical Republicans “must take much of the blame for the failure to improve race relations after the Civil War.” Conversely, Johnson was the true “friend to all races.”<sup>59</sup> No serious scholar in the twenty-first century would argue that Johnson advanced civil rights, except for the fact that Johnson’s contempt for Congress and freed African Americans prompted Congress to pass the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments. Orr further repeated these false themes at the 2008 bicentennial, declaring “the current history profession is totally wrong” about Johnson.<sup>60</sup> Charging that historians were biased because of the Civil Rights Movement, Orr alleged “they project racism back into decisions that Johnson didn’t make on racial grounds to preserve a constitutional

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<sup>57</sup> “A Tribute to Johnson,” *Johnson City Press*, December 26, 2008, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/594087100>.

<sup>58</sup> Bowen, *Andrew Johnson and the Negro*, 159.

<sup>59</sup> “Local Historian: Johnson Advanced Emancipation,” *Greeneville Sun*, September 19, 2008, [https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/local-historian-johnson-advanced-emancipation/article\\_97ce4e8e-b550-562e-afa3-9541b228935a.html](https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/local-historian-johnson-advanced-emancipation/article_97ce4e8e-b550-562e-afa3-9541b228935a.html).

<sup>60</sup> “A Tribute to Johnson,” *Johnson City Press*.

democracy.” Orr directed his comments at the keynote speaker, Eric Foner, who noted that “Johnson lacked the qualities of greatness Lincoln possessed,” mainly his open-mindedness and “sensitivity to the view of others, and ability to grow beyond early racism.”<sup>61</sup> Bergeron’s, Orr’s, and Foner’s comments demonstrate that the closer to Greeneville a historian was, the more benign their interpretation of Johnson was. Both Bergeron and Orr’s assessments downplayed Johnson’s racism and argued Johnson deserved more praise. Foner, a historian at Columbia University, attributed Johnson’s failure as President to his uncompromising racism, “stubbornness, intolerance of the views of others, and an inability to compromise.”<sup>62</sup>

In 2016, O.J. Early, writing for the *Greeneville Sun*, noted that although historical scholarship’s opinion of Johnson remained critical, “at the historic site, pieces of the guardian-of-the-South sentiment remain intact.”<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, superintendent Lizzie Watts maintained that although she was aware of the new histories of Johnson, she did not always accept their conclusions. Watts argued that “a lot of new-age historians simply don’t do a lot of primary research on Johnson. When you’ve heard how bad he is over and over, it’s easy to believe it.” Instead, Watts got her advice from Robert Orr “on some of Johnson’s political positions,” doubly ironic considering how Orr provided only vague arguments with little primary evidence. Thus, Watts did not engage in primary research either, relying instead on Orr’s tenuous notions. Early correctly noted that Orr, “as well as many of the interpretations at the historic site, argue that Johnson advanced the cause of emancipation for enslaved African Americans,” a false interpretation. Moreover, “both Orr and the historic site place an emphasis on what they dubbed

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<sup>61</sup> “A Tribute to Johnson,” *Johnson City Press*.

<sup>62</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 177.

<sup>63</sup> O.J. Early, “Andrew Johnson’s Legacy Still the Center of Debate,” *Greeneville Sun*, July 30, 2016, [https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/local\\_news/andrew-johnsons-legacy-still-the-center-of-debate/article\\_e69411c3-cc95-5741-96ce-1f66c6df0c2f.html](https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/local_news/andrew-johnsons-legacy-still-the-center-of-debate/article_e69411c3-cc95-5741-96ce-1f66c6df0c2f.html).

Johnson's warm-hearted treatment of slaves, as well as August 8, 1863, the day the future President freed his slaves.” Early also examined the visitor center’s interpretation of Reconstruction and impeachment, noting that the museum did have interpretative panels for Johnson’s vetoes of the Civil Rights and Freedmen’s Bureau Bills of 1866. However, Early correctly asserted that according to the exhibits, “Johnson issued vetoes ‘based on his interpretation of the Constitution with respect to the rights of the states.’ Left out of that commentary was Johnson’s ‘deep-seated racial prejudices’ that Foner spoke about in 2008. For historians critical of Johnson, that’s the accompanying—often left out—piece to the ‘strict constitutionalist’ view: white supremacy guided Johnson’s politics.” Watts concluded her interview with Early bizarrely claiming that “I think the more primary research you do on Johnson, the more you will come to understand his positions.”<sup>64</sup> However, from Hans Trefousse to Brenda Wineapple, numerous historians have reviewed Johnson’s papers and other primary sources and demonstrated Johnson’s positions as rooted in white supremacy. Thus, Watts’s comments appear willfully out of touch with scholarly interpretations in 2016.

While local whites zealously defend Andrew Johnson, African Americans continue to celebrate August 8<sup>th</sup> in the town and surrounding region. On July 23, 2018, East Tennessee PBS, in partnership with the George Clem Multicultural Alliance of Greeneville, hosted a conversation with African Americans in Greeneville. When asked what the town was like during segregation and if there were any tensions during August 8<sup>th</sup>, Sylvia Ann Bowers, Gene Maddox, Annie Connor Hamilton, and Joanne Grudger all remembered the event favorably. Annie Hamilton smiled and said, “they [whites] let us have the town. We could have it that day [August 8<sup>th</sup>].” Although addressing the fact that African Americans in Greeneville had more rights than

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<sup>64</sup> Early, “Andrew Johnson’s Legacy Still the Center of Debate.”

elsewhere in the South, primarily the right to vote, segregation existed every other day of the year and African Americans still had to use separate facilities from whites.<sup>65</sup> Maddox and others remembered favorably the dances held at Bernard's Warehouse No. 2, the tobacco warehouse African Americans held their dances at due to Jim Crow social requirements. Ironically, the building sat adjacent to the Johnson Homestead. Maddox asserted that it was "appropriate" that the dance was held at the warehouse next to the Homestead "since President Johnson was pretty much responsible for this celebration that it would be so close to his home," thus reflecting African American memory of the event concerning Johnson.<sup>66</sup> The participants answered several questions about their memories of the event through the decades, remembering it as the happiest day of the year. At the celebrations, African Americans dressed in their Sunday best, held dances, played baseball games, and held beauty pageants. By displaying their athleticism and beauty, African Americans in the town and region demonstrated that beauty and skill were more than just white. Annie Connor Hamilton remembered how "we celebrated with happiness and joy that a breakthrough had come to Greeneville for the Blacks," meaning the end of slavery. Gene Maddox remembered hearing the event's history as a child and always attributed the celebration to Andrew Johnson. In a separate interview, Maddox argued that August 8<sup>th</sup> "became symbolic as the *beginning* of freedom for slaves in Tennessee."<sup>67</sup> Maddox also wished that Johnson's role became more "exposed in a public domain."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> East Tennessee PBS, "East Tennessee Voices: Greeneville's 8<sup>th</sup> of August," YouTube Video, 29:55, August 9, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BSK8rtyI3U>.

<sup>66</sup> East Tennessee PBS, "Black in Appalachia, 8<sup>th</sup> of August: Tennessee's Celebration of Emancipation," YouTube Video, 27:44, August 8, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARGAsxFaJo4>.

<sup>67</sup> Black in Appalachia, "Gene Maddox-8<sup>th</sup> of August, Greeneville, TN," YouTube Video, 30:51, April 20, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_qFJdHSnsk&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_qFJdHSnsk&t=2s).

<sup>68</sup> East Tennessee PBS, "Black in Appalachia, 8<sup>th</sup> of August: Tennessee's Celebration of Emancipation," YouTube Video, 27:44, August 8, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARGAsxFaJo4>.



In response to the brutal murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, African Americans in Greeneville peacefully protested racial injustice and police killings across the country. Rev. Ken Saunders, rector of St. James Episcopal Church in Greeneville, declared that the rally was about “equality and human rights.”<sup>69</sup> Greene County Sheriff Wesley Holt said that “you couldn’t ask for a better crowd right here. They are not disrespectful of us and they’re not disrespectful of anyone.” One fringe group attended the rally despite both whites and Blacks participating in the demonstration. Signs like “Blue Lives Matter, All Lives Matter,” and “My Hometown Matters,” surrounded the Andrew Johnson monument.<sup>70</sup> Supposedly fearing looting, members of the group carried assault rifles and handguns. One man wearing camouflage and carrying an assault rifle turned to a young Black man and told him, “stay safe.” Whether this comment was sincere or not is unclear, however, the context does not bode well for a warm comment of concern. It is noteworthy that the group chose the Johnson statue over other areas in the town. While the Homestead and Memorial Building are off-limits for such acts, there were plenty of places to protest rather than standing next to one of the most racist President’s statues.<sup>71</sup>

Before the Civil Rights era, the memory of Andrew Johnson, although conservative at its core, was remarkably flexible and adaptable. From the memory of Johnson being used to strengthen the monolithic Unionist myth, to the memory of a besieged President who courageously sought to maintain white supremacy, forgive ex-Confederates, preserve small government, and curse the Radicals as the true traitors to the Constitution, the memory of Johnson reflects East Tennesseans’ memory of the era. Despite profound changes in social

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<sup>69</sup> Ken Little, “Greeneville Rally Passionate, Peaceful,” *Greeneville Sun*, June 2, 2020, [https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/local\\_news/story-photos-video-greeneville-rally-passionate-peaceful/article\\_fb31cbf7-dac5-5007-b6e3-93dac18df414.html](https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/local_news/story-photos-video-greeneville-rally-passionate-peaceful/article_fb31cbf7-dac5-5007-b6e3-93dac18df414.html).

<sup>70</sup> Little, “Greeneville Rally Passionate, Peaceful.”

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

relations and scholarly assessments of Andrew Johnson following the Civil Rights era, East Tennesseans, or more specifically, Greeneville and the Johnson Site, continued to rally around a conservative image of Johnson, using that image to assert their conservatism and connect themselves to the larger national story. However, protests over racial inequality during the summer of 2020 have produced a different atmosphere in the country and within Greeneville, as demonstrated by the peaceful Black and white protest in Greeneville alluded to earlier. Because of this, the Johnson Site has begun changing the interpretation at the site, mainly by engaging more with slavery at the site and the issues of Reconstruction like citizenship. The site's webpage provides excellent information on the enslaved families Johnson once owned, primarily that of Dolly, Sam, and William Johnson.<sup>72</sup> The website also covers the origins and legacy of August 8<sup>th</sup>, attributing the holiday to Sam Johnson.<sup>73</sup>

Still, there is plenty of room for revision in the park's interpretation. The museum at the visitor center, as O.J. Early addressed, leaves much room for more explanation. Very little is said of the violence during Reconstruction, especially against the formerly enslaved population of the South. The museum also displays a panel on the importance of Edmund G. Ross, praising him for his vote that prevented a "dangerous precedent...allowing for removal of a President from office for trivial reasons such as political unpopularity." The Johnson Site's webpage also echoes the apologists of Johnson during the 1930s, despite having been updated last on September 15, 2021. On the homepage of the website displayed in bold is Johnson's words, "The Constitution is my Guide." The corresponding text that follows acknowledges Johnson's "complex

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<sup>72</sup> "Slaves of Andrew Johnson," National Park Service (U.S. Department of the Interior, July 24, 2020), <http://www.nps.gov/anjo/learn/historyculture/slaves.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> "August 8<sup>th</sup>," National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior, July 24, 2022), <http://www.nps.gov/anjo/learn/historyculture/august-8th.htm>.

presidency” and argues that the Constitution served as “the guide” for both Radicals and Andrew Johnson from vetoes and impeachment to citizenship and voting rights, glossing over Johnson’s intense racism.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the website explains Johnson’s Reconstruction policies as “based on his interpretation to the Constitution and his belief in the limits of the federal government” and his policies “were often in direct opposition to Congressional measure legislated to enable the freedmen.” Again, the website glossed over Johnson’s belief in white supremacy and attributed his attempts to restrict African American freedom and Congressional authority to his conservative view of the Constitution.<sup>75</sup>

The interpretation of impeachment also echoes the past, only addressing Johnson’s violation of the Tenure of Office Act, in which he removed Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. The site ignores the most substantial articles of impeachment against Johnson, the tenth and eleventh articles.<sup>76</sup> These articles did not concern Stanton and instead focused on Johnson’s degradation of the presidency and his contempt for Congressional authority. Scholars like Brenda Wineapple argue that the impeachment trial was “unmistakably about race,” for Johnson had “sought to obstruct, overthrow, veto, or challenge every attempt of the nation to bind its wounds after the war,” meaning his vetoes of civil rights legislation and pardoning of Confederates.<sup>77</sup> Wineapple further argues that the tenth and eleventh impeachment articles were the strongest articles and what most Senators rallied behind. The tenth article “accused Johnson of disgracing the presidential office,” especially with his “Swing Around the Circle” campaign where crowds

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<sup>74</sup> “Andrew Johnson National Historic Site,” National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior), accessed March 5, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/anjo/index.htm>.

<sup>75</sup> “History & Culture: Andrew Johnson National Historic Site,” National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior), accessed March 5, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/anjo/learn/historyculture/index.htm>.

<sup>76</sup> “Andrew Johnson and Impeachment,” National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior, June 16, 2020), <https://www.nps.gov/anjo/andrew-johnson-and-impeachment.htm>.

<sup>77</sup> Wineapple, *The Impeachers: The Trial of Andrew Johnson and the Dream of a Just Nation*, (New York: Random House, 2019) xix.

demanded he hang Jefferson Davis with Johnson replying, “Why not hang Thad Stevens and Wendell Phillips?”<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, the eleventh focused on Johnson’s abuse of Congress from “his insistence that Congress had no authority if Southern states were not represented—to his obstruction” of laws passed by Congress like the Freedmen’s Bureau and Civil Rights Bills.<sup>79</sup> Thus, by focusing solely on the Tenure of Office Act, the museum and website portray a more favorable defense for Johnson rather than correctly attributing the trial to race.

Still, there is hope for a more balanced and correct interpretation at the Andrew Johnson National Historic Site, although it will take years to implement fully. In an interview with the museum technician at the Johnson Site, Kendra Hinkle, she mentioned that the Johnson Site began working in 2021 with the George Clem Multicultural Alliance in Greeneville, and historians Andrew L. Slap and Steven E. Nash to create a new park brochure that reflects a more open interpretation of Johnson in 2021. Furthermore, the site has planned long-range interpretative changes, which will consist of new museum panels that focus more on citizenship rights, African Americans during Reconstruction, and Johnson’s multiple attempts to undermine Congress.<sup>80</sup> Still, bureaucracies move slowly and the town of Greeneville itself may be hesitant to support interpretive changes, as demonstrated in Larry Keller’s comments back in 2008 that words such as “‘racist’ and ‘white supremacist’ are ‘things I don’t want to believe’ about Johnson.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Thomas Nast, “Andy’s Trip,” *Harpers Weekly*, October 27, 1866.

<sup>79</sup> Wineapple, *The Impeachers*, 266.

<sup>80</sup> Kendra Hinkle, (Museum Technician, Andrew Johnson National Historic Site) interviewed by author, Greeneville, March 23, 2022.

<sup>81</sup> Tom Yancey, “Three Visiting Historians Praise Andrew Johnson Historic Site,” *Greeneville Sun*, July 7, 2008, [https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/three-visiting-historians-praise-andrew-johnson-historic-site/article\\_5d0d19e5-b43b-5477-bd88-f1fdff6e571b.html](https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/three-visiting-historians-praise-andrew-johnson-historic-site/article_5d0d19e5-b43b-5477-bd88-f1fdff6e571b.html).

Despite the numerous interpretative changes made at the Johnson Site and the changes already planned, the National Veterans' Cemetery and the Johnson monument remains a roadblock to a more balanced interpretation. The NPS continues to interpret the story of Andrew Johnson by celebrating "his principled defense of the U.S. Constitution and the service of Americans who have worn the uniform of their country."<sup>82</sup> Because the idea that Johnson heroically defended the Constitution relates to the soldiers and families buried within the cemetery, the town and Site will likely continue this interpretation to avoid offending the families of veterans buried there. Moreover, in a conservative town, themes about Johnson, such as his belief in states' rights, fiscal conservatism, and a commitment to the white working man, are cherished, making the process more complicated. While changes are unfolding in Greeneville concerning the interpretation of Andrew Johnson, the Site and the town remain vastly behind scholarly assessments of Johnson. Instead, Greeneville remembers Johnson as a common man who became a heroic defender of the Constitution. Thus, Greeneville and the Andrew Johnson National Historic Site continue to honor a false idol.

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<sup>82</sup> Binkley, *Administrative History*, 89.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

In the one hundred and fifty-three years since Andrew Johnson first attempted to establish his legacy, East Tennessee's memory of the man has evolved through three phases. The first phase, spearheaded by Johnson and later his daughters, sought to demonstrate Johnson's loyalty to the Union and the constitution as indicative of all East Tennesseans while simultaneously praising his pardon and amnesty policies during Reconstruction to appeal to ex-Confederates. This first phase emphasized East Tennessee's wartime Unionism to appeal to postwar capitalists while also demonstrating to the federal government that the region could be trusted to control its own affairs, especially the racial hierarchy. Once reconciliation spread across the nation, the second phase of Johnson's memory depicted a white supremacist who saved the constitution and the white South from the evils of racial mixing and Radical Republicans bent on centralized power. Support for reconciliation legitimized the efforts of Lost Cause advocates in East Tennessee, so much so that the region shifted from a Unionist to a Confederate heritage by 1908. Nevertheless, Johnson's memory remained popular due to his actions during Reconstruction to prevent interracial democracy and maintain a white man's government. The Civil Rights Movement ushered in the third phase of Johnson's memory that radically altered historians' interpretations of Johnson and the national popular memory of the great commoner. Despite this last change, Greeneville and the National Park Service (NPS) continues to celebrate Johnson as one of the most heroic presidents in American history.

This study demonstrates that the memory of Andrew Johnson, the region's most famous politician, allowed certain East Tennesseans to depict their region in specific ways. Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) leaders, Lost Cause disciples, conservative congressmen and politicians, local historians, and Johnson descendants all used former president's image for their own purposes. This study enhances the historiography of Civil War Era memory because it shows

how versatile Johnson's memory was. For instance, although white East Tennesseans praised Johnson's Reconstruction record while celebrating both Unionists and Confederates as brave and Radical Republicans as evil, fitting Blight's model, the admiration for Johnson's class and commitment to the Union and even emancipation, displays the complexities of East Tennessee's Civil War Era memory. Moreover, the memory of Andrew Johnson demonstrates that there is no one-size-fits-all narrative concerning Civil War memory, different regions and people each remembered the era in their own way.

Andrew Johnson's post-presidential career provides an excellent insight into how East Tennesseans remembered the Civil War during Reconstruction. The accidental president used his record to try and appeal to all Tennesseans. To Unionists, Johnson portrayed himself as their brave and heroic leader during the war who worked alongside Abraham Lincoln to quell the rebellion. Meanwhile, Johnson appealed to ex-Confederates as a benevolent and forgiving president who guaranteed their freedoms by pardoning them for their roles in the rebellion. Johnson's attempts to maintain a white man's government during Reconstruction, coupled with each side's desire to reconcile with their neighbors, helped foster a reconciliationist atmosphere in East Tennessee that appeared faster than anywhere else in the country.<sup>1</sup> Johnson himself pushed reconciliation and denounced Radical Republicans as the true traitors to the nation while judging Confederates as either misguided or defending the constitution like him. While Johnson reached out to both Confederates and white Unionists, he also addressed African Americans as well. Johnson attended August 8<sup>th</sup> celebrations in Greeneville and often argued that it was *him*,

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel B. McGuire, "East Tennessee's Grand Army: Union Veterans Confront Race, Reconciliation, and Civil War Memory, 1884-1913," PhD diss., (University of Georgia, 2015), 33. McGuire argues that "Local Unionists not only came to the aid of their Confederate neighbors because of commercial ties and friendships, but many also sustained kinship ties with outspoken Rebels."

not Lincoln, who freed African Americans.<sup>2</sup> While Johnson tried to remind African Americans of the emancipation he granted them, he maintained his paternalistic racism in which he warned them against voting for Radicals and attempting to undermine the racial hierarchy. Johnson continued to run for national office until he finally achieved election to the U.S. Senate in January 1875, which represented Johnson's vindication in Tennessee, at least in his mind. Still, the national opinion of Johnson and even the opinion of many Middle and West Tennesseans remained low when he died in August 1875.<sup>3</sup>

When Johnson died, Unionists saw the value in clinging to the image of the great commoner. The memory of Andrew Johnson strengthened the myth of monolithic Unionism in East Tennessee, the idea that all East Tennesseans were loyal. White East Tennesseans had two reasons for supporting the Unionist myth and pushing Johnson alongside it. First, it could attract Northern capital to invest in the region because it had been loyal rather than an area full of traitorous Confederates. Second, if the region had been loyal like Johnson, then the federal government did not need to interfere with their affairs.<sup>4</sup> The ability to appear loyal by hiding behind Johnson's memory shielded the region from federal interference with white Southerner's greatest fear—racial equality. Although Unionists pushed the monolithic Unionist idea to outside investors, they also promoted reconciliation in the region between 1878 and 1908. Both GAR

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<sup>2</sup> At a speech in Nashville Johnson declared “when you come to consider who it was that proclaimed you free, you will remember...Mr. Lincoln refused to extend his proclamation to Tennessee and left her out. Andrew Johnson in the midst of danger and death proclaimed it from the capitol steps.” *Nashville Republican Banner*, April 11, 1869, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/604998303>.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Lee maintains that public opinion of Johnson across the nation “remained overwhelmingly negative.” Tom Lee, “The Lost Cause that Wasn't: East Tennessee and the Myth of Unionist Appalachia,” in *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War's Aftermath* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 315.

<sup>4</sup> Kelli Brooke Nelson, “On the Imperishable Face of Granite: Civil War Monuments and the Evolution of Historical Memory in East Tennessee 1878-1931,” Master's thesis, (East Tennessee State University, 2011), 19. Nelson argues that the Johnson monument sparked the Unionist monument phase in East Tennessee that sought to strengthen the monolithic Unionist myth.



leaders and ex-Confederates and their descendants celebrated Andrew Johnson as a symbol of patriotism and reconciliation. This demonstrates that although the area contained Unionists, they like Johnson, were not committed to racial equality. David Blight argued that one of the few things ex-Confederates and Unionists could unite behind was the belief in white supremacy.<sup>5</sup> East Tennessee Unionists and Confederates rallying behind the memory of Andrew Johnson demonstrates the validity in Blight's argument because each celebrated Johnson's Reconstruction record.

The memory of Andrew Johnson also benefitted greatly from the political and economic turmoil of the Gilded Age, in which the U.S. experienced political corruption, economic crashes, and wage inequality. Thus, the memory of a poor white indentured tailor who rose through economic and political ranks due to his own ability and hard work appealed to the lower and middle classes. This period also produced the first favorable biography of Johnson, written by Reverend James Jones that would influence a flux of pro-Johnson biographies during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>6</sup> Through the efforts of Martha J. Patterson and Congressman Walter P. Brownlow, the federal government acquired the Andrew Johnson cemetery in 1901 and established it as a National Cemetery in 1906. Nevertheless, as towns like Greeneville industrialized, the popularity of the Lost Cause also grew in East Tennessee. Moreover, white Northerners increasingly sought to reconcile with white Southerners.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the necessity to appear loyal was no longer necessary to attract capital.

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<sup>5</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 26-27. Blight argues that by 1913 white Northerners and Southerners united together in white supremacy at the expense of African American political and civil rights.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. James S. Jones, *Life of Andrew Johnson: Seventeenth President of the United States*, (Greeneville: East Tennessee Publishing Company, 1901).

<sup>7</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 26-27.

Another boost to Johnson's memory was the 1926 Supreme Court ruling that the Tenure of Office Act was unconstitutional, proving Johnson and his apologists right fifty-eight years later. This ruling sparked an outpouring of favorable scholarly biographies on Andrew Johnson. These scholars often trained by William A. Dunning, repaired the image of Johnson from a vindictive and bungling accidental president into a heroic, sober, and benevolent commander-in-chief wrongly impeached by Radical Republicans determined to impose racial equality.<sup>8</sup> This interpretation dominated both scholarly and popular interpretations for the next thirty years.

Now that white Northerners focused on reconciliation and at times adopted Lost Cause views of the Civil War and Reconstruction, white East Tennesseans were free to celebrate the aspects of Johnson that they cherished—his rise out of poverty and his white nationalism. During the late 1920s and 1930s, Johnson's popularity reached unimaginable heights largely because of the rise of the Lost Cause, an increasing desire for a romanticized past, and Jim Crow segregation laws. The memory shifted from a benevolent Unionist president to a white nationalistic hero who courageously defended the white South from the humiliation and power of African Americans and their Radical Republican allies.

With Johnson's popularity growing across the nation, East Tennesseans worked to preserve more of his legacy. In 1942, after negotiations between Margaret J. Patterson Bartlett, Congressman B. Carroll Reece, and the federal government, the National Park Service purchased the Johnson homestead and acquired the titles for the National Cemetery and the Johnson tailor shop owned by the state. By 1958, the NPS renovated the home to reflect the final years of

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<sup>8</sup> Robert W. Winston, *Andrew Johnson, Plebian and Patriot* (New York: Henry Holt, 1928); John Trotwood Moore, "The Rail-Splitter's Running Mate," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 30, 1929; Claude Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution After Lincoln* (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929); Lloyd Paul Stryker, *Andrew Johnson: A Study in Courage* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); George F. Milton, *The Age of Hate: Andrew Johnson and the Radicals*, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1930).

Johnson's life (1869-1875). In many ways, the dedication marked the zenith of Johnson's memory nationally. Shortly after, the Civil Rights Movement began to dominate national headlines and prompted a drastic reevaluation of Johnson by historians and the public. Beginning in 1960, scholars spearheaded by Eric McKittrick's *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* began reevaluating Johnson's career by focusing on his intense racism.<sup>9</sup> With Americans increasingly supporting civil rights for African Americans, the memory of the white supremacist defender of the white South had to be updated to fit the context of the times. During the third phase of Johnson's memory Greenville newspapers and local historians like Robert Orr depicted Johnson as a benevolent enslaver who was also one of the most progressive presidents in American history.<sup>10</sup> The third phase, which continues today, represents Greenville and the NPS's attempt to cast Johnson as a hero for everyone, especially East Tennesseans, rather than a racist reactionary. Central to the local interpretation of Andrew Johnson at the historic site was Margaret J. Patterson Bartlett, who often entertained visitors with favorable stories about her ancestor. It was not until 1993, one year after Margaret died, that the NPS gradually introduced topics like the Freedmen's Bureau and Black Codes.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the shift to guided tours in 1993, the interpretation of Johnson at the national historic site borders on the heroic. The interpretation contains glimpses of John Trotwood Moore

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<sup>9</sup> Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960); LaWanda Cox and John Cox, *Politics, Principle, and Prejudice, 1865–1866: Dilemma of Reconstruction America*. (New York, NY: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963); John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).

<sup>10</sup> Hugh A. Lawing, "Andrew Johnson National Monument," (*Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 20, no. 2 1961) 103; Howard Hill, "More Information on Andrew Johnson," *The Greenville Sun*, December 5, 1963, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584886972>; Robert Orr, *President Andrew Johnson of Greenville, Tennessee*, (Knoxville: Tennessee Valley Publishing, 2005), 18. Orr falsely argued that Johnson was an "abolitionist in disguise" in order to make him more accessible in the twenty-first century.

<sup>11</sup> Cameron Binkley, *Andrew Johnson National Historic Site Administrative History* (Atlanta, Ga: Cultural Resources, Southeast Region, National Park Service, 2008), 98.

and Claude Bowers, two Lost Cause and Dunning School advocates who claimed Johnson prevented centralized power and racial equality during Reconstruction. While the Johnson site does not openly praise Johnson for his racism like Moore and Bowers, little critical interpretation exists there. The NPS depicts Johnson's impeachment as a foolhardy attempt to remove a just president.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, as demonstrated in chapter four, the NPS does plan to eventually change this interpretation and focus more on the aspects of Reconstruction that still affect American society today from racial violence to citizenship rights.<sup>13</sup> However, as showed by Larry Keller's comments at the 2008 panel discussion in Greeneville, white East Tennesseans may not be willing to accept these interpretive changes because the memory of a heroic and benevolent Johnson has been so enduring in East Tennessee.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Greene County voted overwhelmingly for Donald J. Trump in 2020.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, according to a Politico poll 83% of Republicans did not support the removal of Confederate statues in July 2021.<sup>16</sup> These two statistics coupled with Keller's comments demonstrate that even after the NPS makes interpretive changes, Greeneville and East Tennessee will likely continue to honor their false idol.

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<sup>12</sup> O.J. Early, "Andrew Johnson's Legacy Still the Center of Debate," *Greeneville Sun*, July 30, 2016, [https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/local\\_news/andrew-johnsons-legacy-still-the-center-of-debate/article\\_e69411c3-cc95-5741-96ce-1f66c6df0c2f.html](https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/local_news/andrew-johnsons-legacy-still-the-center-of-debate/article_e69411c3-cc95-5741-96ce-1f66c6df0c2f.html).

<sup>13</sup> Kendra Hinkle, (Museum Technician, Andrew Johnson National Historic Site) interviewed by author, Greeneville, March 23, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Larry Keller, a local storyteller, said words such as "'racist' and 'white supremacist' are 'things I don't want to believe' about Johnson." Tom Yancey, "Three Visiting Historians Praise Andrew Johnson Historic Site," *Greeneville Sun*, July 7, 2008, [https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/three-visiting-historians-praise-andrew-johnson-historic-site/article\\_5d0d19e5-b43b-5477-bd88-f1fdff6e571b.html](https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/three-visiting-historians-praise-andrew-johnson-historic-site/article_5d0d19e5-b43b-5477-bd88-f1fdff6e571b.html).

<sup>15</sup> Greene County recorded 22, 259 voters for Donald J. Trump compared to just 5, 199 for Joseph R. Biden. See "Tennessee Election Results," Tennessee Secretary of State Tre Hargett Portrait Photo, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://sos.tn.gov/elections/results#2020>.

<sup>16</sup> Cameron Easley, "American Electorate Continues to Favor Leaving Confederate Relics in Place," *Morning Consult*, February 11, 2022, <https://morningconsult.com/2021/07/14/confederate-statues-flag-military-bases-polling/>.

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