

How Did President Andrew Johnsons Views Differ From Union General William T. Shermans Views On What Should

How Did President Andrew Johnsons Views Differ From Union General William T. Shermans Views On What Should happen to the South and the process of Reconstruction after the Civil War? This question highlights the fundamental differences in priorities, philosophies, and visions for the post-war United States held by two prominent figures of the era. President Andrew Johnson and General William T. Sherman both played pivotal roles during and after the Civil War, but their perspectives on how to rebuild the nation, reintegrate the Southern states, and address issues of race and governance diverged significantly. Understanding these differences provides insight into the complex political and social landscape of Reconstruction America.

Backgrounds and Perspectives

Andrew Johnson: A Southern Unionist and President

Andrew Johnson, who became the 17th President of the United States after Abraham Lincoln's assassination in 1865, was a Southern Democrat from Tennessee. His background as a tailor, his staunch Unionist sentiments despite his Southern roots, and his political career shaped his approach to Reconstruction. Johnson believed in a relatively lenient process to reintegrate the Southern states and was committed to restoring the Union swiftly.

Key aspects of Johnson's perspective included:

- Emphasis on rapid reintegration of the Southern states with minimal punishment.
- Opposition to extensive federal intervention in Southern affairs.
- Support for the preservation of white supremacy and resistance to granting full rights to newly freed slaves.
- Belief that the states, not the federal government, should determine their own post-war policies.

William T. Sherman: A Union General and Military Strategist

William Tecumseh Sherman was one of the most prominent Union generals during the Civil War, known for his ruthless tactics and "scorched earth" policies, especially his March to the Sea. After the war, Sherman became an advocate for a more integrated and equitable Reconstruction process.

Sherman's views were characterized by:

- Support for civil rights and suffrage for freed slaves.
- Belief in a more active federal role in rebuilding Southern society.
- Advocacy for economic development and land redistribution to promote stability.
- Emphasis on using military and federal authority to ensure lasting peace and reform.

The Core Differences in Views on Reconstruction

Approach to Reintegration of the Southern States

While both Johnson and Sherman recognized the importance of restoring the Union, their methods and visions for the process differed markedly.

Johnson's Approach:

- Favored swift restoration of Southern states using Presidential Reconstruction.
- Allowed Southern states to create their own governments, often leading to the enactment of Black Codes and restrictive laws.
- Believed that the Southern states had never legally seceded and thus should be restored with minimal federal oversight.
- Opposed measures that aimed to secure civil rights for freed slaves, viewing them as a threat to social order.

Sherman's Approach:

- Supported a more comprehensive federal intervention.
- Believed that Reconstruction should include protections for freed slaves and measures to ensure their civil rights.
- Advocated for military oversight in the South to enforce new laws and prevent the resurgence of white supremacist policies.
- Saw economic restructuring, including land redistribution, as essential for long-term peace.

Views on Civil Rights and Freedmen

Another significant point of divergence was their stance on the rights of freed slaves and the broader civil rights movement.

Johnson's Views:

- Opposed the extension of voting rights to freed slaves.
- Vetoed bills aimed at granting civil rights to African Americans, including the Civil Rights Act of 1866.
- Believed that African Americans should not be granted full citizenship or suffrage, aligning with many Southern whites' views.

Sherman's Views:

- Supported civil rights for freed slaves, including voting rights.
- Believed that African Americans deserved protection under the law and should be active participants in civic life.
- Used his military authority to support efforts to aid freedmen, including establishing schools and promoting economic opportunities.

Policy Implementation and Outcomes

Johnson's Policies and Their Impact

President Johnson's approach led to a series of policies that facilitated the quick readmission of Southern states, but also resulted in significant challenges, including:

- The issuance of pardons to many Southern elites who regained political power.
- The rise of Black Codes, which severely limited the rights of freedmen and perpetuated racial inequalities.
- The veto and obstruction of civil rights legislation, contributing to the emergence of discriminatory laws and practices.
- The eventual impeachment proceedings against Johnson, driven in part by his resistance to Congressional Reconstruction efforts.

Key outcomes of Johnson's policies:

1. Rapid Southern reintegration.
2. Limited protections for freed slaves.
3. Emergence of white supremacist regimes, including the Ku Klux Klan.
4. The setting of the stage for the era of Jim Crow laws.

Sherman's Initiatives and Their Influence

Sherman's vision, though not always formally adopted as policy, influenced the broader Reconstruction efforts through:

- Advocacy for federal oversight and military enforcement.
- Support for the Freedmen's Bureau, which aimed to assist freed slaves and impoverished Southerners.
- Promotion of land redistribution policies, though these largely fell short of his aspirations.
- Efforts to promote economic development in the South, including infrastructure projects and education initiatives.

Key impacts of Sherman's views:

1. Encouragement of civil rights initiatives.
2. Military presence used to enforce new laws.
3. Foundation for later civil rights activism.
4. Recognition of economic and social reforms as necessary for lasting peace.

Legacy of Their Divergent Views

Long-term Effects of Johnson's Policies

Johnson's lenient and often conciliatory approach contributed to the persistence of racial inequality in the South. His opposition to protections for freed slaves and his vetoes of civil rights legislation delayed progress toward racial equality.

Consequences include:

- The rise of segregationist policies.
- The disenfranchisement of African Americans.
- The establishment of the Jim Crow era.

Legacy of Sherman's Approach

While Sherman's ideas were not fully realized during his lifetime, his advocacy for civil rights and federal intervention laid groundwork that would be built upon by later civil rights leaders and policies.

Influences include:

- Support for the 14th and 15th Amendments.
- Inspiration for subsequent efforts to enforce civil rights laws.
- Recognition of economic and social reforms as integral to peace.

Conclusion: Contrasting Visions for a Post-War America

The differing perspectives of President Andrew Johnson and Union General William T. Sherman exemplify the broader debates that shaped the Reconstruction era. Johnson's emphasis on swift reconciliation and limited federal involvement reflected a desire to restore the Union with minimal upheaval, often at the expense of racial justice. Conversely, Sherman's advocacy for civil rights, economic reform, and active federal oversight represented a vision of a more equitable and integrated society.

Their contrasting approaches underscore the complex challenges faced in rebuilding a fractured nation—balancing political reconciliation, racial equality, economic stability, and social justice. While Johnson's policies contributed to the persistence of racial discrimination, Sherman's ideals foreshadowed future civil rights advancements. Understanding these differences helps illuminate the enduring struggle for justice and equality in American history.

Keywords: Andrew Johnson, William T. Sherman, Reconstruction, Civil War, Civil Rights, Black Codes, federal intervention, Southern reintegration, Jim Crow, civil rights legislation, post-war America

Frequently Asked Questions

How did President Andrew Johnson's views on Reconstruction differ from Union General William T. Sherman's approach?

President Johnson favored a lenient Reconstruction policy that prioritized quick reintegration of Southern states with minimal changes, while Sherman supported more proactive measures to protect civil rights and ensure genuine Reconstruction efforts.

What were Andrew Johnson's beliefs regarding the rights of freed slaves compared to William T. Sherman's stance?

Johnson was largely opposed to granting full rights to freed slaves and prioritized restoring Southern states without significant social reforms, whereas Sherman was more sympathetic to the rights of freedmen and supported policies that aimed to improve their situation.

In terms of Reconstruction policies, how did Johnson's vision differ from Sherman's?

Johnson advocated for swift readmission of Southern states with minimal federal intervention, whereas Sherman believed in more active federal measures to secure civil rights and ensure that Southern states adhered to Reconstruction mandates.

What were the key disagreements between Johnson and Sherman regarding the treatment of former Confederates?

Johnson was lenient and often pardoned former Confederates, promoting quick reconciliation, while Sherman was more cautious and sought to prevent former Confederates from regaining too much political power, supporting measures that restricted their influence.

How did Johnson's views on the use of military authority during Reconstruction differ from Sherman's approach?

Johnson was skeptical of military intervention and preferred presidential authority, whereas Sherman, as a military leader, believed in using military presence as a tool to enforce Reconstruction policies and protect civil rights.

Did Johnson and Sherman agree on the importance of civil rights for African Americans?

No, Johnson was largely opposed to expanding civil rights for African Americans and favored quick political reintegration, while Sherman recognized the importance of protecting civil rights and supported policies that aimed to improve the lives of freed slaves.

How did their personal backgrounds influence Johnson's and Sherman's differing views on Reconstruction?

Johnson, a Southerner and former slaveholder, favored reconciliation with the South and was more conservative on civil rights, whereas Sherman, a Union general from the North with a military background, supported a more active federal role in securing civil rights and Reconstruction policies.

In summary, what was the main ideological divide

between President Johnson and General Sherman regarding post-war Reconstruction?

The main divide was that Johnson favored rapid, lenient reconciliation with minimal federal intervention, while Sherman supported a more active, rights-based Reconstruction that involved military enforcement and protections for freedmen.

Additional Resources

Clash of Perspectives: President Andrew Johnson vs. Union General William T. Sherman on Post-War Reconstruction and Reconstruction Policies

The aftermath of the American Civil War was a tumultuous period marked by divergent visions for the nation's future. Among the key figures shaping this era were President Andrew Johnson and Union General William T. Sherman. Their contrasting perspectives on reconstruction, race relations, and the reintegration of the Southern states reveal fundamental ideological differences that influenced the course of American history. This article offers an in-depth analysis of their views, highlighting their philosophies, policies, and the enduring impact they left on the United States.

Introduction: The Context of a Nation Rebuilding

The Civil War concluded in 1865, leaving the nation fragmented—both geographically and ideologically. The Union victory set the stage for Reconstruction, a complex process aimed at restoring the Southern states to the Union while addressing the profound issues of slavery, racial equality, and political restructuring.

President Andrew Johnson, who assumed office after Abraham Lincoln's assassination, was committed to a swift and lenient reintegration of the Southern states. Conversely, General William T. Sherman, a Union military leader renowned for his "March to the Sea" and ruthless tactics, held views rooted in a vision of radical change and racial equality. Understanding their perspectives requires examining their backgrounds, policies, and ideological frameworks.

Andrew Johnson's Views: A Lenient and Racially Conservative Approach

Background and Ideology

Andrew Johnson, a Southern Democrat from Tennessee, was a former slave owner and a staunch Unionist who believed in maintaining the social hierarchy of the antebellum South. His political stance was characterized by a desire to restore the Union as swiftly as possible, often emphasizing states' rights and a limited federal role.

Johnson viewed the Civil War as a conflict over states' rights rather than solely about slavery, though his policies reflected a tendency to favor white supremacy and resist the social reforms proposed by radicals.

Reconstruction Policies and Beliefs

Johnson's approach to Reconstruction was pragmatic but deeply conservative, emphasizing the following principles:

- **Rapid Reintegration of Southern States:** Johnson favored quick readmission of Southern states into the Union, often granting pardons to former Confederates and allowing them to regain political power swiftly.
- **Minimal Federal Intervention:** He believed that states should manage their own affairs, including issues related to civil rights and social order, resisting federal mandates.
- **Vetoing Radical Legislation:** Johnson opposed many of the Radical Republicans' bills, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and vetoed efforts to grant civil rights to freed slaves, reflecting his racial conservatism.
- **Black Codes:** Under Johnson's leniency, Southern states enacted "Black Codes," laws designed to restrict the freedoms of newly freed African Americans and maintain white supremacy.

Impact of Johnson's Views

Johnson's policies led to significant tensions with Radical Republicans, who sought to implement more comprehensive civil rights protections and federal oversight. His vetoes and leniency allowed many Southern elites to reassert control, often through violence and discriminatory laws, delaying true racial equality and civil rights.

William T. Sherman's Views: A Vision of Racial Equality and Military Reconstruction

Background and Ideology

William Tecumseh Sherman was a Union general renowned for his aggressive tactics and strategic brilliance. Unlike Johnson, Sherman was influenced by a more radical vision of social reform, particularly concerning racial equality and the restructuring of Southern society.

Sherman believed in using military power not just to defeat the Confederacy but to reshape the social fabric of the South. His experiences during the war, especially his campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas, shaped his views on the potential for social change.

Reconstruction Policies and Beliefs

Sherman's perspectives on reconstruction were rooted in the following principles:

- **Military Occupation and Federal Oversight:** Sherman supported the idea that military authority was essential to enforce new laws and protect the rights of freed slaves and Union supporters.
- **Support for Freedmen's Rights:** He was an advocate for the rights of African Americans, supporting initiatives that provided land, education, and legal protections.
- **Land Redistribution:** Sherman believed that giving land to freed slaves and poor whites could foster economic independence and stability, reducing the likelihood of future rebellion or oppression.
- **Racial Integration:** Sherman's actions and speeches often emphasized racial equality, advocating for African Americans to have an active role in rebuilding Southern society.

Impact of Sherman's Views

Although Sherman's ideas were progressive for his time, they were often limited by the broader political climate. Nonetheless, his support for civil rights and military enforcement laid groundwork for some radical reforms, and his campaigns demonstrated that a different approach to Reconstruction was possible—one that embraced racial equality and federal authority.

Contrasting Philosophies: Key Differences Between Johnson and Sherman

Aspect	Andrew Johnson	William T. Sherman
View on Race	Maintained white supremacy; opposed civil rights for freed slaves; supported Black Codes	Advocated for racial equality; supported African American rights and landownership
Reconstruction Approach	Lenient, quick reintegration; minimal federal oversight	Military-led, enforced social reforms; supported federal intervention
Attitude Toward Southern Elite	Forgave former Confederates; reinstated them into political power	Opposed reinstating former Confederates' influence without reform
Policy on Civil Rights	Vetoed civil rights legislation; resisted federal protections	Supported civil rights and legal protections for freedmen
Use of Military Power	Limited; believed in states' rights	Emphasized military enforcement to uphold reforms

Implications and Legacy: How Their Views Shaped Post-War America

The divergent views of Johnson and Sherman had profound consequences:

- Johnson's Approach: Facilitated the rise of "Black Codes" and later Jim Crow laws, which institutionalized racial segregation and disenfranchisement. His opposition to Radical Reconstruction delayed civil rights advances and fostered regional resentment.
- Sherman's Approach: Although limited by political opposition, his advocacy for racial equality and military enforcement contributed to early efforts that aimed to protect African American rights, influencing later civil rights movements.

Their contrasting philosophies symbolize the broader ideological debate that characterized the Reconstruction era—between leniency and punitive measures, racial conservatism and progressivism, federal authority and states' rights.

Conclusion: A Tale of Two Visions

The visions of Andrew Johnson and William T. Sherman reflect two fundamentally different philosophies about what America should become after the Civil War. Johnson's emphasis on rapid reconciliation and preservation of white supremacy contrasted sharply with Sherman's progressive stance advocating racial equality and federal intervention.

While Johnson's policies allowed the Southern social order to reassert itself, Sherman's ideas represented a more transformative vision—one that recognized the importance of civil rights and social justice. Their legacies serve as enduring lessons about the complexities of reconciliation and the challenges of addressing profound social change in a fractured nation.

Understanding their perspectives offers valuable insights into the historical roots of ongoing debates about race, federal authority, and national unity—debates that continue to resonate today.

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