

THE INVOLVEMENT OF ULYSSES S. GRANT
IN THE IMPEACHMENT OF
ANDREW JOHNSON

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The purpose of this study is to determine the extent of Ulysses S. Grant's involvement in the impeachment of Andrew Johnson and how the General's actions contributed to the crisis surrounding the impeachment. The activity of Grant in his relations with the Republican Party in 1867 and 1868 bear close examination. Of special importance is his relation to the Radical Republicans as a group, and his individual relationship with Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and with Andrew Johnson.

When Congress threw out the Presidential Plan of Reconstruction and substituted its own, it gave control of the South to the army. If the army was to control the South then control of the army became a key political question. The commanding general of the army was U. S. Grant. Congress, especially the leading Radicals, was not too sure of Grant politically. But, because of his national popularity they did not dare attack him openly. Neither was the President sure of Grant's political inclination. But, again, because of his popularity Johnson wanted him on his side in the struggle with Congress. Each side was out to attach the nation's hero to its cause.

The President was determined to fire his Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, whom he suspected of being a Radical spy in the Cabinet. To accomplish this in the face of the Tenure of Office Act which supposedly forbade him from taking this action, Johnson determined to replace Stanton with Grant. Grant, who didn't like Stanton, supposedly promised the President that he would support the latter in his attempt to test the constitutionality of the Tenure of Office Act before the courts. If for any reason the General found out he could not carry out the functions of Secretary of War he would notify the President in time to be replaced by someone who would help Johnson carry out his intentions. When Grant resigned and allowed Stanton to resume the War Department, the ensuing argument drove the General openly into the arms of the Radicals and the Republican nomination. The argument centered around the interpretation of the famous promise, a promise which was verbal.

In dealing with a very political situation Andrew Johnson displayed a complete lack of political sense. Despite all his years in politics before coming to the White House he did not practice political give and take. He had not mastered the art of the politically possible. Ulysses S. Grant was a paragon of ambiguity. He made an art out of saying nothing.

The grunt and the cigar puff were the extent of his commitment in controversial political situations. As Johnson's Secretary of War, Grant found himself on an unpopular side. He was a man who yearned after public approval. With the Republican national convention coming up he found himself in a bad spot. He grabbed at whatever chance he could to remove himself from what was in his eyes a very unpleasant, unpopular and unprofitable situation.

In order to carry out this study a great deal of library research was necessary. Newspapers and magazines of the period had to be read in an attempt to ascertain public feelings. Andrew Johnson's papers have not been collected and published. The University of Tennessee has begun the task but as of this year they are only up to 1853. One of the more helpful sources was Fawn Brodie's book, Thaddeus Stevens. It contains the known writings of Thaddeus Stevens. Just before his death Stevens destroyed many of his files and letters. Among the original sources consulted that proved to be very useful was the Diary of Gideon Welles and the "Notes of Colonel W. G. Moore." Welles was Secretary of the Navy under both Lincoln and Johnson, while Moore was Andrew Johnson's private secretary. In doing this study the supervision and advice of Dr. Eric Roman of the Department of Social Sciences was a constant inspiration.