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Abstract:	The trouble began in the summer of 1865. U.S. President Andrew Johnson began to implement his own version of Reconstruction while Congress was in recess. Johnson quickly invited rebel states back into the Union and pardoned scores of ex-Confederate leaders. The Radicals were horrified. Thaddeus Stevens, the most influential Radical in Congress, watched from his home state of Pennsylvania and fumed. When Congress returned to Washington in December 1865, the Radicals were ready to pounce. Their first step was to refuse seats to the Southern leaders Johnson had welcomed back to the Capitol. By November 1866, the Republicans enjoyed a powerful two-thirds majority in the U.S. Congress. Yet Radical Republicans feared that as long as Johnson remained president, Reconstruction was in danger.
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ImPEACHMEnT!

"By the gods, there will be no trouble now in running the government," a Radical Republican senator declared when Andrew Johnson became president.

He could not have been more wrong.

The trouble began in the summer of 1865. President Johnson began to implement his own version of Reconstruction while Congress was in recess. Johnson quickly invited rebel states back into the Union and pardoned scores of ex-Confederate leaders. He also refused to impose black suffrage (the right to vote) on the Southern states.

The Radicals were horrified. Thaddeus Stevens, the most influential Radical in Congress, watched from his home state of Pennsylvania and fumed. How dare the president begin Reconstruction without Congress? It With his bottom lip jutting out and his eyes "livid coals of fire," Stevens declared war on the president. He would become one of Johnson's most powerful enemies.

When Congress returned to Washington in December 1865, the Radicals were ready to pounce. Their first step was to refuse seats to the Southern leaders Johnson had welcomed back to the Capitol. Then, in February 1866, the Radicals pushed for a bill that would expand the life and powers of the Freedmen's Bureau. To the shock of Johnson's supporters, he declared the bill unconstitutional and vetoed it.

In March, Congress struck back with the Civil Rights Act, which gave African Americans greater protection under the law (see page 44). This time, when Johnson rejected the legislation, Congress overrode his veto. The battle lines between Congress and the president were now clearly drawn.

The Road to impeachment

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By November 1866, the Republicans enjoyed a powerful two-thirds majority in Congress. Yet Radical Republicans feared that as long as Johnson remained president, Reconstruction was in danger. Many Radicals believed that their only solution was impeachment — to accuse the president of misconduct in an effort to remove him from office. In early 1867, a group of Radicals began to investigate Johnson in hopes of finding evidence that he had committed a crime. One congressman even accused Johnson of involvement in Abraham Lincoln's assassination. But Johnson's record was clean, and Congress dropped the case.

In the meantime, Congress limited the president's power with legislation. On March 2 — the same day it passed the Military Reconstruction Act —Congress approved the Tenure of Office Act, limiting Johnson's ability to dismiss government officials who had been confirmed by the Senate. In particular, it protected Radical sympathizers such as Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, a member of Johnson's cabinet.

Johnson and Stanton had been at odds for some time. By the summer of 1867, Johnson was at his wit's end. "[I]t is impossible to get along with such a man," he confided in a friend. "I can stand it no longer." By requesting Stanton's resignation while Congress was not in session, Johnson avoided violating the Tenure of Office Act. But he was clearly testing the Radicals.

The Senate returned to Washington and voted to keep Stanton onboard. Annoyed, Johnson fired the secretary of war once again. This time, many Republicans believed that Johnson had broken the law.

Three days later, on February 24, 1868, Congress voted to impeach the president — a first in U.S. history. Stevens, now 76 years old and in such poor health that he could barely walk, was determined to see Johnson's removal. To a chamber packed with spectators, Stevens and his committee presented 11 charges against the president. Most of the charges involved Johnson's breach of the Tenure of Office Act. One charge accused him of making "inflammatory and scandalous" remarks against Congress.

The Radicals' case was weak from the beginning. Many senators questioned whether the vaguely worded Tenure of Office Act applied to Stanton at all. Others wondered whether Johnson's actions truly amounted to "high crimes and misdemeanors." It soon became clear that the Radicals' true objection to the president was his interference with Radical Reconstruction. This was hardly grounds for impeachment. On May 16, 1868, the Senate narrowly acquitted Johnson, meaning he was found not guilty. The vote (35 in favor of impeachment and 19 opposed) fell one vote short of the two-thirds majority required to remove Johnson from office. Stevens, now deathly ill, was outraged. "The country is going to the devil!" he bellowed, as porters carried him out of the Senate.

R New Leader

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In 1868, General Ulysses S. Grant (the former commander of the Union army) was elected president. Grant promised to bring peace to the country and voting rights to African Americans. With his support, Congress quickly passed the 15th Amendment, guaranteeing all male citizens the right to vote. The Radicals declared victory. Reconstruction was finally over, they believed.

But the limitations of the 15th Amendment soon became clear. Many Southern states introduced literacy tests and poll taxes (taxes at election places) that made it impossible for most blacks and many poor whites to vote. The amendment also failed to ensure suffrage for women and immigrants. It would be many more years before all Americans found a place at the ballot box.

To pardon someone means to release him or her from the legal penalties of a criminal or civil offense.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): 15th Amendment: This engraving commemorates the 15th Amendment, which guaranteed voting rights for all male U.S. citizens. The insets highlight equal rights supporters and African Americans enjoying the privileges of citizenship.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Thaddeus Stevens gives the closing comments in the debate on the case for President Andrew Johnson's impeachment.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): A political cartoon criticizes President Johnson's view of the U.S. Constitution.

PHOTO (COLOR): A copy of a ticket to President Johnson's impeachment trial.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): The Senate acts as a court at President Johnson's impeachment trial.

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