

In the course of the American Civil War, in four occupied southern states loyal civil governments were established and in three other states at least attempts at reconstruction took place. The master thesis “Lincoln’s Reconstruction west of the Mississippi River: Restoration of loyal civil governments in Arkansas and Louisiana, 1862–1865” treats the process of wartime reconstruction of the Union in accordance within recent historiography that disputes revisionist accounts of the topic. The thesis argues that the President held to his moderate vision throughout the Civil War and did not depart from it in favour of radical conceptions by the end of the conflict. Lincoln’s policy was practical, opposed to dogmatic, purpose approach of his radical fellow partisans.

Two case studies of reconstruction on the state level are to show that the presidential policy was a proper one. The peculiarities of each state asked for differentiated handling. Louisiana and Arkansas were chosen for their abysmally different social, economic and political features yet common war experience. In terms of wealth, density of population, and share of slaves in its number, Louisiana and Arkansas were situated on opposite extremes of the scale. Like the other states of Lower South, Louisiana seceded in January 1861, while the Upper South’s Arkansas left the Union in the second wave of secession only after the fall of Fort Sumter. Still, both states belonged to the trans-Mississippi region whose military importance substantially decreased later in the conflict, so that only limited Union forces were available to expand the occupied territory and fight Confederate guerrilla in the area

The first chapter of the thesis overviews the policy of reconstruction of President Lincoln and the measures taken by its opponents within his Cabinet and particularly in the Congress. Abraham Lincoln presented his vision of reconstruction already in the First Inaugural Address on March 1861. He held that the Union is perpetual, declared secession void and appealed to Southern Unionists for restoration of loyal governments in their states. Their rights were to be left unimpaired. Initially upheld by the Congress’ Crittenden–Johnson Resolutions, Lincoln’s conception was soon attacked by the radical faction of the Republican Party. Representative Thaddeus Stevens presented his “conquered provinces” theory as early as August 1861 and the “state suicide” theory of Senator

Charles Sumner followed next February. Both argued that the secession had made Southern states void and had converted them to a mere territory under federal sovereignty. This would have enabled the federal government to abolish slavery within the limits of these states. In the case of continued existence of states such a step would have been unconstitutional.

Unionists in Western Virginia and Eastern Tennessee soon responded to Lincoln's invitation by establishing loyal government and electing their congressmen respectively. Occupation of substantial areas of the southern states in Spring 1862 allowed further steps in reconstruction. Abraham Lincoln subsequently appointed military governors to Tennessee, North Carolina, Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas. They were to administer civil affairs and to assist Unionists in reconstructing loyal governments. Forced to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, the President prodded Southern Unionists in the occupied areas to elect their congressmen. The respective districts were then excluded from the Proclamation. Inasmuch as the process of reconstruction had lagged for much of the year 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued the Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction. The modus of restoration of loyal governments was taken up by the Unionists in Arkansas and Louisiana, and they restored their governments by the end of Spring 1864. The military governor of Tennessee developed an alternative plan of reconstruction and the state set up loyal government a year later. Although partially or fully excluded from the Emancipation proclamation, the reconstructed states all abolished slavery during the war.

In the Thirty-seventh Congress, more or less proposals of radical reconstruction legislative were blocked by conservative Republicans and Democrats and the Representatives of the reconstructing states were usually admitted. Disapproval of the Emancipation proclamation, however, led most of Lincoln's conservative supporters not to run for re-election and the distribution of power in the Thirty-eight Congress was consequently no longer advantageous to Lincoln's reconstruction policy. Still, the Wade-Davis Bill providing for radical handling of the issue was passed rather accidentally and the President took advantage of the opportunity to place a pocket-veto. Radical Republicans then joined conservative Democrats in thwarting Lincoln's reconstruction by refusing to admit representatives of the Southern states. Yet not all Radical Republicans were at odds with the presidential

program. Secretary of Treasury Salmon P. Chase, on the contrary, hoped to fill the radical demands of abolition and universal suffrage within the framework of Lincoln's reconstruction policy. Agents of his Department provided support for those Unionist factions in Louisiana and Florida that were likely to push the liberal program and Chase's own presidential ambitions.

The reconstruction of Louisiana is dealt with in the second chapter. Notwithstanding social and economic ties of the state with the North, it had left the Union and no mass unionist movement remained active within its borders. In Spring 1862, however, New Orleans and Baton Rouge fell to the Union army. Despite inconsiderate occupation policy of General Benjamin F. Butler, local Unionist movement emerged immediately with aid of the Treasury agents. Liberal candidates supported by them contended with conservative and moderate Unionists for congressional seats in December 1862 election. Although this provided for exclusion of part of Louisiana from the Emancipation Proclamation, in May 1863, liberal and moderate Unionists agreed on a plan to abolish slavery throughout the state. Author of the plan, liberal leader Thomas J. Durant, was given authority to register voters for constitutional convention. Military governor George F. Shepley, however, didn't provide financial means for the drive and the reconstruction dragged out. In the meantime, conservative opponents to the abolition plan called an unauthorised election of governor, congressmen and state legislature.

Annoyed at the delay caused by Durant, President Lincoln entrusted the reconstruction to General Nathaniel P. Banks, military commander in Louisiana. In co-operation with moderate Unionists, Banks decided to hold gubernatorial election first and constitutional convention only after, having supposed the reverse order would have caused further delay of the reconstruction. Michael Hahn, a moderate, thus became governor of Louisiana in March 1864. General's move and Hahn's victory bitterly angered the liberal faction of the Unionists. Thomas J. Durant and his partisans started to lobby in the Congress against the government, even though the constitutional convention fulfilled the liberal program. Slavery was abolished and some civil rights expanded beyond the racial limits, the question of suffrage having been left to the decision of state legislature. It was elected in September, but failed to enfranchise even the Creoles. There was no longer the influence of General Banks who,

having been stripped of his command as a result of military defeat, left Louisiana. His successor, general Stephen A. Hurlbut soon challenged authority of the loyal government. At the end of the war, Hahn assumed senatorial function and the new governor James M. Wells began to build a conservative coalition.

The third chapter depicts the reconstruction of Arkansas, the poorest state of the Union in 1861. In spite of having been rather dependent on federal improvement funding and having displayed the lowest share of slaves in population of all Southern states, Arkansas fell into the vortex of secession. The unionist movement, however, remained particularly strong in the mountainous Northwest, and a new one developed in the Southwest. After two temporary attempts at occupation of the northern Arkansas, in the course of which military units from local unionists were raised, the Federal army established in Helena on the banks of Mississippi. It was to this unsympathetic centre of Arkansas plantation area, where former Congressman from Missouri and officer John S. Phelps was sent by President Lincoln to initiate the reconstruction of the state in the capacity of military governor. Unable to persuade Federal commanders to invade inland areas and to cope with the demoralisation brought by the illicit cotton trade and also due to personal health problems, Phelps had accomplished in reconstruction until his appointment was withdrawn in summer 1863.

Few months later, however, General Frederick Steele was permitted by military command to launch an invasion from Helena which resulted in capture of Arkansas' capital Little Rock without much resistance. Impulse to reconstruction of the state then came from the simultaneously occupied Northwest. The movement of local Whiggish Unionists for constitutional convention won over delaying tactics of a Little Rock based Democratic group that hoped to dominate the process by uniting with its fellow partisans in the area not yet liberated from the Confederates. New state constitution of January 1864 abolished slavery in Arkansas and included several changes in representation and filling of state offices that were designed to strip plantation oligarchy of power. Isaac Murphy, steady Unionist from the Northwest, was then elected governor. Deplorable financial situation of the government and particularly guerrilla war combined with shortage of manpower of the Federal army

and disfavour of its commanders, however, hindered Murphy's efforts at efficient civil government until the end of war.