

Presidential Impeachments

v.

Andrew Johnson (1868)

Andrew Johnson became president following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. In 1868 the House of Representatives brought charges of impeachment against President Johnson. His views on the South and the Confederates had caused controversy, but a movement to impeach him arose when he dismissed Edwin Stanton as Secretary of War without approval by the Senate. They viewed his dismissal as an attack on Reconstruction in the South.

Radical Republicans wanted to impeach Johnson because they believed he was too conciliatory toward the South during Reconstruction. Johnson removed Stanton as Secretary of War; Stanton then claimed Johnson had broken the Tenure of Office Act.

The Constitution requires a two-thirds vote to impeach a president; if one more senator had voted guilty, Johnson would have been impeached. Seven Radical Republicans voted not guilty, including Edmund Ross, who cast the deciding vote. He believed Johnson could dismiss Stanton. That vote cost Ross his political career. The Republicans did not nominate him for re-election to the House.

Bill Clinton (1998)

Bill Clinton was elected to his first term as president in 1992 and was re-elected in 1996. In 1998 Congress sought to impeach President Clinton on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice. These charges arose because he lied under oath about his relations with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

The allegations arose when independent counsel Kenneth Starr was investigating Clinton's real estate investments. It was called the Whitewater Scandal; however, after an extensive investigation Starr found no impeachable wrongdoing by Clinton. Starr next investigated a sexual harassment lawsuit filed by Paula Jones when Clinton was governor of Arkansas. No impeachable offenses were found, but the investigation was re-invigorated when taped conversations between Lewinsky and White House employee Linda Tripp were revealed. Tripp revealed the tape to Starr. Clinton later lied about his relationship under oath during questioning.

Only Republicans voted guilty on the charge of perjury; every Democrat and a number of Republicans in the House of Representatives voted not guilty. Clinton was acquitted.

Similarities

The similarities between Johnson and Clinton were obvious. The opposition party in the House of Representatives brought impeachment charges against both presidents, and the impetus for impeachment was politically motivated. A major difference was that Clinton was elected to two presidential terms and was generally popular. Johnson, a Southern Democrat whom Lincoln had chosen as a running mate as an olive branch to the defeated South, became president after Lincoln's assassination.

Name: _____

Date: _____

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Discussion Questions:

1. What were the impeachment charges the House of Representatives brought against President Andrew Johnson? Why did the House of Representatives want to impeach President Johnson?

2. What were the impeachment charges the House of Representatives brought against President Bill Clinton? Why did the House of Representatives want to impeach President Clinton?

Open-Ended Question

3. Do you think the House of Representatives was justified in attempting to impeach President Johnson and President Clinton? Why?