

# The most disgraceful episodes in american history



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During the period between the 1890's and the 1940's, most professional historians agreed; they concluded that Reconstruction was one of the most disgraceful episodes in American history, a tragic era, when misguided or opportunistic northern politicians had enfranchised a black population obviously unfit for citizenship, thereby condemning the long suffering South to an orgy of misrule and corruption.

Some black scholars of the 1920's and 30's disagreed vehemently with this view, but not until 1950's and 60's did a majority of Reconstruction historians reject the exaggerations, distortions, and racist assumptions of this image. Because they dissented vigorously from the old orthodoxy, these historians became known as revisionists.

Even today, some of the myths reflected in "Birth of a Nation" have a strong hold on the popular historical imagination. Retelling the story of Reconstruction from a modern revisionist perspective does not require setting up a new myth of saintly Radical Republicans, model black officeholders and totally vicious southern whites to replace the stereotypes in "Birth of a Nation".

Mixed motives, hypocrisy, blunders and corruption were important aspects of the complex drama that unfolded between the end of the Civil War and the final collapse of Reconstruction in 1877.

But there was another side, involving the heroic struggle of blacks and their white allies to achieve racial justice and equality against overwhelming odds. If Reconstruction was tragic, it was not because what was attempted was wrong; it was rather because those who tried to form a more egalitarian

society in the South lacked the sustained support and unfaltering will to achieve their aims.

Reference:

Kennedy, D. M., Cohen, L., & Bailey, T. A. (2006). *The American pageant: A history of the republic*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.