

It is in treating the Reconstruction state governments in the South that the older scholarship is most distorted by racist assumptions and most pernicious in its present-day effects. Modern scholarship overwhelmingly rejects the myth of Reconstruction as a saturnalia of misgovernment and corruption by ignorant and/or venal carpetbaggers, Negroes, and scalawags. Though the Reconstruction regimes had their quota of corruption, as did most other American governmental units in this period, the student needs to know that the radical Republican experiment for a time made progress toward a healthy reconstruction of Southern society, that many Negroes served ably in the Reconstruction governments, and that the Reconstruction governments had many constructive accomplishments, particularly the extension of the public school system, and the protection of equal civil and political rights of all.

The experiment in Reconstruction failed after a few years, owing to a growing Northern indifference which permitted conservative Southern whites to regain control by violence through such agencies as the Ku Klux Klan. Soon Negroes had been reduced to a kind of unofficial slavery. The vote was taken from them, first by trickery and intimidation and later by amendments to the state constitutions. Denied economic opportunity, many were exploited as sharecroppers, and others in menial jobs. By the end of the century, they were born and reared in segregated communities, and they lived and died in a state of inequality, isolated from the mainstream of American life. Southern state laws and a disastrous Supreme Court decision, *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896), helped encase them in segregation.

Segregation and violence continued to characterize race relations in the South during the first half of the twentieth century. The hundreds of lynchings which used to occur annually have almost disappeared, but bombings, burnings, and shootings have increased. A more important change has been the movement of millions of Negroes to the cities and to the North. Here repression has been somewhat more subtle but only somewhat less damaging. Employers and unions relegate most Negroes to menial jobs. They are segregated into ghettos where they pay high rents for slum housing. Segregated housing means in turn segregated and inferior schools.

The other side of the story is the increasingly vigorous effort, especially by Negroes themselves, to change the situation. The growing Negro vote in crucial Northern cities and the cold-war campaign to win the support of the uncommitted nations of the world has made the federal government more responsive to the plight of Negroes. Prodded by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the federal courts began to declare in the 1930s and 1940s against racial discrimination in voting, jury service, and educational opportunities. This movement culminated in the Brown decision of 1954 (*Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*) outlawing racial segregation in the public schools. Meanwhile the executive branch of the federal government had begun to move against segregation and