



Heroes of the American Reconstruction: Profiles of Sixteen Educators, Politicians and Activists

Stanley Turkel

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The history of post-Civil War Reconstruction wasn't written by the winners. Congress forced Reconstruction on an unrepentant South steeped in resentment and hatred, where the old guard and old attitudes still held sway, murder and depredations against freed slaves and sympathizers were rampant, and "black laws" swapped the physical bonds of slavery for legislative ones. During Reconstruction, talented black leaders rose to serve in Congress and in state and local governments. Blacks and whites struggled together to secure the rights of millions of freed slaves, now citizens, and to heal the wounds of a shattered nation. But Reconstruction was overthrown, victim of lingering antipathy and a smear campaign that fueled the myth of a South ravaged by incompetents, scalawags and carpetbaggers, a myth perpetuated everywhere from encyclopedias and history books to today's media. Consequently, the heroic efforts of many Reconstruction figures have been misrepresented, dismissed, or simply forgotten. These biographical sketches profile 16 diverse men and women whose Reconstruction efforts should not be overlooked. They range from Blanche Kelso Bruce - a freed slave who became the first African American to serve a full term in and preside over the Senate, and to have his signature appear on the nation's currency - to James Longstreet, one of the Confederacy's greatest generals, branded a traitor to the lost cause and slandered as the goat of Gettysburg after he championed equal voting rights. Chapters explore the beginning and end of Reconstruction.

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