Released in 1915, the silent film was directed by D.W. Griffith. It tells the story of the Civil War and Reconstruction from the perspective that black people are inherently wicked and that granting them too many freedoms would destroy the very fabric of America. In the movie, the Cameron family of South Carolina witnesses the rise of black militias seeking to rape white women and conquer the white man. These fictional, evil black men are accompanied by “carpetbagging” Republican politicians who want to further destroy the South. The term “carpetbagger” refers to Northerner DW Griffith’s film was released on 8 February 1915. A century later it’s regarded as a landmark in cinema history – and terribly bigoted. Tom Brook reports. The film is as confounding as ever, both brilliant and repugnant. Groundbreaking in its use of innovative cinematic techniques, it remains tainted by its brazen racism. The Birth of a Nation was the creation of DW Griffith, who had tried his hand as an actor and playwright but whose real genius lay in film-making. Nothing on its scale had even been attempted before. It was the epic story of the relationship between two American families, one Union, the other Confederate, at the time of the Civil War and the Reconstruction that followed.