

dela's triumphant release from prison in the 1990s. But a half-century earlier, the very first edition had broached the subject of African Americans' problematic role in America's imperialist expansion in Cuba and the Philippines as well as their protests against Italy's brutal invasion of Ethiopia. Whatever other faults Franklin might have had, narrowness of vision was not among them.

It is hardly the case, of course, that Franklin's work is above criticism. For all its openness to a more capacious perspective onto the African American experience, *From Slavery to Freedom* hews closely to the conventional national narrative, framed not only by political events but the initiatives of powerful Caucasian elites and heroic African Americans. This is especially evident—and through successive editions—in the discussion of Reconstruction, when the field of action for African Americans within and outside formal politics was suddenly and vastly expanded. Notably, here was an instance in which a potential intergenerational transfer—from Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* or Horace Mann Bond's economic and social studies of Alabama Reconstruction, for example—had clearly faltered.

Such criticisms cannot diminish Franklin's immense contribution to American and Southern historical scholarship, however, as well as to our understanding of the African American experience more generally. He was the first to apply the tools and learning of a professionally-trained historian to fashion a compelling historical narrative of that experience. He was the first to situate African American life firmly at the center of the nation's formation from its beginning until the moment in which he wrote, while also connecting that experience to the broad international currents that also shaped it. With a historian's tools he rendered irresistible a people's claim to simple justice and to citizenship. This was, then, an act as assuredly political as it was a magnificent act of scholarship.

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doi:10.1017/S1742058X10000093

An Historian's Historian

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Like many people, I knew John Hope Franklin long before we ever met. During an age when the disjuncture between public personal and private persona is usually jarring, part of the honor of being in his presence was the seamlessness between the

man he presented himself to be and the man he was. Erudite and exacting yet gracious and generous in his writings and public appearances, Franklin brought those same virtues to the private gatherings I was privileged to witness and share with him.

It is now impossible for me to pinpoint how and when I first learned of Franklin, perhaps most likely in college through his *From Slavery to Freedom*. But I remember exactly the first time I saw him speak. In 1976, he delivered the prestigious National Endowment for the Humanities Jefferson lecture series. In that bicentennial year, I was living in Washington, D.C. where I was mid-way through the misery of law school—my initial and ill-fated vocational choice. Franklin's first lecture, delivered in the splendor of Constitution Hall, was both brilliantly written and passionately orated. It also was hotly controversial and one could feel this in the exaggerated hush of the crowd. Franklin used the occasion of the Jefferson lecture to discuss Jefferson's views on race, slavery, and African American character and intellect. Having moved to Washington after four years at Mr. Jefferson's University in Charlottesville, I knew firsthand both the reverence with which Jefferson was treated by scholars and the profound paradoxes about race and slavery that were ignored in his legacy or excused as being merely a product of his times.

The year before Franklin's talk, Dumas Malone had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1975 for his biographical treatises on Jefferson. The fevered celebrations of two hundred years of American independence reached Olympic proportions in the nation's capitol. Yet the looming question for many African Americans, including me, was similar to that posed by Frederick Douglass in 1852: "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?" Despite the gains of the civil rights era, a reckoning with the legacy of slavery at the nation's founding needed to be voiced in that moment of national commemoration. That is what Franklin did in his lecture, defiantly, patiently, and respectfully, but with a depth of conviction born from fidelity to the historian's craft and to historical sources.

The image and the import of Franklin's lecture stayed with me long after, renewed once again when I read his 1985 biography of the extraordinary nineteenth century preacher, politician, and self-trained historian, George Washington Williams. In 1883, Williams had published his tome, *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880: Negroes as Slaves, as Soldiers, and as Citizens*—the first of its kind. Franklin's account of his own search for the details of Washington's life and work read like a detective story and spanned decades of research, giving me a glimpse of the intellectual fun in the behind-the-scenes work of that kind of historical research. The entwined stories of Washington's life and Franklin's pursuit of it inspired me to think more deeply about the vocation of writing, research, and teaching as a route to public service and engagement. Soon after, through good fortune and providential turns, I gathered up the courage to begin my own move toward graduate study in history in 1989.

My first meeting with Franklin would come a decade later, in 1999, when my first book was an inaugural one in the John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture at the University of North Carolina Press, edited by Waldo Martin and Pat Sullivan. At a dinner at an Organization of American Historians (OAH) meeting in Toronto celebrating the launch of the series, Franklin treated me, then an assistant professor, with a generosity for which I am still deeply grateful. There would be other occasions in small settings when his rich storytelling and wit would be on display, including a memorable dinner in the summer of 2005 at the Martha's Vineyard home of Lucy and Sheldon Hackney. He was then as he was when I first saw him at Constitution Hall—gracious, brilliant, and deeply committed to ending injustices. We last spoke in 2007 at president Drew Faust's installation at

Harvard, where Franklin represented the historical profession, a gracious and fitting honor from one southerner and one southern historian to another.

When I teach my African American history survey course, I always begin it with a brief history of African American history. I introduce my students to Franklin through his essays on the evolution of scholarship in the field and on the dilemmas of being a Black scholar. For show and tell, I bring a copy of Washington's still-impressive *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880: Negroes as Slaves, as Soldiers, and as Citizens* and tell them his story, too.

I am now turning to writing about another Black intellectual too long lost to history—that of Merze Tate, a stellar Oxford and Harvard-trained scholar of diplomatic and international history who began her long tenure on the history faculty at Howard in 1942. A prolific author, she pioneered in the fields of international relations and human rights, writing about disarmament and the political history of Hawai'i and the Pacific region; a world traveler and a Fulbright scholar, she was an expert on India, and later Africa. In 1944, Tate reviewed Franklin's first book, *The Free Negro in Ante-bellum North Carolina*. She commended it as a "dispassionate social and historical study" by a "young, brilliant scholar of American history," citing Franklin's painstaking archival work and the elegance of his writing. As well, she praised him for reflecting credit upon the many teachers who "inspired and encouraged him."

Although I never studied with either Franklin or Tate, I count them both among my professors. I hope that my work will reflect well upon the many lessons gleaned from their writings and their long, engaged lives of commitment to scholarship and service. They still have much to teach all of us.

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doi:10.1017/S1742058X1000010X

Re-Reading “From Slavery to Freedom”

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Long before I had the pleasure of making his acquaintance in person, John Hope Franklin's writings were a vital presence in my academic life. His books were some of the earliest sign posts that I encountered when I first ventured into the new and