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"A False Picture of Negro Progress": John Hope Franklin, Racial Liberalism, and the Political (Mis)uses of Black History during the 1963 Emancipation Centennial

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This article scrutinizes public contestations over Black history during 1963's Emancipation Centennial. Specifically, it investigates how the Kennedy administration censored the historian John Hope Franklin's drafts for the chief commemorative effort *Freedom to the Free*, a history of civil rights since 1863. Reflecting the hubris of mid-twentieth-century racial liberalism, these edits excised white supremacy from American history, instead celebrating a confining definition of racial progress that prioritized Black equalization, adjustment, and incorporation into a deracialized liberal nationhood. The censoring of Franklin's dissident Americanism therefore highlights how racial liberalism simultaneously promoted and suppressed Black history, historians, and public figures more generally.

In September 1963 the magazine *Ebony* published the longest edition in its history, a 246-page issue celebrating that year's centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. Reflecting on the anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's 1 January 1863 executive order freeing enslaved persons within the Confederate states, a virtual who's who of Black intellectuals and activists utilized the issue – eight months in the making – to link nineteenth-century freedom struggles to those ongoing in the mid-twentieth-century United States. Amid the racially conservative and white-dominated Civil War Centennial of 1957 to 1965, commemorating Emancipation

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offered a profound opportunity to mobilize Black countermemory towards contemporary empowerment and liberation.[1]

Nevertheless, an incumbent Kennedy administration increasingly aware of African Americans' political power worked systematically to co-opt commemorations, blunting Emancipation's radical edge by situating it within a broader narrative, typical of postwar liberalism, that celebrated the gradual evolution of a nonracial, inclusive sense of *de jure* American citizenship. It simultaneously promoted and exploited a growing Black history movement to prematurely celebrate recent racial progress and ignore the continued endurance of white supremacy.[2] Defending America's politico-economic structures amid increasingly apparent inequalities, the administration's commemoration thus disavowed demands for a more radical and sustained assault on racial injustice.

This article highlights the experiences of one historian prominent in *Ebony*'s special issue – John Hope Franklin, the only history professor *Ebony* lauded as one of "America's 100 Most Influential Negroes."[3] Perhaps the pre-eminent African American historian of this era, Franklin spent 1962–63 working as the first Black Pitt Professor of American History and Institutions at the University of Cambridge. *Ebony* accordingly profiled Franklin across three pages that were sumptuously illustrated by photographs of afternoon teas with college masters amid elaborate Elizabethan portraiture. Franklin, however, was "coldly logical" about such firsts.[4] In an era when the federal government increasingly utilized prominent Black public figures as "participant-symbols" to demonstrate to global audiences the possibility of racial equality, Franklin was keenly aware that his prominence was both exploitable *and* exculpatory.[5]

[1] *Ebony*, 18, 11 (Sept. 1963). See also E. James West, *Ebony Magazine and Lerone Bennett Jr.: Popular Black History in Postwar America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 43–47. For the broader story of the Civil War Centennial see Robert Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961–1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); David Blight, *American Oracle: The Civil War in the Civil Rights Era* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011); and Jon Wiener, "The Civil War Centennial in Context, 1960–1965," in Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, eds., *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 237–57.

[2] For a parallel examination of the commercial exploitation of this growing movement see E. James West, "'Getting on the Negro History Bandwagon': Selling Black History from World War II to the Dawn of Black Power," *Journal of African American History*, 107, 3 (2022), 423–50.

[3] "America's Most Influential Negroes," *Ebony*, 18, 11 (Sept. 1963), 228–32, 229.

[4] "John Hope Franklin at Cambridge," *Ebony*, 18, 11 (Sept. 1963), 160–64, 160.

[5] Ben Keppel, *The Work of Democracy: Ralph Bunche, Kenneth B. Clark, Lorraine Hansberry, and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 8.

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Perhaps the starkestt example of such exploitation involved Franklin's struggles to write a pamphlet for the US Commission on Civil Rights's centennial commemorations detailing the history of civil rights from 1863 to 1963, later entitled *Freedom to the Free*. Despite extensively pre-vetting Franklin, the commission – acting largely unbeknownst to Franklin and upon the advice of the white historians he hired as his consultants – recruited a second team of historians that drastically revised Franklin's drafts. The commission chiefly feared that Franklin's forensic detailing of the betrayals and backward steps of America's racial histories, particularly following Reconstruction, would not inspire contemporary national unity. Even Franklin's ever-diplomatic autobiography recalled,

> Of the many instances in which it appeared that I was used by the United States government, this is the clearest, most unequivocal example … there can be no question that the United States, through the Commission on Civil Rights, attempted to make blatant and crude use of me in its effort to present a false picture of "negro progress" for the centennial.[6]

While Robert Cook has briefly summarized the story of *Freedom to the Free* and examined how the white historians Allan Nevins and Bruce Catton engaged with the centennial, no scholars have extensively examined Franklin's own centennial interventions.[7] By instead centring Franklin's centennial experiences through his personal papers, this article speaks to broader questions concerning how mid-twentieth-century Black public intellectuals struggled and strategized to bring their scholarship to "mainstream," predominantly white, public audiences, particularly through such prominent government-sponsored channels. Combining rapidly expanding literatures on Black intellectual history and mid-twentieth-century racial liberalism (much of this written since Cook's 2007 analysis), this article examines two critical and still-ongoing dynamics: the simultaneous promotion and censoring of Black public voices by the federal government, and liberalism's continued failure to reckon with the historical and contemporary impacts of white supremacy.[8] Both investigations thereby further recent efforts to uncover the "unstated but crucial" racial reasoning inherent in American liberalism.[9]

[6] John Hope Franklin, *Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), 200.

[7] For this brief but useful account see Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 179–82. On Catton and Nevins see Robert Cook, "Bruce Catton, Middlebrow Culture, and the Liberal Search for Purpose in Cold War America," *Journal of American Studies*, 47, 1 (2013), 109–26; and Cook, "Ordeal of the Union: Allan Nevins, the Civil War Centennial, and the Civil Rights Struggle of the 1960s," in Iwan W. Morgan and Philip John Davies, eds., *Reconfiguring the Union: Civil War Transformations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 181–200.

[8] On this recent rise of African American intellectual history see Brandon Byrd, "The Rise of African American Intellectual History," *Modern Intellectual History*, 18, 3 (2021), 833–64.

[9] Robin Marie Averbeck, *Liberalism Is Not Enough: Race and Poverty in Postwar Political Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 4.

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The story of *Freedom to the Free* first underscores the tensions created as the federal government increasingly enlisted select, supposedly moderate, Black figures like Franklin to deflect increasingly prominent global criticism of Jim Crow. While a diverse literature has illustrated the federal utilization of Black public figures, including jazz musicians, as "goodwill ambassadors" to "project vitality and optimism on the part of a country that was deep in crisis," this scholarship has rarely discussed historians.[10] Franklin, however, encountered censorship remarkably similar to that which constrained the lives of Paul Robeson, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Josephine Baker, among others. Indeed, following Nicholas Grant's analysis of Robeson, I situate Franklin as an exemplar of a critical mid-twentieth-century tradition of dissident Americanism.[11] Throughout his historical advocacy, Franklin championed what Grant describes as a patriotism of critique, one that utilized the chastened Americanism that had long characterized Black Emancipation memory to complicate national myths by recognizing the historical impacts of white supremacy. This patriotism worked within state-sponsored efforts, transforming America from the inside. Centring the experiences of Franklin – who had been promoted throughout his career as a supposedly rare, trustworthy, gentlemanly, and 'non-race-conscious' Black scholar – evidences the underpaid, undercelebrated, and relentlessly racialized creative labour of even the most prominent mid-twentieth-century Black public figures, whose Blackness was simultaneously celebrated and super-scrutinized for alleged emotionalism and "special pleading." Figures including Franklin were promoted as Black "indigenous interpreters": those deemed uniquely able to illuminate for white audiences the latest realities of Black life.[12] Despite Franklin's continued assertions that he spoke as a historian without regard to race – as what Ross Posnock calls an "anti-race race man" – Franklin's drafts of *Freedom to the Free* were thus critiqued in a consistently racialized manner, justifying edits that simultaneously utilized and neutralized his scholarship by enfolding it within the commission's broader celebration of recent racial progress.[13]

[10] Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 184. See also Lisa Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009); and Keppel.

[11] Nicholas Grant, "Patriotism and Black Internationalism," *Modern American History*, 6, 3 (2023), 322–40, 324. Of course, Franklin predominantly utilized dissident Americanist rhetorics within a more moderate politics than Robeson.

[12] Daniel Matlin, *On the Corner: African American Intellectuals and the Urban Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 4.

[13] Ross Posnock, *Color & Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 6.

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Second, uncovering this broader message – which emphasized recent *de jure* equalization over longer histories of white supremacy – problematizes the historical conceits integral to the racial liberal beliefs of the commission and Franklin's varied critics. Put briefly, I understand racial liberalism as a set of prevailing argumentative tendencies rather than as a cohesive or contemporaneously defined ideology.[14] As an analytical device, then, racial liberalism is most generative when foregrounding how ideas about race were structured by power, practice, and process, by the naturalizations and normalizations created by the intersecting commercial, intellectual, political, and racial formations of Cold War America. Racial liberalism thus promotes the triangulated and institutionally minded study of ideas in action. Racial liberal beliefs centred around understanding race as an antiquated cultural construct which could be eradicated *primarily* through individual rather than structural solutions, i.e. through legal equalization, tolerance-centred education, and interracial understanding.[15] Such solutions rarely necessitated challenging American global leadership or capitalism. We are, however, yet to fully appreciate either history's critical role within racial liberalism or racial liberalism's impact within historical writing. This article therefore employs racial liberalism as an analytical heuristic, suggesting that it more precisely identifies the political investments, racialized assumptions, and institutionalized power relations that shaped mid-twentieth-century historical scholarship than the now much-critiqued paradigm of "consensus history."[16] This scholarship – and *Freedom to the Free* – was marked more by fierce contestations, pregnant ambiguities, and segregated political, cultural, and educational spheres than by consensus. As Daniel Geary reminds us, mid-twentieth-century liberalism always contained "diverse and conflicting strands."[17]

By scrutinizing such conflicts, this article ultimately details how historical writing validated and reinforced liberalism's broader denial of America's

[14] On racial liberalism as a post-World War II historical phenomenon see Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938–1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Leah N. Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); and Joseph Darda, *The Strange Career of Racial Liberalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022). On racial liberalism as a longer-standing phenomenon see Charles W. Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[15] See particularly Gordon.

[16] For this critique see Ellen F. Fitzpatrick, *History's Memory: Writing America's Past 1880–1980* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[17] Daniel Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 9.

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white-supremacist founding. The broader individualizing and dematerializing tendencies of racial reasoning after *Brown* v. *Board* – which often promoted a turn away from history itself – further postponed that reckoning.[18] Following this precedent, the commission's report utilized recent, primarily legal achievements in race relations to affirm the essential righteousness of American ideals and the desirability of American citizenship and global leadership. Downplaying Emancipation's contributions to Black independent, transnational, and anticapitalist empowerment placed Black "adjustment" and "maturation" as *the* keys to racial equalization and rendered Emancipation a global symbol of American benevolence. Critically, then, *Freedom to the Free* illustrates how liberal triumphalism was conditioned upon precisely this broader non-reckoning with America's white-supremacist past. As contemporary educators struggle against tropes of a "post-racial" America, *Freedom to the Free* reminds us that malignant triumphalism and the occlusion of white supremacy must be understood and challenged as one.[19]

BLACK EMANCIPATION MEMORY AND THE CIVIL WAR CENTENNIAL

Any federal commemoration of Emancipation required welding together Black memories of Emancipation long characterized by dissonance, instability, and class- and gender-inflected tensions.[20] It required superimposing predominantly white organizational structures over an array of localized commemorations which, amid the rise of Jim Crow, served as crucial occasions for Black

[18] In addition to the literature in note 14 above see Lani Guinier, "From Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy: Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Divergence Dilemma," *Journal of American History*, 91, 1 (June 2004), 92–118; and Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880–1996* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[19] See, inter alia, Matthew Teutsch, "On the Mythologizing of United States History," *AAIHS Black Perspectives*,16 March 2021, www.aaihs.org/on-the-mythologizing-of-united-states-history; and Jill Lepore, "Why the School Wars Still Rage," *New Yorker*, 14 March 2022, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/03/21/why-the-school-wars-still-rage.

[20] On Black Emancipation memory see Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808–1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South 1863–1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Rinaldo Walcott, *The Long Emacipation: Moving toward Black Freedom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021); Julius B. Fleming, *Black Patience: Performance, Civil Rights, and the Unfinished Project of Emancipation* (New York: NYU Press, 2022); and Geneviève Fabre, "African-American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century," in Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally, eds., *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 72–91.

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legitimation, self-definition, and mobilization. In Geneviève Fabre's summation, their mood was "*subjunctive*, the *ought* and *should* prevailed over the *was*."[21] Perhaps most profoundly, it required reconciling – ultimately unsuccessfully – the competing commemorative goals of claiming American citizenship and affirming a unique Black heritage. Particularly by the early twentieth century, a flourishing Black public sphere engendered a shift towards educative presentations that utilized Emancipation to demand contemporary educational, economic, and professional advancement.[22] This also encouraged (albeit far from guaranteed) male commemorative leadership.[23] Throughout *Freedom to the Free*'s preparations, this absence of Black women's voices merits underlining.

In short, Emancipation had long offered a site for the dissident and subjunctive Americanism pursued by Franklin. Throughout the mid-twentieth century's liberation movements, international actors employed the ambiguities central to Emancipation memory to demand their full liberation.[24] Scott Sandage has illustrated how protesters at the Lincoln Memorial co-opted the ambiguities of Lincoln's legacy to demand further political rights, "layering and changing the public meanings of the hero and his shrine." Emphasizing unfulfilled American values helped to "circumvent opposition, unify coalitions, and legitimate black voices in national politics."[25] Many early twentieth-century Black historians of Emancipation shared Franklin's acute sense of irony and paradox, W. E. B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson questioning popular reverence for an advocate for colonization who remained hobbled by the racial conservatism of his era.[26] As argued most prominently in Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* (1935), Black historians saw Emancipation as fragile and shortly extinguished by the repressive violence of counter-Reconstruction.[27]

[21] Fabre, 72. [22] Kachun, 260. [23] Clark, 56–95.

[24] On international debates concerning Emancipation memory see Kevin Gaines, "From Colonization to Anti-colonization: Lincoln in Africa," in Richard Carwardine and Jay Sexton, eds., *The Global Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 259–71; and Jay Sexton, "Projecting Lincoln, Projecting America," in ibid., 288–302.

[25] Scott Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939–1963," *Journal of American History*, 80, 1 (1993), 135–67, 136.

[26] Allen C. Guelzo, "How Abe Lincoln Lost the Black Vote: Lincoln and Emancipation in the African American Mind," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 25, 1 (2004), 1–22.

[27] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1935); Horace Mann Bond, "Social and Economic Forces in Alabama Reconstruction," *Journal of Negro History*, 23, 3 (1938), 290–348; John Hope Franklin, "Whither Reconstruction Historiography?", *Journal of Negro Education*, 17, 4 (1948), 446–61; and Franklin, *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

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"The slave," Du Bois argued, "went free; stood a moment in the sun; and then moved back again toward slavery."[28]

Descended from Union veterans and growing up in Oklahoma, a key site of post-Emancipation freedom dreams, Franklin swiftly encountered an Emancipationist countermemory within which Emancipation became "the starting point for measuring the progress of the race as it emerged from the 'dark night of slavery into freedom.'"[29] As early as 1927, aged twelve, he gave a speech discussing the proclamation's anniversary to his Boy Scout troop.[30] Franklin's landmark Black history survey *From Slavery to Freedom* (1947) also lauded the proclamation, which "captured the imagination of working men in many parts of the world, who viewed it as a great humanitarian document."[31] Nevertheless, informed by *From Slavery to Freedom*'s hemispheric scope, Franklin always viewed Emancipation as not only internationally unexceptional but exceptionally overdue.[32] His *The Emancipation Proclamation* (1963) opened by surveying nineteenth-century New World emancipations. Only in the American South was slavery defended as a positive good, placing America alongside "rather backward places like Cuba and Brazil and the avowedly 'uncivilized' portions of Asia and Africa."[33] Franklin even provocatively highlighted how Russia, emancipating its serfs in 1861, "outdistanced the United States in its handling of the problem of human freedom."[34]

Befitting his dissident Americanism, Franklin therefore viewed the proclamation as a second Declaration of Independence, as yet another opportunity for America to "live up to its loud preachments in favor of freedom."[35] Indeed, as

[28] Du Bois, 30.

[29] Stephen G. Hall, *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American History Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 152. On Oklahoma as a Black post-Reconstruction project see Jovan Scott Lewis, *Violent Utopia: Dispossession and Black Restoration in Tulsa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022).

[30] Terry Pollard Gayle, "John Hope Franklin: Searching for Equality in History – and in Life," *LA Times*, 3 July 1995, WA12.

[31] John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 3rd edn (New York: Knopf, 1967), 283. The Du Boisian language of "workingmen" here is notable, bespeaking the influence *Black Reconstruction* had on Franklin despite his concerns about the work's alleged anger and Marxist leanings. See John Hope Franklin, "Shifting the Burden Where It Belonged," *San Francisco Examiner*, 5 July 1964, 170.

[32] On the internationalism of Franklin and *From Slavery to Freedom* see Nick Witham, *Popularizing the Past: Historians, Publishers, and Readers in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), esp. 93–97.

[33] John Hope Franklin, *The Emancipation Proclamation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963), 11.

[34] Ibid., 8.

[35] Franklin to Herman H. Sommers, 15 Feb. 1955, "S, 1930s–1950s," C7, John Hope Franklin Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University (henceforth JHFP).

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the author of *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (1961), Franklin was always aware that Emancipation's victories were all too brief.[36] This bitter awareness perhaps most differentiated Franklin's beliefs from those of the commission. Franklin therefore declared in 1956 that he "never had any great enthusiasm" for Emancipation commemorations.[37] They could only aid the civil rights movement when remembering Emancipation within its context. Reckoning with Emancipation's failures demanded recognizing African Americans' continued status *between* slavery and freedom, legally "freed" yet deprived of first-class citizenship. Indeed, Franklin forcefully argued that the Civil War Centennial failed to provoke this reckoning because it emphasized the war's military aspects rather than the racial degradation promoted by counter-Reconstruction. Following his appointment to the New York Civil War Centennial Commission, Franklin warned of a "field for distortions, polemics and the like," criticizing colleagues who were "inclined to simulate and recreate too realistically the events of 1861–1865."[38] An ardent pacifist, Franklin had long argued that romanticizing violence, particularly within the South, justified white societal domination.[39] As the Civil War Centennial approached the centennial of Emancipation, then, Franklin demanded that it "set this nation on the urgent task of completing the work begun by the war."[40] Only by transcending its hitherto "circus-like atmosphere" could the centennial aid African Americans trapped "somewhere in the dim, uncharted area between abject slavery and complete freedom."[41]

Indeed, Franklin's suspicions of the Civil War Commission, the national body responsible for planning commemorations, were widespread. In April 1961, the New Jersey delegation to the centennial of the Civil War's opening shots at Fort Sumter demanded this commemoration be moved after their delegate Madaline A. Williams was denied accommodation in segregated Charleston. Franklin urged the New York Commission to join this eventually successful protest, warning that doing otherwise risked "turning the clock back to some antediluvian notions of human relations."[42]

[36] Franklin, *Reconstruction*.

[37] Franklin to William McKinley McNeill, 4 Jan. 1956, "M, 1940s–1950s," C5, JHFP.

[38] Franklin to Leon W. Scott, 10 Jan. 1961, and Franklin to the Honorable Francis E. Rivers, 10 Jan. 1961, "NY State Civil War Centennial Commission, 1961–1962," S19, JHFP.

[39] John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1956).

[40] John Hope Franklin, "A Century of Civil War Observance," *Journal of Negro History*, 47, 2 (1962), 97–107, 107.

[41] "JFK Aide to Be NCC Speaker," *Durham Sun*, 13 Oct. 1961, 11.

[42] Franklin to Bruce Catton, 17 March 1961, "American Heritage Publishing Company," C25, JHFP. After initially refusing to make this move, the Civil War Commission bowed following pressure from President Kennedy, moving the venue to the Charleston Naval Base.

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This scandal led to the appointment of a new commission chairman, Allan Nevins. A Civil War historian and public history advocate, Nevins encouraged a more intellectual celebration oriented towards national reconciliation and rekindling Americans' regard for their nation's essential values.[43] In his 1959 American Historical Association presidential address, Nevins argued that America during the Cold War needed "all the moral fortitude, all the faith in the power of liberty and morality to survive the assaults of tyranny and wrong, that historians of every school can give it."[44] This message of national unity continually conflicted with Franklin's appreciation for paradox, irony, and the still-extant forces of white supremacy. Yet, critically, it also fostered ideological alignment with the incumbent President Kennedy, whom Nevins had previously praised in a laudatory collection of Kennedy's foreign-policy speeches as the ablest "torchbearer" for dynamic liberalism during a "time for anxiety, for tough thinking, for resolute action."[45]

While Franklin welcomed Nevins's appointment, Nevins's eight-volume Civil War history, *Ordeal of the Union* (1947–71), starkly illustrates how his reconciliatory narratives obscured the role of racial conflicts within American history in a manner typical of racial liberalism.[46] Nevins's preface, for example, noted that "no series of volumes can do justice to the tremendous story of effort, devotion and valor North and South, in the war which finally vindicated national unity."[47] For the historian Thomas Pressly, Nevins exemplified a hybridist "new nationalist tradition." Critical of slavery yet wary of excessive moralism, Nevins chiefly attributed the war to the "unrealities of passion" which prevented sectional compromise.[48] Conflict was preventable, if only mid-nineteenth-century politicians possessed New Deal liberalism's technocratic foresight. For Nevins, then, racial issues presented an opportunity for ensuring civilizational adaptation, demonstrating American

[43] For an overview of Nevins's career see Gerald L. Fetner, *Immersed in Great Affairs: Allan Nevins and the Heroic Age of American History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004).

[44] Allan Nevins, "Not Capulets, Not Montagues," *American Historical Review*, 65, 2 (1960), 253–70, 270.

[45] Allan Nevins, "Introduction: A Believer in the American Mission," in Nevins, ed., *The Strategy of Peace* (New York: Harper, 1960), ix–xv, ix–x.

[46] Useful surveys of the *Ordeal* series include James L. Crouthamel, "Allan Nevins's Ordeal of the Union: A Review Essay," *New York History*, 54, 1 (1973), 59–66; and Robert Middlekauff, "Telling the Story of the Civil War: Allan Nevins as a Narrative Historian," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 56, 1 (1993), 67–81.

[47] Allan Nevins, *The War for the Union*, Volume II, *War Becomes Revolution, 1862–1863* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), vii.

[48] Thomas J. Pressly, *Americans Interpret Their Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), 310–23, esp. 310–11.

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exceptionalism, and fostering a more homogeneous and consequently more advanced American polity. Emancipation terminated "the inherited anachronism that had so long retarded the nation's progress, and crippled its pretensions to the leadership of the liberal forces of the globe."[49] Nevins therefore exemplifies the process noted by Nina Silber whereby New Dealers disassociated slavery, and Emancipation itself, from issues of race, celebrating Emancipation as the deliverance of the entire American nation and, indeed, the globe.[50]

Altogether, then, Nevins's liberal evangelism wholly befitted a presidency that increasingly recognized the political value of commemorating Emancipation yet, in order to foster national unity and international goodwill, ignored the continued realities of white supremacy highlighted by a century of Black Emancipation memory. Indeed, administration staffers keenly sensed how commemorating Emancipation could deflect criticism of Kennedy's inaction on racial issues. Having promised during the 1960 election that discrimination in federal employment and housing could be eliminated through "a stroke of the President's pen," once in office Kennedy prioritized quiet, non-obstructive, accommodative progress through behind-the-scenes negotiation and compromise.[51] For a President elected by a razor-thin margin over Richard Nixon with a historic share of the Black vote, the Centennial offered a felicitous opportunity to demonstrate America's historical commitment to freedom within a context of Cold War civil rights.[52]

To summarize, even in a period of so-called consensus history interpretations of Reconstruction and Emancipation remained fiercely contested. Racial liberalism's harmonious narrative of ever-increasing inclusion inevitably conflicted with a dissident and subjunctive Black Emancipation countermemory historically concerned with ongoing betrayals, hypocrisies, and inequalities. Delegating commemorative responsibilities to the Commission on Civil

[49] Nevins, *War Becomes Revolution*, 237.

[50] Nina Silber, *This War Ain't Over: Fighting the Civil War in New Deal America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 5–7.

[51] For a brief overview of Kennedy's civil rights record see Derek C. Catsam, "Civil Rights," in Marc J. Selverstone, ed., *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2014), 540–57. Nick Bryant, *The Bystander: John F. Kennedy and the Struggle for Black Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), persuasively characterizes Kennedy as a bystander on racial issues.

[52] The intersections of domestic racial policy and Cold War priorities has been a long-standing thread in scholarship on JFK, e.g. Renee Romano, "No Diplomatic Immunity: African Diplomats, the State Department, and Civil Rights, 1961–1964," *Journal of American History*, 87, 2 (2000), 546–79. Mary Dudziak's landmark *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 156, claims that civil rights became "the third leg of the stool" of JFK's priorities, together with foreign affairs and domestic issues.

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Rights ultimately helped Kennedy and Nevins to sidestep such controversy.[53] The commission was unenthused – its executive staff director Berl I. Bernhard later recalled that "no one wanted to do it. It was just considered to be a big burden."[54] Here, Bernhard was disappointed. In May 1962, Kennedy ordered the commission to produce a history of civil rights since 1863, a project Bernhard would later deem "one of the most aggravating things that ever happened … you try to get any two people to agree about history – they don't exist."[55]

Despite these many disagreements, the report's title – "One Hundred Years of Progress" – starkly illustrates the political expectations placed upon a project that could "prove an important contribution to a national and international understanding of the progress we have made, the factors which have made this possible, and the road we still have to travel."[56] Surveying the report's construction therefore evidences the ever-racialized contestations that emerged as the commission struggled to enfold vastly heterogeneous Emancipation memories – and a quietly dissident historian that it wholly expected to be a trustworthy indigenous interpreter – within this broader triumphal narrative.

DRAFTING *FREEDOM TO THE FREE*

For ever-nervous government actors, Franklin – a highly respected, prominent historian based at the fiercely anticommunist Brooklyn College – must have appeared the ideal indigenous interpreter. As early as 1956, the Civil War historian Bell Irvin Wiley recommended inviting Franklin to advise on the centennial because he was "one of the most highly respected and most articulate of the Negro scholars."[57] Throughout his career, Franklin received opportunities following similar backhanded praise from liberal white scholars, who lauded Franklin as a rare Black historian – in the words of his PhD mentor emblazoned on the cover jacket of Franklin's most famous work – "without a

[53] Established by President Eisenhower in 1957, the commission had two chief roles: investigating allegations of racial discrimination and recommending policy responses to contemporary racial issues. See Jocelyn C. Frye, Robert S. Gerber, Robert H. Pees and Arthur W. Richardson, "The Rise and Fall of the United States Commission on Civil Rights," *Harvard Civil Rights–Civil Liberties Law Review*, 22, 1 (1987), 449–506.

[54] Transcript of Berl I. Bernhard, recorded interview with John F. Stewart, 23 July 1968, John F. Kennedy Oral History Collection, JFK Library, 52.

[55] Ibid., 53.

[56] Kennedy to John A. Hannah, 23 May 1962, reprinted in White House press release, 15 June 1962, "Emancipation Proclamation Anniversary, 1962: 24 Apr.–24 Aug.," White House Staff Files of Lee C. White, John F. Kennedy Presidential Papers, JFK Library.

[57] Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 162–63.

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chip on his shoulder."[58] In this case, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., a friend of Franklin's then serving as Kennedy's "court historian," assured the commission that Franklin was a "highly trusted, decent, and balanced person who is thoroughly competent and most distinguished."[59] Once more evidencing the broader super-scrutinization of Black public figures, however, throughout 1962 Franklin was vetted by a vast FBI inquiry which extended to Albany, Charlotte, Honolulu, Memphis, Milwaukee, New York, and San Francisco. It found Franklin to be a loyal citizen and liberal diplomat who won over his predominantly white Brooklyn neighbourhood.[60] Lampooning the surveillance of Black intellectuals with which both had become familiar following the Red Scare, the Black historian and Howard University professor Rayford Logan informed Franklin of a visit from "a man in a blue suit," quipping, "he really has a dossier! He did not know, however, about Australia, Stockholm [Franklin's recent lecture tours], and the William Pitt Professorship."[61]

Although neither Franklin nor Bernhard's papers contain Franklin's drafts, both the commission's dogmatic triumphalism and the perpetual racial dynamics Franklin struggled against can be inferred by closely reading the related correspondence. To paraphrase Penny Von Eschen, finding these discontinuities within federal attempts to manage historical time powerfully reveals the hubris of racial liberalism.[62] From the beginning, the commission favoured signs of racial progress – itself defined abstractly – while perceiving this to be a politically neutral orientation, a stance indicative of precisely such hubris. Inviting Franklin to author the report, Bernhard recognized that "for much of the period in question, there would be very little substantial progress to report and that many of the advances have come only in the past few years." Bernhard consequently encouraged Franklin to indicate factors that promoted and could further encourage progress. Remarkably, Bernhard reasoned that this would avoid accusations that the report was intended as propaganda.[63] Franklin, ever mindful of history's capacity to promote national self-scrutiny via democratic debate, clearly appreciated this opportunity to counter the Civil War Centennial's neglect of Black memory from

[58] Cover of *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn, "From Slavery to Freedom Book Covers," W05, JHFP.

[59] Undated and untitled memo, "Emancipation Proclamation Centennial Planning Committee Materials (2)," Box 5, Berl I. Bernhard Personal Papers, JFK Library (henceforth BIBP).

[60] This inquiry is extensively documented in materials from Box R7 of the John Hope Franklin Papers.

[61] Logan to Franklin, 17 Jan. 1962, "Logan, Rayford (3 of 6)," C38, JHFP.

[62] Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, 25.

[63] Berl I. Bernhard to Franklin, 7 Dec. 1961, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

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the inside, accepting Kennedy's ambitious deadline. He forever thereafter struggled with this deadline – by June 1962 he was working sixteen-hour days and, paid per day, received pay Bernhard recognized was "rather meagre."[64] Shortly after signing the contract on 4 January 1962, Franklin recruited three distinguished historical consultants: Allan Nevins, Rayford Logan, and the Yale-based historian of the South C. Vann Woodward. Selecting these three broadly liberal and highly prestigious public intellectuals once again indicates Franklin's strategy of working from the inside, utilizing their prestige to provide his quietly dissident scholarship legitimacy and a wider interracial audience than many other Black historical projects.[65]

Nonetheless, viewing Franklin as the liberal establishment's house scholar obscures both this strategic approach and how Franklin's Blackness – ever a provocation to federal anxieties – was consistently weaponized to devalue his conclusions. Franklin approached the project gravely aware of its symbolic power. Indicative of both his patriotism of critique and awareness that he was regarded as a safe choice, Franklin consistently challenged triumphal narratives, marshalling Emancipation memory's subjunctive power to demand further action on racial issues. Such action would at last "fulfil the promise of 1863."[66] While staffers adopted the shorthand "Progress Report," Franklin called his work "Civil Rights – A Theme in United States History." From the beginning, he emphasized that the history of Reconstruction and of the rise of Jim Crow was "not a pretty picture," warning that the period from 1863 to 1948 was "a bit distressing and the word 'progress' can be applied to it only in the broadest, philosophical terms."[67] As Franklin's first drafts arrived, then, the commissioner and

[64] Franklin to Bernhard, 24 Aug. 1962, "Emancipation Proclamation Centennial Planning Committee Materials (2)," Box 5, BIBP; Bernard to Franklin, 28 Aug. 1962, "Emancipation Proclamation Centennial Planning Committee Materials (2)," Box 5, BIBP.

[65] Woodward was critical to promoting Franklin's early involvement in the predominantly segregated Southern Historical Association yet the pair had fallen out by the 1970s following Woodward's rightward turn and suspicion of the Black studies and Black Power movements, culminating in a tense exchange in the *New York Review of Books*. See James C. Cobb, *C. Vann Woodward: America's Historian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022). When Franklin worked in the Howard History Department chaired by Logan from 1949 to 1956, the two became notable coconspirators, airing their frustrations with President Mordecai Wyatt Johnson. Franklin, Logan's younger colleague, was frequently the voice of reason who urged Logan to avoid antagonizing the administration. See Kenneth Robert Janken, *Rayford W. Logan and the Dilemma of the African-American Intellectual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

[66] Franklin to Bernhard, 20 June 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

[67] Franklin to Bernhard, 20 July 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

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Catholic theologian Theodore Hesburgh declared them "entirely too negative." If only Franklin had handled this story "of great drama" appropriately, he could have "many good things to show about the struggle upwards from black despair to a rather bright new day full of hope."[68] Similarly, Woodward urged Franklin to balance this "history of much perfidy" with "the heroic efforts of the few who have fought the great fight, and a just appraisal of positive accomplishments."[69] Both comments encouraged contributionism, the tendency within Black historiography that Russell Rickford suggests "presented the achievements of innocuous black strivers … as the product of industriousness and self-discipline in an increasingly meritocratic society."[70] Yet Franklin had historically rejected contributionism, viewing Black history in *From Slavery to Freedom* as "the story of the strivings of the nameless millions."[71]

Commentators, including Hesburgh, also persistently criticized Franklin for disproportionately highlighting the "black side of the picture."[72] It is especially notable that Woodward encouraged Franklin to further investigate non-Black racial minorities to guard against accusations of "ethnocentrism."[73] Such comments – particularly from a historian who had previously lauded Franklin as a "Negro historian for whom it was not necessary to make any apologies or allowances on account of his race" – underscore the disproportionate burdens on Black historians to demonstrate racial neutrality that were engendered by mid-twentieth-century academia's normative whiteness.[74] Concomitantly, Nevins implied that ethnocentrism led to overemotionalism, hindering scholarly objectivity.[75] Instead, Nevins urged an "Olympian"

[68] Theodore Hesburgh to Bernhard, 4 Sept. 1962, "Emancipation Proclamation Centennial Planning Committee Materials (3)," Box 5, BIBP.

[69] Woodward to Franklin, 13 Feb. 1962, Box 19, Folder 222, C. Vann Woodward Papers, MS 1436, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. For Woodward as a racial liberal see Darda, *The Strange Career of Racial Liberalism*, 1–22.

[70] Russel Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 49. For example, the *Atlanta Constitution* predicted that African Americans would "take pride" in the report's illustrating "in the rise of the Negro from slavery, that our democracy's shortcomings are small indeed compared to its majestic achievements." See "Racial Stock-Taking Has Positive Side," *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 Nov. 1961, 4.

[71] John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn (New York: Knopf, 1947), viii.

[72] Hesburgh to Bernhard, 4 Sept. 1962, "Emancipation Proclamation Centennial Planning Committee Materials (3)," Box 5, BIBP.

[73] Woodward to Franklin, 13 Feb. 1962, Box 19, Folder 222, Woodward Papers.

[74] Woodward to John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Nov. 1949, reprinted in C. Vann Woodward and Michael O'Brien, ed., *The Letters of C. Vann Woodward* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 124–25.

[75] For Franklin's important critique of this reasoning see John Hope Franklin, "The Dilemma of the American Negro Scholar," in Herbert Hill, ed., *Soon One Morning: New Writing by American Negroes, 1940–1962* (New York: Knopf, 1963), 60–76, esp. 72.

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neutrality. In an argument indicating the belief in Black cultural deficiencies that Richard King defines as a consensus view of the mid-twentieth-century white left, Nevins argued that while science had disproven allegations of Black biological inferiority, white Americans still possessed "temporary superiority – a greater cleverness, adaptability, earnestness."[76] This would "require time, long educational effort, industry, and patience to overcome." He understood Franklin's "feelings" but argued – reflecting tropes of Black pathologism endemic to 1960s liberalism – that "some of the disabilities of the Negro have arisen from their own faults and shortcomings; they cannot all be attributed to white injustice."[77] These intertwined charges of ethnocentrism and emotionalism therefore illustrate how Franklin's Blackness was utilized to invalidate his conclusions. Communicating to Schlesinger, Nevins remarkably claimed, "I wrote him in gentle terms, for he is a sensitive man, and this is a sensitive time for his race."[78]

Like many mid-twentieth-century racial liberals, then, Nevins's allusions to Black pathologism presented racial equalization as an issue of acculturation, integration, and then equalization. This was the dilemma of America's post-Civil War century, with Nevins arguing in *Ordeal* that, following Emancipation, "many a Northerner looked upon the refugee freedman with a fresh and startled glance; he saw not only a man, but a problem."[79] This stance reflected Nevins's assessment that the first Reconstruction failed because it gave African Americans political rights they were not sufficiently prepared to exercise. Such allegations of post-Emancipation civic immaturity remained widespread in mid-twentieth-century American liberalism – Nick Bryant describes how Kennedy himself "embraced this highly selective southern view of Reconstruction."[80] Indeed, Reconstruction was by far the report's most critiqued chronological section, revealing both its highly contested nature in mid-twentieth-century American memory and how profoundly it provoked white anxieties surrounding decolonization and domestic Black empowerment.[81] For example, the commissioner and Tennessee-born political scientist

[76] See Richard King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals, 1940–1970* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004), 125.

[77] Nevins to Franklin, 22 Aug. 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP. On such pathologies see Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights*, esp. 61–63.

[78] Nevins to Arthur Schlesinger Jr., 10 Sept. 1962, "Emancipation Proclamation Centennial Planning Committee Materials (3)," Box 5, BIBP.

[79] Allan Nevins, *The War for the Union*, Volume III, *The Organized War to Victory 1864–1865* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 5.

[80] Quoted in John Michael, "'Profiles in Courage': JFK's Book for Boys," *American Literary History*, 24, 3 (2012), 424–43, 428.

[81] See Bernhard A. Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography," *Journal of Southern History*, 25, 4 (1959), 427–47; and Carole

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Robert Rankin, having recently listened to Hesburgh lecture on the likely failings of newly independent African democracies, noted comparisons to "the condition of the South when rights were given to large groups of the population who really did not know how to make use of them."[82] Reconstruction therefore played a critical role in validating conceptions of Black pathology, strikingly evidencing Jason Morgan Ward's assessment of how this "profoundly pessimistic view of black civic fitness … pervaded the civil rights era and persisted in its wake."[83]

By August 1962, however, Franklin – now based in Cambridge – rejected Nevins's critique in a manner evidencing the politics of respectability that Franklin developed while completing his undergraduate education at Fisk.[84] Franklin noted the "extremely high" standards he expected of his Black colleagues but emphasized that meeting such standards was not a prerequisite for their enjoyment of civil rights.[85] Shortly thereafter, Nevins again urged comprehensive rewriting to emphasize Black contributions towards American life.[86] Franklin sternly rejected Nevins's charge, arguing, "I did not even castigate lynchers and those who burned Negroes at the stake; nor did I take the federal government to task for its numerous derelictions in the area of civil rights."[87] He believed that the developments spoke for themselves.

In rejecting white expectations of a contributionist text, critiques of supposed emotionalism and ethnocentrism, and accusations of Black post-Emancipation immaturity, Franklin thus struggled against long-standing racialized dynamics that Jonathan Scott Holloway, among others, considers to have persistently constrained Black-authored scholarship.[88] These dynamics are

Emberton and Bruce E. Baker, eds., *Remembering Reconstruction: Struggles over the Meaning of America's Most Turbulent Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017).

82 Robert S. Rankin to Cornelius P. Cotter, 13 Nov. 1962, "Emancipation Proclamation Centennial Planning Committee Materials (2)," Box 5, BIBP.

83 Jason Morgan Ward, "Causes Lost and Found: Remembering and Refighting Reconstruction in the Roosevelt Era," in Carole Emberton and Bruce E. Baker, eds., *Remembering Reconstruction: Struggles over the Meaning of America's Most Turbulent Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 35–56, 51.

84 On the impact of such ideologies on the Fisk campus see Perzavia Praylow, "Re/Making Men and Women for the Race: Coeducation, Respectability, and Black Student Leadership at Fisk University, 1924–1970," PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign (2012).

85 Franklin to Nevins, 27 Aug. 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

86 Nevins to Franklin, 8 Sept. 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

87 Franklin to Nevins, 21 Sept. 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

88 See Jonathan Scott Holloway, "The Black Intellectual and the 'Crisis Canon' in the Twentieth Century," *Black Scholar*, 31, 4 (2001), 2–13.

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remarkably reminiscent of the marginalization of Du Bois's contributions to *An American Dilemma* and evidence how these racialized judgements remained ever-present throughout the heyday of mid-twentieth-century liberalism.[89] Corroborating Holloway's suggestion that Black knowledge has predominantly been accepted when it echoes the conclusions of prominent white scholars, a day later Nevins – hired *by* Franklin as *his* consultant – privately complained that Franklin utilized "inflamed" terminology and offered "too much a history of general outrages, violence, terrorism, and prejudice."[90] Evidently perturbed, Bernhard shortly thereafter complained that the report would not inspire progress because it neglected themes of "national concern and infinitesimal progress."[91] Franklin refused, however, evidencing his dissident Americanism by writing instead of his hope that "in a country like ours, with its great vigor and its determination to do what is right, a knowledge of the facts would inspire it to correct its injustices and make further progress."[92] For Franklin, then, public history projects had a vital role in fostering for both Black and white Americans a truer Americanism alive to the violences of white supremacy. Black historians had to strategically rework American history to prompt that reckoning. Nevins's remarkable transformation from Franklin's consultant to editor, however, bespeaks the broader super-scrutinization that Black intellectuals endured when promoting this dissident Americanism through the entrapping niches available to indigenous interpreters within mid-twentieth-century liberalism.

Indeed, on the very day that Franklin promised these revisions, a commission staffer travelled to Central State College, Ohio to discuss revising Franklin's report with the Black historians Charles Harris Wesley, Paul McStallworth, Jerome Jones, and Prince Wilson.[93] Franklin soon learned of this from McStallworth, a former colleague. McStallworth's actions indicate how Black intellectuals formed counternetworks to strategize against their shared experiences of editorial censorship and federal duplicity. As Daniel

[89] See Aldon Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 198–215; and Jerry Gershenhorn, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 123–67.

[90] Holloway, 5; Nevins quotes from Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 181.

[91] Bernhard to Franklin, 20 Sept. 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

[92] Franklin to Bernhard, 24 Sept. 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

[93] Indeed, days earlier Bernhard met the Baltimore-based Black historian of the Civil War Benjamin Quarles to discuss a similar takeover of Franklin's project. Bernhard to Benjamin Quarles, 20 Sept. 1962, "Emancipation Proclamation Centennial Planning Committee Materials (3)," Box 5, BIBP.

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Matlin notes, by the 1960s several Black public figures found the indigenous interpreter to be an increasingly "demeaning and confining" role.[94] Indicatively, Franklin soon bemoaned to Logan – whose *What the Negro Wants* (1944) had similarly been censored by the University of North Carolina Press – that "they wanted some sort of 'whitewash' and are disappointed because they got a lesson in history."[95]

There was a great irony in the commission's choosing Wesley: in 1946 the publisher Knopf rejected Wesley's initial manuscript for the Black history survey that Franklin was to write as *From Slavery to Freedom*, fearing that Wesley's writing appeared old-fashioned.[96] Twenty-four years Franklin's senior and one of Carter G. Woodson's "Old Boys" who spearheaded the early Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), Wesley became the first ASNLH president following Woodson's death in 1950.[97] He was evidently suspicious of Franklin's postwar generation of scholars, who increasingly left the world of HBCUs and the ASNLH to break into white educational institutions. Rayford Logan noted how, after one American Historical Association meeting, Wesley accused Franklin of "playing up to white people." Another scholar added that Franklin was a "white man's n*****," a comment Wesley explicitly endorsed.[98] According to McStallworth, however, Wesley was reluctant to rewrite Franklin's draft, urging the commission to accept it both on being first contacted and having met face-to-face. Wesley's eventual acceptance – and his extensive efforts organizing the ASNLH's own Emancipation commemorations – perhaps can be best attributed to the bitter awareness he shared with Franklin that commemorating Emancipation offered a critical opportunity to salvage something from a Civil War Centennial that had hitherto "prevent[ed] any reconstruction of the historical thought which could prove to be a basis for improved human relations and could bring greater unity to North and South."[99]

[94] Matlin, *On the Corner*, 8.

[95] Franklin to Logan, 24 Sept. 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP. For the story of *What the Negro Wants* see Holloway, esp. 6–9.

[96] Witham, *Popularizing the Past*, 83.

[97] On Wesley see Janette Hoston Harris, "Woodson and Wesley: A Partnership in Building the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History," *Journal of Negro History*, 83, 2 (1998), 109–19; and James L. Conyers Jr., ed., *Charles H. Wesley: The Intellectual Tradition of a Black Historian* (New York: Garland, 1997).

[98] Rayford Logan Diary Entry, 31 Dec. 1957, "1955 (15. Aug–31. Dec), 1956–1957," Box 6, Rayford Whittingham Logan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Asterisks mine.

[99] Charles H. Wesley, "The Civil War and the Negro-American," *Journal of Negro History*, 47, 2 (1962), 77–96, 78. On the ASNLH's commemorations see Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 163–64, 169.

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Perhaps the greatest benefit for the commission was not who Wesley was, but how an impending deadline and four-person writing team shifted control over the overall argument towards the commission, almost guaranteeing a more politically useful text than might be generated by a sole historian. A new project prospectus entitled "A Study of the March in History of Negro-Americans toward Freedom" evidences this increasingly explicit emphasis on progress, proposing a story of "the development and transition to freedom of Negro-Americans in the United States from the period of slavery to the dawn of full citizenship practices in the 1930s." Interestingly, one commission figure scribbled out "1930s" for "1960s," emphasizing racial progress during Kennedy's presidency.[100] These political motivations therefore once again corroborate Holloway's conclusions, revealing both the fragility of Black scholarship that did not follow white expectations and the federal government's editorial powers.

Thus began the tragicomedy of three parties – the commission, Wesley, and Franklin – revising the same manuscript simultaneously yet separately. Franklin's final revisions, sent on 19 November 1962, conceded to several commission demands, including a new concluding chapter highlighting recent advancements towards equality. Nevertheless, Franklin evidently suspected that the commission was exploiting his scholarship, pointedly asking what use had been made of his manuscripts.[101] When the final report arrived in late November, Franklin was once more furious. Having committed to near-impossible deadlines, his acknowledgement consisted of an unelaborated thanks. The final draft was "lacking in style, character, and movement." Symptomatic of racial liberalism, it failed to recognize the full historical impact of white supremacy, offering only an "elementary recitation of the first two centuries of slavery" and ignoring the antebellum period, intellectual and cultural factors, and private-sector forces which impeded progress. At heart, "much of the writing – in some cases, rewriting – reflected a remarkable innocence of the interrelationships of various historical events and developments, to say nothing of the historical facts themselves."[102] That very day, Franklin warned Schlesinger (evidently hoping he would transmit this warning to Kennedy) that the report was "different in almost every important respect from the one that I prepared."[103]

[100] "Emancipation and Civil Rights, Project Prospectus," undated, "Emancipation Proclamation Centennial Planning Committee Materials (3)," Box 5, BIBP.

[101] Franklin to Bernhard, 9 Nov. 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

[102] Franklin to Bernhard, 6 Dec. 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

[103] Franklin to Arthur Schlesinger Jr., 6 Dec. 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

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Once more, then, the report's technocratic triumphalism severed Emancipation from this broader historical context of white supremacy, jibing against Franklin's dissident Americanism and drawing critical responses from Black public figures and activists. Rather than being published as a mass-market paperback like the 1968 Kerner report – only five thousand copies were printed for public sale – the commission disseminated *Freedom to the Free* as a gift to select interracial elites, as well as globally distributing it to Peace Corps training sites.[104] The report was formally launched with a White House function on Lincoln's birthday. With approximately 1,100 guests, this was celebrated as the largest buffet reception hitherto held at the White House and offered an expedient occasion for the administration to build relationships with prominent civil rights organizations and "borrow some Lincoln Day thunder" from the Republicans.[105] Bernhard recalled how guest list decisions continued for days because "this whole civil rights issue was becoming [so] aggravating, controversial that if you missed key people, they were going to be offended … It was rather hilarious."[106] Despite this fanfare, Franklin did not know of the report's release until approached by a *Newsweek* journalist. Weeks later, it was delivered to his door without even a covering letter.[107]

Many African Americans shared Franklin's suspicions, arguing that this celebratory reception revealed the broader inattention of the Kennedy administration and white-authored scholarship to America's ongoing racial inequalities. In a report festooned with glamorous society photographs, the *Baltimore Afro-American* noted how one Black guest rejected a copy, remarking, "don't give me that, I don't have my freedom yet." The NAACP's lobbyist to Congress, Clarence Mitchell Jr., refused to attend entirely, demanding Kennedy end the filibuster before sharing "cookies and punch."[108] The former incident was picked up by the Black nationalist Robert F. Williams's Cuba-based Radio Free Dixie, which declared the celebration a "disgrace to

[104] For print numbers see Howard W. Rogerson to Melvin C. Murray, 3 Dec. 1962, "Emancipation Proclamation Centennial Planning Committee Materials (2)," Box 5, BIBP; Julius A. Amin "The Peace Corps and the Struggle for African American Equality," *Journal of Black Studies*, 29, 6 (1999), 809–26, 816.

[105] "Kennedy Invades GOP Day," *Miami Herald*, 14 Feb. 1963, 9.

[106] Transcript of Berl I. Bernhard, recorded interview with John F. Stewart, 23 July 1968, John F. Kennedy Oral History Collection, JFK Library, 54–55.

[107] Franklin to Logan, 25 Feb. 1963, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP. Franklin was invited to the White House dinner, albeit likely with the full awareness that he would not attend because he was in Cambridge.

[108] B. M. Phillips, "So This Is the White House," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 23 Feb. 1963, 5.

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the starving, oppressed, jim crowed and terror stricken masses of Afroamericans."[109]

Black intellectuals echoed Williams's criticism. The novelist and historian J. Saunders Redding accused the report of exploiting Black history and glossing over violent resistance to recent civil rights legislation.[110] The editor Ernest Daniel Kaiser and the prominent Afrocentrist historian John Henrik Clarke, book reviewers for the journal *Freedomways*, described Martin Luther King's appeal for a new Emancipation Proclamation as "infinitely preferable" to the commission's report.[111] Four years later, Kaiser further lambasted an "eternally sanguine, insultingly titled" work that reflected the "mild, liberal, shallow approach" of many white-authored Black history texts.[112] Like these Black public figures, Franklin was all too aware that his association was being used to legitimize such shallow approaches to racial issues. He swiftly disowned the report, urging Kaiser and Clarke to immediately clarify that he had not authored the text.[113] Also carefully attuned to these dynamics of ambiguous authorship, Rayford Logan painstakingly discerned how the press avoided saying whether he, Nevins, or Woodward were consultants to Franklin or to the commission.[114]

All in all, *Freedom to the Free*'s production, publication, and reception all attest to the hubristic narrative of racial progress foundational to racial liberalism and critical to the Kennedy administration's political aspirations. While taking great caution to recruit a supposedly trustworthy and "non-race-conscious" Black indigenous interpreter, Franklin's editors censored and impugned his scholarship through an array of implicit but nonetheless relentlessly racialized judgements. For Franklin and his Black correspondents, such judgements were all too familiar. Accusations of emotionalism, ethnocentrism, pathologism, and post-Reconstruction immaturity all justified the fundamental non-reckoning with the historical force of white supremacy promoted by racial liberalism's individuating, universalizing, and often

[109] Radio Free Dixie Broadcast Transcript, 1 March 1963, Series 7: Radio Free Dixie Broadcasts, 1962–1966 (March 1, 1963–March 31, 1963), Robert F. Williams Papers, Black Power Movement, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

[110] J. Saunders Redding, "Three New Books: U.S. Comm. Report Has Political Overtones," *Baltimore African American*, 6 April 1963, A2.

[111] Ernest Daniel Kaiser and John H. Clarke, "Recent Books," *Freedomways*, 3, 2 (1963), 242–51, 243.

[112] Ernest Daniel Kaiser, "Negro History: A Bibliographical Survey," *Freedomways*, 7, 4 (1967), 335–45, 341.

[113] This clarification was printed in Ernest Kaiser and John H. Clarke, "Recent Books," *Freedomways*, 3, 4 (1963), 580–91, 591.

[114] Rayford Logan Diary Entry, 17 Feb. 1963, "1960: 18. June (Cont.)–19. Dec, 1961–1966; 1967: 4. Jan to 2. Feb.," Box 7, Rayford Whittingham Logan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

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ahistorical tendencies. *Freedom to the Free* therefore offers an underrecognized yet no less powerful example of how political, intellectual, and racial factors combined to reiterate racial liberal norms to public audiences. Just as its production starkly illustrates the challenges of voice, authorship, and racialization endured by many mid-twentieth-century Black indigenous interpreters, studying its published form therefore maps the remarkably consistent historical silences within mid-twentieth-century liberalism's reconciliatory glossing of American history.

ANALYSING THE RECONSTRUCTED *FREEDOM TO THE FREE*

Freedom to the Free's published form powerfully illustrates how the federal government simultaneously promoted and sought to domesticate an emerging Black history movement. Demonstrating stark continuities in liberal thought, its argument closely adhered to the frameworks established by Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (1944) and echoed in the Kerner report of 1968. To borrow from Malcolm McLaughlin's wholly applicable description of the latter, *Freedom to the Free* "rhetorically contained black democratic aspirations within the borders of the United States and established the rights of American citizenship as the only meaningful measure of freedom."[115] As McLaughlin suggests of the Kerner report, *Freedom to the Free* therefore also evidences how 1960s centrist liberalism reimagined itself to tame the demands of the civil rights movement, a dynamic that anticipates Tom Davies's important analysis of how late 1960s liberalism sought to "engage, modify, and sublimate" the energies of Black Power.[116]

Indicatively, *Freedom to the Free* frequently utilized the term "American Negro": a mid-twentieth-century term typical of racial liberalism which implied that African American culture, society, and civic loyalties were primarily determined, and would be determined thereafter, by their status within the United States.[117] Progress – a recurrent yet forever ill-defined term – thus entailed *de jure* equalization and social and cultural incorporation into a prospectively deracialized liberal American nationhood, rather than independent Black empowerment. This teleology thereby relegated the severest of racial ills – slavery – to the distant past, as a "curious and archaic word." As Franklin lamented, the report almost entirely ignored the enslaved's

[115] Malcolm McLaughlin, "The Story of America: The Kerner Report, National Leadership, and Liberal Renewal, 1967–1968," *The Sixties*, 14, 1 (2021), 20–52, 32.

[116] Ibid., 24; Tom Adam Davies, *Mainstreaming Black Power* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 2.

[117] Michael Lackey, "Redeeming the Post-metaphysical Promise of J. Saunders Redding's 'America'," *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 12, 3 (2012), 217–43, 223.

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experiences. Indeed, the introduction remarkably argued that slavery left a "unique record of the indomitability of the human spirit" to both the formerly enslaved and former slaveholders.[118] While ostensibly celebrating that indomitability, *Freedom to the Free* underplayed Black radical resistance and antebellum and transnational liberatory strivings, particularly those of Black women. Its cover image exemplified these implications of historic Black passivity, featuring a kneeling Black man, his figure shrouded by scribbles and eyes solemnly fixed downwards, superimposed in front of another Black man with a shirt and tie, sleeves drawn up, and fists clenched defiantly starring into the top-right corner.[119] Again, the masculinist imagery bears repeating.

The report's historical sections did recognize "periods of disturbing lack of progress, of retrogression," particularly between Reconstruction and World War I.[120] Nevertheless, this contrast only strengthened its central thesis that, since 1945, "progress has accelerated until today, for all the contradictions, all the transitional dislocations, all the temporary setbacks and stalemates, governments at all levels as well as private associations and individuals are pressing determinedly and successfully toward the goal of equality before the law and equal opportunity for all."[121] Indeed, of the 169-page historical sections, seventy-seven pages made up the extended chapter "1948–1962: Breakthrough toward Equality." Reflecting racial liberalism's tendency to favour legal solutions to racial issues, this chapter persistently attributed this acceleration to victories in court, citing 115 legal cases and emphasizing, particularly since 1945, the contributions of federal agencies, including the FBI.[122] These interventions only further attested to postwar America's benevolent global leadership and "sense of responsibility."[123] *Freedom to the Free* also disproportionately emphasized moderate and less direct-action-oriented civil rights organizations; Franklin justly argued that it described the Southern Regional Council more extensively than it did CORE or the SCLC.[124]

These biases transparently reveal what Nikhil Pal Singh has described as US liberal nationalism's tendency to celebrate formalistic, technocratic, and legalistic politics as "integrationist" while discounting as separatist and irrational

[118] US Commission on Civil Rights, *Freedom to the Free: A Century of Emancipation 1863–1963* (Washington, DC: US Government Printer's Office, 1963), 1.

[119] This imagery reflects broader tropes of Black passivity in visual imagery. See Martin A. Berger, *Seeing through Race: A Reinterpretation of Civil Rights Photography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 39. I am grateful to Andrew Fearnley for this inference.

[120] US Commission on Civil Rights, 2.

[121] Ibid., 3.

[122] Number of cases based on author's calculations from list of cases in ibid., 241–46.

[123] Ibid., 122.

[124] Franklin to Bernhard, 6 Dec. 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

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Black radical, transnational, and anti-capitalist politics.[125] Discussing the commission's formation, *Freedom to the Free* argued that by 1957 there existed "a definite and discernible tide which was to sweep away the traditional impediments to civil rights legislation."[126] Corroborating Ben Keppel's assessment of how *Brown* v. *Board* immediately became a "sacred and redemptive chapter in the history of American democracy," *Freedom to the Free* celebrated the decision as the most momentous event in recent racial history, which rendered segregation a "dead letter in every area of public activity."[127] Granted, it critiqued Massive Resistance, arguing that "violence will not be tolerated as a means of thwarting court-ordered desegregation … as time passes, the courts will demand something more than token compliance."[128] Yet this rhetoric bracketed racial confrontation, particularly lynching, as an un-American rarity. Reading Franklin's initial submission, Hesburgh argued that lynching had "practically ceased."[129] Yet Franklin – anticipating the violence that struck Birmingham, Alabama the following year – argued that this claim was "not only merely optimistic but [also] imposes a narrow definition of lynching."[130] The final report's statement that lynching was "virtually extinct" thus imposed a narrow definition of racial violence that was symptomatic of how racial liberals foregrounded primarily deinstitutionalized, putatively autonomous, and irrational racial violence to occlude the broader constitutive role of white supremacy – and violence – throughout American history.[131]

When recognizing northern inequalities, *Freedom to the Free* similarly obscured the impact of institutionalized white domination. Reflecting a widespread manoeuvre in liberal modernization theory, it bracketed urban issues as primarily temporary results of occupational dislocation, of adjusting fundamentally benign urban management schemes to new demands on public services.[132] Focussing on the deprivations of urban life rather than on the structures that created them only further reinforced notions of Black

[125] Singh, *Black Is a Country*, 40, 46.

[126] US Commission on Civil Rights, 192.

[127] Keppel, *The Work of Democracy*, 115; and US Commission on Civil Rights, 199.

[128] US Commission on Civil Rights, 199.

[129] Theodore Hesburgh to Bernhard, 4 Sept. 1962, "Emancipation Proclamation Centennial Planning Committee Materials (3)," Box 5, BIBP.

[130] Franklin to Bernhard, 6 Dec. 1962, "U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Materials RE: Report, 1961–1964," S22, JHFP.

[131] US Commission on Civil Rights, 185. See Elaine Parsons, "The Cultural Work of the Ku Klux Klan in US History Textbooks, 1883–2015," in Carole Emberton and Bruce E. Baker, eds., *Remembering Reconstruction: Struggles over the Meaning of America's Most Turbulent Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 225–61.

[132] Averbeck, *Liberalism Is Not Enough*, 37. For the section where this tendency is most apparent see US Commission on Civil Rights, 206.

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incapacity and pathologism.[133] Like the Kerner report, *Freedom to the Free* therefore demanded more intensive liberal technocratic stewardship rather than Black community activism, and individual and predominantly male advancement rather than any subversive or anticapitalist radicalism.[134]

In sum, *Freedom to the Free*'s "American Negro" terminology and from-slavery-to-civic-inclusion teleology both affirmed an underlying narrative of an ever-the-more-liberal American nationhood and nonviolent, gradualist, and nation-affirming means of attaining *de jure* parity within that nation. It wholly echoed the Myrdallian contention, as Singh has written, that this ability to harmonize a heterogeneous population fitted America to be "the broker of the world's security concerns and aspirations for social progress."[135] Indeed, the final chapter commenced with Alexis de Tocqueville's oft-quoted prediction of a world divided between Russia and America. It then noted Tocqueville's contention that America's greatest challenge was slavery, an "immovable" force. Contrary to Tocqueville, however, this conclusion argued that Americans abolished slavery without either the white or the Black race's "extirpation," demonstrating their ability to interracially collaborate for societal betterment.[136] It consequently urged Americans to jointly conclude this struggle for equality, attaining for "American Negroes" a fully realized citizenship.

This rhetoric altogether quarantined historical analysis, attempting to blunt the contingencies and complexities of Franklin's findings. The report's skeletal historical framework relied greatly on his research, citing *From Slavery to Freedom* on twenty-two occasions. Yet this history was made less potent by an interpretation in which racial progress – i.e. equalization – involved only temporary conflict, violence, or sacrifice because it ultimately suited both white and Black interests. Ultimately, Franklin's dissident Americanism was only one of many Black perspectives on American history that continue to be silenced in order to elide white supremacy's constitutive role in American history; to banalize radical, anticapitalist, and transnational Blackness; and to prematurely celebrate the recent racial progress that, particularly for white audiences, maintains American innocence and thereby makes racial matters communicable, promising, and exculpatory.

[133] See Mical Raz, *What's Wrong with the Poor? Psychiatry, Race, and the War on Poverty* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

[134] McLaughlin, "The Story of America," 37–41.

[135] Singh, *Black Is a Country*, 136.

[136] US Commission on Civil Rights, 201–4.

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CONCLUSION

In summation, *Freedom to the Free* powerfully evidences American liberalism's long-standing failure to reckon with America's white-supremacist past. Just as postwar liberalism's core promise of equal citizenship within an increasingly liberal, nonracial American nationhood was conditioned on such elisions, liberal narratives of a triumphal and unifying civil rights movement that remain both prevalent and pernicious today were premised upon liberalism's broader inattention to its complicity in producing racial inequality.[137] As contemporary Black history movements challenge both malicious triumphalism and legislation that criminalizes teaching the history of white supremacy and critical race theory, this story underscores the historically co-constitutive relationship between these tendencies.

From the first, the commission's emphasis on progress was remarkably systematized, poorly defined, and explicit. It believed Franklin to be a uniquely moderate, "non-race-conscious" Black scholar, failing to appreciate his dissident Americanism and simultaneously perpetuating an ideal of legitimate Black spokespersonship that prevented more radical thinkers from attaining such opportunities. FBI investigations, contractual stipulations, and Nevins's subterfuge all suggest how 1960s governmental fact-finding missions increasingly recognized the political expedience of including exceptional Black indigenous interpreters while remaining profoundly cautious regarding the hypocrisy and complexities that even thinkers without a "chip on their shoulder" might emphasize. Franklin's experiences of censorship, then, were far from unique. His underpaid and unappreciated historical scholarship ballasted *Freedom to the Free*, yet the commission most extensively altered the introduction and conclusion's argumentative sections to foreground their broader triumphal message. Following Myrdal and anticipating the Kerner report, *Freedom to the Free* underscored recent progress while underplaying contemporary inequities, and celebrated Emancipation's international example while ignoring Reconstruction's collapse: a collapse attributed not to racialized violence but to Black civic pathology. Even in Kennedy's "Camelot" – which, for many, epitomizes liberal academic thinking's influence within the executive office – this interpretation of Reconstruction remained prevalent, premising Black adjustment as the prerequisite to first-class citizenship.

[137] For discussions of these tendencies within the United Kingdom see Andrew Fearnley et al., *New Approaches to Civil Rights History: A Guide for A-Level Teachers* (Manchester, 2021), at https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=57149; and Megan Hunt, Benjamin Houston, Brian Ward and Nick Megorian, "'He Was Shot Because America Will Not Give Up on Racism': Martin Luther King Jr. and the African American Civil Rights Movement in British Schools," *Journal of American Studies*, 55, 2 (2021), 387–417.

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This rhetoric – typical of racial liberalism – discounted radical, anticapitalist, and transnational Black empowerment as subversive, and instead presented liberalism and predominantly male individual achievement within a capitalist economy as *the* solutions to racial injustice. Particularly in urban areas, this technocratic and legalistic rhetoric reinforced discourses of Black pathologism and slighted the many de facto challenges remaining.

For Franklin, the proclamation was not a further feat in the historical ascent of American liberty but, instead, a tragically betrayed attempt to actualize, at last, the professed values of America's founding. Emancipation and Reconstruction were central to this profoundly ironic, dissident reading of American history, which emphasized unfulfilled promises and the fragility of progress. After 1963, Franklin continued to challenge public understandings of Reconstruction, particularly within the South.[138] He persistently disputed triumphal accounts of racial progress, later in the 1960s criticizing several "immature, outmoded, and unrealistic" Voice of America broadcasts that celebrated alleged progress to international audiences. These ignored "the impact on Western civilization of more than two centuries of the domination and exploitation of the black man by the white man" and "rip[ped] from the context of worldwide human enslavement the situation in the United States."[139] Despite his centennial experiences, however, Franklin continued to work with government, even as he grew increasingly sceptical of America's rightward turn. Franklin contributed to 1968's Kerner report and led President Bill Clinton's ill-fated One America Initiative on Race.[140] For his critics, particularly those associated with the Black studies movement, these moves evidenced naivety.[141] Yet they also reflected Frankin's clear belief that Americans of all races had to be taught the inconvenient realities of history. Working from the inside, through government, offered a constricting

[138] For one example see John Hope Franklin, "'Birth of a Nation': Propaganda as History," *Massachusetts Review*, 20, 3 (1979), 417–34.

[139] John Hope Franklin, "Critiques of 'Voice of America' Broadcasts on the Civil Rights Movement, 1960s," W35, JHFP. Franklin most prominently criticized notions of a "color-blind" United States in a public lecture series given days after the Rodney King trials. See John Hope Franklin, *The Color Line: Legacy for the Twenty-First Century* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993).

[140] Established in 1997, this initiative intended to find best practices for racial reconciliation. It was nonetheless criticized for ignoring non-Black racial minorities and was widely attacked as an ineffective discussion forum that lacked significant powers and evidenced the shallowness of neoliberal race management programmes. See Franklin, *Mirror to America*, 342–64.

[141] For example, the critic of the Black intellectual class Harold Cruse accused Franklin of achieving his place in the pantheon of American historiography because he was "an American historian who just happened to be Black." Harold Cruse, "The New Negro History of John Hope Franklin: Promise and Progress," in *The Essential Harold Cruse: A Reader*, ed. William Jelani Cobb (New York: St Martin's Griffin, 2002), 199–210, 209.

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yet powerful platform for promoting that education. Indeed, *Freedom to the Free* suggests that behind Franklin's moderate public image lay a more critical scholar who obscured his full dissident Americanism to strategically exploit the entrapping niches available to mid-twentieth-century Black public figures wishing to reach mass audiences.[142]

Today, it is perhaps fitting that Franklin's instruction to tell the "unvarnished truth" are the first words visitors encounter entering the National Museum of African American History and Culture's History Galleries. Ultimately, *Freedom to the Free* provides an exceptionally detailed archive of government actors' attempts to "varnish" Black history to project a misleadingly inclusive image of America. By scrutinizing how racial liberal narratives tended to simultaneously ignore the continued force of white supremacy and banalize popular understandings of Black history, *Freedom to the Free* historicizes and thus problematizes those "master narratives" of the civil rights movement which continue to contour public understandings of this period. It reminds us that such narratives are historically constructed, and must be challenged as such. Varnishing Black history underwrote liberalism's promises, silenced its critics, and celebrated – however prematurely – its purported victories. If we are to supersede this strategically blind liberalism, which prevents both our historical and political reckoning with white supremacy's continued impacts, *Freedom to the Free* powerfully reminds us of the value of the dissident and unvarnished history pursued by John Hope Franklin within that process.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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[142] Many of Franklin's friends and colleagues later noted his quiet anger and internal radicalism. This viewpoint is perhaps most eloquently expressed in Robin D. G. Kelley, "A Historian in the World," *Journal of African American History*, 94, 3 (2009), 362–69.

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