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# John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom* (1947), Mid-Twentieth-Century Racial Liberalism, and the Dilemmas of African American History in Print

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*This article demonstrates how postwar racial liberalism simultaneously catalyzed and constrained mid-twentieth-century black intellectual labor by examining the production, reception, and subsequent reinvention of John Hope Franklin's seminal 1947 black history survey, *From Slavery to Freedom*. Seeking to exploit growing postwar interest in histories of race, Franklin's publishers, Knopf, continuously promoted Franklin as an authentic yet non-threatening black spokesperson who could explain the latest realities of blackness to concerned white liberals. While this double-edged praise accelerated Franklin's rise to academic prominence, he increasingly smuggled a quiet radicalism within his text in the eight editions published during his lifetime, affirming American ideals while simultaneously illuminating their hypocrisies. Examining *From Slavery to Freedom's* afterlives thus offers a panoramic narrative of black history's evolution that spans the twentieth century, revealing the uneasy alliances and improvisations through which black scholars popularized black history while navigating the relentlessly racialized tensions of a white-dominated academy and nation.*

Since its publication in 1947, John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom* has been widely recognized as one of the most influential works of African American history published during the twentieth century. First written in the aftermath of World War II amid the outbreak of the Cold War, Franklin's work remains both a leading example of mid-twentieth-century black historiography and an ever-evolving document, having subsequently been updated into a total of ten editions. By 2005, it had been translated into six languages and had sold over 3.5 million copies.<sup>1</sup> Franklin commenced his narrative in Africa and also surveyed the histories of African-descended peoples in Canada, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Yet his history ended with the United States, centering it as *the* primary site of future black possibility. Across thirty chapters—commencing with ancient Egypt and concluding after World War II—*From*

<sup>1</sup> Bob Thompson, "A Personal Journey into America's Past," *Washington Post*, 3 Nov. 2005, C01.

*Slavery to Freedom* evidenced how “Negro Americans” shaped and were shaped by American history’s broader forces. In so doing, Franklin argued, they came to uniquely understand the hypocrisies of America’s professed egalitarian ideals, leveraging this knowledge to force their nation to keep faith with itself. Even in the begrudging recollection of Franklin’s critic Harold Cruse, “here, for the first time in our lives, was offered a textbook, massive in scope, authoritative, very nearly a compendium of Black History in the Western Hemisphere ... here was presented the grand panorama of Black History spread out in all its dramatic evolution.”<sup>2</sup>

This article contends, however, that the very direction of that “dramatic evolution”—towards the United States and freedom—starkly illustrates certain characteristics within Franklin’s text that proved commercially exploitable within a postwar intellectual and publishing environment inextricably shaped by racial liberalism. This article analyzes the production, reception, and reinvention of Franklin’s text. In so doing, it highlights how he—like many other black public figures of this era—strategized to disseminate his subtly dissident scholarship by working with such liberal cultural gatekeepers, which both provided and policed access to wider interracial audiences. Franklin’s publishers Knopf marketed *From Slavery to Freedom* as a work that would explain black history to a growing liberal and primarily white audience that perceived racism to be the major challenge facing postwar America. For these racial liberal readers, studying race and racial histories provided unparalleled insights into America’s historical morality and future global role. A vital term in a growing literature on mid-twentieth-century American intellectual history, “racial liberalism” was neither a clearly nor contemporaneously defined ideology.<sup>3</sup> This article understands racial liberalism not as a singular body of thought, but as a bundle of tendencies normalized by the institutional power structures and intellectual and commercial formations of early Cold War America. As an analytical heuristic, then, racial liberalism foregrounds power and process, encouraging the study of ideas in action and as affected by intertwined cultural, commercial, intellectual, political, and racial dynamics. Altogether, racial liberal tenets tended to dematerialize and psychologize racial critique, principally focusing on individual prejudice, bigotry, and the primarily southern laws that translated such prejudice into formal desegregation and disenfranchisement. In this sense, racial liberal tendencies expanded the scope of both Franklin’s remit and his readership, even as they constrained the terms of engagement for his analysis of race.

This is not to bracket Franklin—who continually rejected suggestions that his histories followed any one ideology—as an archetypal racial liberal. It is, however, to underline the profound interplay between the commercial demands of racial liberal cultural gatekeepers and certain intellectual tendencies of Franklin’s generation of postwar black historiography, however fraught with creative and racial tensions these

<sup>2</sup>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, 2002), 199–210, at 200.

<sup>3</sup>Inter alia see Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis, 2011); Charles Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism* (Oxford, 2017); and Joseph Darda, *The Strange Career of Racial Liberalism* (Stanford, 2022). On this growing literature see Daniel Wickberg, “Modernisms Endless: Ironies of the American Mid-century,” *Modern Intellectual History* 10/1 (2013), 207–19.

uneasy alliances were. It is also to center how black intellectuals worked *through* racial liberal institutions and structures. This article thus returns to Walter Jackson and Daniel Geary's more concentrated investigations of racial liberalism within particular intellectual projects, applying their analysis of the institutionalized power dynamics surrounding postwar nongovernmental organizations and the federal government to the study of postwar publishing.<sup>4</sup> As opposed to studies of racial liberalism that predominantly focus on how white moderation foreclosed alternative social possibilities, this article instead centers black adaptation and negotiation, a stance that better captures both the subtle anger and the pedagogical malleability of Franklin's ever-evolving text, particularly during its second life after the 1960s.

Throughout his career, Franklin—who defined himself as a historian of the South—aimed to write histories that bridged interracial audiences, setting black history amid the “general framework of American history” where it “affected and was affected by almost everything that was going on.”<sup>5</sup> In so doing, Franklin both followed and distinguished himself from the black historians of the previous interwar generation, praising W. E. B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson while simultaneously critiquing what he alleged were Du Bois's doctrinal Marxism and Woodson's exaggerated praise of black achievement.<sup>6</sup> Franklin's early scholarship, profoundly influenced by his wartime experiences of segregation, consequently aimed not to celebrate notable black achievers but to objectively demonstrate the historical significance of the “strivings of the nameless millions.”<sup>7</sup> Franklin sought to free African Americans from their liminal status *between* slavery and freedom created in the aftermath of Reconstruction. Through both his scholarship and his activism during the civil rights movement—most notably aiding the NAACP's historical research for *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)—Franklin instead demanded for African Americans first-class citizenship. Franklin's histories were consequently particularly alive to paradox and hypocrisy, looking to leverage African Americans' insights as chastened believers in America's democratic ideals in order to challenge their nation's practical failings and construct a more genuine liberal democratic politics across the globe. Franklin's work therefore principally demanded legal equality within the political formation of the United States, rarely challenging American Cold War capitalist primacy and frequently underplaying transnational radicalism, intraracial class divides, gendered experiences, and African connections and influences.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938–1987* (Chapel Hill, 1990); Daniel Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia, 2015).

<sup>5</sup>John Hope Franklin to Roger Shugg, 4 May 1946, “FSTF Correspondence, 1943–1947,” Box W06, John Hope Franklin Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University (henceforth JHFP).

<sup>6</sup>On this generation see Jacqueline Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History* (Baton Rouge, 1993); Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Urbana, 2007); Jeffrey Aaron Snyder, *Making Black History: The Color Line, Culture, and Race in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens, GA, 2017); and Jarvis R. Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (Cambridge, MA, 2021).

<sup>7</sup>John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn (New York, 1947), viii.

<sup>8</sup>For recent analysis of Franklin's career and scholarship see Thomas Cryer, “A False Picture of Negro Progress: John Hope Franklin, Racial Liberalism, and the Political (Mis)uses of Black History during the

This article's first section explores the publication and immediate reception of *From Slavery to Freedom*, while its second section explores *From Slavery to Freedom*'s second life and period of true commercial success fueled by the late 1960s "black revolution on campus."<sup>9</sup> Finally, its third section scrutinizes how Franklin revised his text's treatment of gender and Africa from the second edition of 1956 onwards, altering but not revolutionizing his overarching conceptual framework. In examining the intellectual, cultural, and commercial histories of racial liberalism as they intersected within Franklin's text, these sections make two overarching arguments.

First, *From Slavery to Freedom* highlights the critical role of historical scholarship in articulating and contesting racial liberal understandings of race, particularly the tendency to bracket race as primarily a matter of outdated attitudes rather than societal structures and inequalities. Leah Gordon has described this tendency to attribute racism to individual prejudice as "racial individualism."<sup>10</sup> Other scholars have emphasized how works including Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (1944) understood racial discrimination as an anachronistic contradiction to liberal modernity, suggesting, in Nikhil Pal Singh's terms, that "modern life inevitably yielded a steady transition from the evils of racial differentiation into holistic national sameness."<sup>11</sup> This logic obscured race's contribution to the disparities of politico-economic modernity and their global expansion through imperialism, including America's imperial projects. Existing scholarship, however, has predominantly ignored how racial liberal tendencies affected history itself, severing the discipline from our understanding of broader dynamics within publishing, academia, and the social sciences. This article consequently demonstrates historical writing's critical role in mediating and articulating racial knowledge in mid-twentieth-century America. In turn, it utilizes racial liberalism as an analytical device that—compared to the now much-critiqued paradigm of a period of "consensus history"—more precisely highlights the uneasy alliances, racialized assumptions, and institutionalized power relations key to postwar American historical practice. Used judiciously, racial liberalism helps to characterize the variety of revisionism—methodologically expansive yet averse to overt ideologies, racially integrative yet not politically agitative, cosmopolitan yet America-centric, transnational yet not antinational—through which liberal historians tended to reformulate American history.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, reckoning with this historiography's complex alliances and legacies encourages a more searching reflection on our contemporary discipline and its remarkably endurable white-supremacist norms.

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1963 Emancipation Centennial," *Journal of American Studies* (forthcoming), published online 2024, at doi:[10.1017/S0021875824000379](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875824000379); and Nick Witham, *Popularizing the Past: Historians, Publishers, and Readers in Postwar America* (Chicago, 2023), 77–103.

<sup>9</sup>See Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley, 2012).

<sup>10</sup>Leah N. Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America* (Chicago, 2015), 2–3.

<sup>11</sup>Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 39.

<sup>12</sup>"Consensus history" characterizes the postwar generation of American historiography as one that emphasized the unity of American values while downplaying societal and particularly class-based conflict. For a vital critique of this term see Ellen Fitzpatrick, *History's Memory: Writing America's Past, 1880–1980* (Cambridge, MA, 2002).

Second, examining *From Slavery to Freedom's* reception and reinvention elucidates how black public figures, including Franklin, negotiated with and—increasingly by the 1960s—struggled against consistent societal demands for black behavioral propriety and political moderacy. Racial liberal thinking suggested that America's principal racial division was white–black, rendering black authors valued informants on the lives of America's chief racial other.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, as scientific authorities increasingly challenged biological theorizations of race, the ultimate goal of racial liberal discourse—and many black texts, according to white publishers, including Knopf—became educating, equalizing, and incorporating African Americans into a soon-to-be-realized nonracial, liberal sense of American nationhood. Franklin's reviewers thus super-scrutinized his work for loyalty to American values and the sober objectivity considered critical to combating white prejudice through interracial understanding, antiprejudice education, and legal desegregation.<sup>14</sup> Knopf and white liberal funders, reviewers, and historians thus celebrated Franklin's scholarship as precisely the authentic yet nonchauvinistic, stirring yet nonemotive, black history that could enlighten the public toward these ends. *From Slavery to Freedom's* marketing and reception celebrated Franklin's work as an intellectual instrument for this racial liberalism, in ways that its author increasingly strained against.

As Nick Witham discerns, Knopf thus sold Franklin's work as a text that aptly met broader postwar demands for popular, patriotic, and universalist histories.<sup>15</sup> Witham usefully models the intertwined commercial, cultural, and intellectual analysis of postwar historiography pursued by this article. Nevertheless, more precisely attributing these demands to racial liberalism suggests how critical terms within Witham's analysis—the popular and the public—were not neutral categories but contested and relentlessly racialized constructions that equated white middlebrow liberals with the “normal” reading public. Focusing on racial liberalism therefore allows Franklin's work to speak to different and highly contemporary questions concerning the broader commercial and representative demands placed on black public figures and black intellectual labor more generally.

This analysis underscores prevalent tendencies throughout Franklin's career to read his work indexically and instrumentally: that is, to read it as evidence of black advancement or to emphasize disproportionately its ability to improve race relations. Knopf celebrated Franklin's text as an elegant appeal for justice which nonetheless avoided prior black historians' supposed “special pleading.” Establishing tropes that followed Franklin throughout his career, many reviewers of *From Slavery to Freedom* backhandedly welcomed Franklin as an exemplar of a new generation of postwar “raceless” black authors, celebrating a work “so balanced, so free of racial chauvinism, that it might be the product of a white scholar.”<sup>16</sup> These readings, however, equally critiqued the interwar black histories of Woodson and Du Bois and policed more radical postwar

<sup>13</sup>Matthew Pratt Guterl, *The Color of Race in America, 1900–1940* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), esp. 91–136.

<sup>14</sup>Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice*, 2–3.

<sup>15</sup>Witham, *Popularizing the Past*, esp. 77–103.

<sup>16</sup>Philip Butcher, “Review of *From Slavery to Freedom*,” *Opportunity*, Summer 1948, page unknown.

black historiography, determining it to be less legitimate, useful, and commercially “popular” and thus constraining its accessibility to “public” (i.e. predominantly white, middlebrow, and liberal) audiences.

Studying this reception highlights how Franklin’s career was both catalyzed and contained by postwar demands for what Daniel Matlin calls “indigenous interpreters,” black spokespeople sought by cultural gatekeepers seeking to inform concerned white audiences about racial matters.<sup>17</sup> Yet, simultaneously, black authors including Franklin sought to challenge these relentlessly racialized understandings of their powers of voice and authorship. Those thinkers whom Ross Posnock calls “anti-race race men and women” struggled to write and self-identify *beyond* race, believing that knowledge of black life and history could not be separated from that of America and the world.<sup>18</sup> *From Slavery to Freedom*, written during a period that Korey Garibaldi describes as one of notable interracial literary collaborations, sits squarely within this movement.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, by the late 1960s the demand for black-authored texts discussing “black topics” increased exponentially, Kenneth Warren arguing that a prospective universality that sought to create a more racially expansive nationhood and public sphere was increasingly exchanged for a retrospective particularity that celebrated black history and heritage in order to empower readers in the present.<sup>20</sup>

Examining *From Slavery to Freedom*’s invention and reinvention both indexes and complicates this transition. In so doing, this article builds on a growing scholarship on black intellectual history and print culture and, more particularly, its concern with fluid texts and unstable documents.<sup>21</sup> When examining *From Slavery to Freedom*’s publication, marketing, reception, and reproduction, it utilizes the interdisciplinary combination of literature, print culture, and reception studies fundamental to this scholarship.<sup>22</sup> As Claire Parfait has further underlined, studies of black historiography have—with notable exceptions—rarely incorporated book history methodologies, while book historians have predominantly favored analyzing fiction.<sup>23</sup> It is clear, therefore, that we need studies of black histories in transition, censored and de-censored, made and unmade, invented and reinvented. Understanding these intertwined histories helps to clarify how a still predominantly white literary world displaces, contains, and commercializes authorial blackness today. To analyze these intersections, this article analyzes *From Slavery to Freedom*’s production and reproduction through the “sociology of texts,” an approach prioritizing the “mutations and mediations that

<sup>17</sup>Daniel Matlin, *On the Corner: African American Intellectuals and the Urban Crisis* (Cambridge, MA, 2013).

<sup>18</sup>Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Intellectuals and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), ii.

<sup>19</sup>Korey Garibaldi, *Impermanent Blackness: The Making and Unmaking of Interracial Literary Culture in Modern America* (Princeton, 2023), esp. 141–73.

<sup>20</sup>Kenneth Warren, *What Was African American Literature?* (Cambridge, MA, 2011).

<sup>21</sup>On the growth of black intellectual history see Brandon R. Byrd “The Rise of African American Intellectual History,” *Modern Intellectual History* 18/3 (2021), 833–64.

<sup>22</sup>Joycelyn Moody and Howard Ramsby II, “Guest Editors’ Introduction: African American Print Cultures,” *Melus* 40/3 (2015), 1–11, at 7.

<sup>23</sup>Claire Parfait, “Rewriting History: The Publication of W. E. B. Du Bois’s ‘Black Reconstruction in America’ (1935)” *Book History* 12 (2009), 266–94, at 266.

direct us to circumstances outside the strict realm of the literary.”<sup>24</sup> In its gradually revised treatment of gender and Africa, *From Slavery to Freedom*’s evolution thereby highlights black history’s present-oriented ethos, offering a unique lens onto its practitioners’ shifting concerns and priorities across a half-century of rapidly expanding scholarship.

### A historian “without a chip on his shoulder”: Knopf and the boutiquing of blackness, c.1945–1947

Alfred A. Knopf Inc.’s understandings of postwar publishing and readership owed greatly to racial liberalism. Founded in 1915, Knopf represented one of the new publishing houses that flourished after World War I, publishing foreign authors including Gogol and Turgenev and several prominent voices of the Harlem Renaissance. It was no stranger to controversy, having published Carl Van Vechten’s provocative novel *Nigger Heaven* (1926) and the civil rights leader Walter White’s contentious account of 1906’s Atlanta race riots, *The Fire in the Flint* (1924). Knopf’s rise was closely tied to that of the middlebrow. As Amy Clements has explained, Knopf mastered utilizing modern promotional tactics to promote an “aura of Old World anti-commercialism” to a broad middle-class audience.<sup>25</sup> This audience was profoundly interested in race. By World War II, Knopf had published several wide-ranging histories of race and slavery in the Americas by the anthropologist Melville Herskovits, the historian of Mexico Frank Tannenbaum, and the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre. Knopf also published several works on southern history, ranging from Francis Butler Simkins’s quasi-revisionist history *The South: Old and New* (1948) to William Alexander Percy’s elegy for a lost South, *Lanterns on the Levee* (1941). Franklin’s work therefore perfectly complemented an extensive Knopf-published literature evidencing both the Americas’ intertwined racial histories and how race continued to scar American life.

*From Slavery to Freedom*, originally entitled “A History of the Negro,” was initially planned to be written by Charles Harris Wesley, a historian and the president of the historically black Wilberforce University. Carter G. Woodson recommended Wesley after the Knopf editor Roger Shugg asked him for “competent Negro scholars.” Wesley’s manuscript, however, disappointed and appeared “old-fashioned.”<sup>26</sup> While Knopf’s archives do not contain Wesley’s manuscript, there existed stark institutional and professional differences between the HBCU president and Franklin’s postwar generation of scholars, who increasingly left black educational and associational settings to break into white institutions. The diaries of Franklin’s confidant and future colleague Rayford Logan remarkably allege how, after one American Historical Association conference some ten years later, Wesley accused Franklin of “playing up to white people” before

<sup>24</sup>David D. Hall, “Backwards to the Future: The Cultural Turn and the Wisdom of Intellectual History,” *Modern Intellectual History* 9/1 (2012), 171–84, at 172.

<sup>25</sup>Amy Root Clements, *The Art of Prestige: The Formative Years at Knopf, 1915–1929* (Amherst, 2014), 5.

<sup>26</sup>August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915–1980* (Urbana, 1986), 117.

endorsing the historian William Brewer's suggestion that Franklin represented a "white man's n\*\*\*\*\*."<sup>27</sup>

Shugg approached Franklin following the recommendation of Arthur Schlesinger Sr, a friend of Alfred Knopf's and a key unofficial mentor during Franklin's Harvard doctorate. Intending to research white militancy in the antebellum South, Franklin initially rejected Shugg's invitation to coauthor Wesley's book. Undeterred, Shugg visited Franklin in person in North Carolina and offered a \$500 advance. Franklin later recalled, "I was just swept off my feet."<sup>28</sup> By February 1946, Franklin had agreed to delay his research on what was to become *The Militant South* (1956), agreeing with Shugg that Knopf's project was more urgent. Indeed, Franklin's acute awareness of the postwar commercial demand for surveys of black history is underlined by his refusal to advertise in Knopf's 1946 spring catalogue for fear of encouraging another publisher to commission a similar book.<sup>29</sup> These commercial and externally driven factors behind Franklin's turn from white southern history to black history bear emphasizing. *From Slavery to Freedom* was to define Franklin's career, bracketing him—against his constant objections—as a scholar primarily specializing in black history. Writing after *From Slavery to Freedom*'s publication to the leading southern historian C. Vann Woodward, Franklin noted, "I am glad the job is behind me. It was extremely difficult, both in magnitude and in nature ... I wrote that book not so much because I wanted to as because I felt that it should be written. I now take great pleasure in returning to my first love—Southern intellectual history."<sup>30</sup>

For a thirty-one-year-old who initially felt uneasy writing about history outside the United States, the writing process was one of great industry and improvisation. Franklin later recalled, "there was no model ... I was just stumbling around, just reading the shelves, and I found some other things."<sup>31</sup> Franklin's project was primarily one of conceptualization and organization rather than original primary-source research. Frequently working sixteen-hour days during a period at the Library of Congress funded by a loan from his wife Aurelia, Franklin wrote his 240,000-word tome in seven months.<sup>32</sup> On receiving Franklin's draft, Shugg immediately sought to maximize its commercial potential, recommending that Franklin provide further "dramatic quality" by "elaborating with colorful detail illustrative episodes wherever possible." Evidently, Shugg sought an interracial, mass-market audience, praising the manuscript's "civic value" and appeal "to the interested general public as well as to the colleges."<sup>33</sup> Shugg thus praised Franklin's "exceptionally lucid" prose and, while celebrating how the manuscript was "free of all racial chauvinism," declared that it would be "an authentic and interesting work for many years to come."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Rayford Logan diary entry, 31 Dec. 1957 (asterisks mine), Box 6, Rayford Whittingham Logan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

<sup>28</sup>Manning Marable, "A Conversation with John Hope Franklin," *Souls* 1/4 (1999), 73–88, at 81.

<sup>29</sup>Franklin to Shugg, 20 April 1946, "FSTF Correspondence 1943–1947," W06, JHFP.

<sup>30</sup>Franklin to Woodward, 8 Jan. 1948, Folder 222, Box 19, C. Vann Woodward Papers (MS 1436), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

<sup>31</sup>Marable, "A Conversation with John Hope Franklin," 81.

<sup>32</sup>Jack Star, "Above All, a Scholar," *Change* 9/2 (1977), 27–33, at 31.

<sup>33</sup>Shugg to Franklin, 7 June 1946, "FSTF Correspondence 1943–1947," W06, JHFP.

<sup>34</sup>Shugg to Franklin, 3 May 1946, "FSTF Correspondence 1943–1947," W06, JHFP.



This coded celebration of refined authenticity over racial chauvinism also profoundly shaped the marketing of *From Slavery to Freedom*. Knopf's strategy predominantly followed the pattern Claire Parfait observes of Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* (1935), a "double strategy, which simultaneously emphasized the originality of the work and reassured potential buyers that the work was one of serious scholarship."<sup>35</sup> Selling Franklin as a trustworthy indigenous interpreter to a "universal," implicitly white public, Knopf studiously gathered quotes of appraisal and certification from white scholars. Echoing the use of white voices to introduce slave narratives and black literary works, including Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), promotional materials quoted several white historians to confirm Franklin's credentials as a trained and non-race-conscious Harvard Ph.D.<sup>36</sup> Most strikingly, Knopf placed on the dust jacket a quotation from Schlesinger suggesting that Franklin "writes without a chip on his shoulder." Reading Franklin's text would "give Negroes a new pride in their race and will cause white people to reassess the role of the Negro in American history." Also summoning this biracial readership, Knopf's promotional blurb declared, "Today the Negro is as much an 'American' as any other people who have come to our shores," emphasizing that Franklin's work would "prove equally instructive and enjoyable for any American to read."<sup>37</sup>

Knopf thus strategically deployed Franklin's blackness to evidence its diversity and contribution to the deracialization of the public sphere sought by mid-twentieth-century liberals. In one advertisement the Jefferson biographer Dumas Malone celebrated how Knopf's authors ranged from "a poetic conservative like William A. Percy to a scholarly Negro like John Hope Franklin."<sup>38</sup> The continuity of such arguments is particularly striking. Well into the 1960s, Knopf audaciously advertised "the only thorough and authentic history of Negro Americans by an outstanding Negro scholar."<sup>39</sup> Press flyers for the African American market also appealed to integrationist sentiments, emphasizing that "Dr Franklin has not written a Jim Crow book."<sup>40</sup> Reiterating critical tenets of racial liberalism, Knopf's marketing consistently stressed Franklin's loyalty to American values, the second edition's blurb noting how Franklin wrote "without racial chauvinism, but with deep attachment to the cause of freedom and equality."<sup>41</sup> Most illustratively, the first edition's spine showed chains partially broken with an interconnecting vine, imagery recalling racial liberal teleologies which relegated slavery—and most structural inequities—to the past, summoning Americans to eliminate their remaining effects through individual action.

<sup>35</sup> Parfait, "Rewriting History," 276.

<sup>36</sup> See Keneth Kinnamon, "How *Native Son* Was Born," in Henry Louis Gates Jr and K. A. Appiah, eds., *Richard Wright: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (New York, 1993), 110–31, at 123.

<sup>37</sup> Cover of Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn.

<sup>38</sup> Advertisement, *The Times Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 25 Jan. 1948, 67.

<sup>39</sup> "Back Matter," *Journal of Southern History* 35/1 (1969), 142.

<sup>40</sup> "A Book for Negro History Week," 18 Feb. 1949, "FSTF Correspondence, 1948–1960," W06, JHFP.

<sup>41</sup> Lori Ween, "This Is Your Book: Marketing America to Itself," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 118/1 (2003), 90–102; cover of John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 2nd edn (New York, 1964).

Undoubtedly, Knopf's claims dovetailed with Franklin's long-standing emphasis on the centrality of African Americans within American history. As early as 1942, Franklin praised the insistence of recent historians that "as [minority] groups rapidly become Americanized they have made their contributions to the whole sequence of human movement in American life."<sup>42</sup> Franklin's author form likewise declared that *From Slavery to Freedom* would interest an interracial audience because black history provided lessons for "the continuing struggle of mankind for justice and equality." He would therefore concentrate on the "acculturative processes which have promoted the integration of the Negro in American Life."<sup>43</sup> These remarks were edited into *From Slavery to Freedom's* preface, where Franklin promised to detail how "the Negro has sought to cast his lot with an evolving American civilization." African Americans, Franklin argued, were as American as any other Americans, justifying their demands for first-class citizenship.<sup>44</sup>

Like Knopf, then, Franklin situated African Americans amid the "general framework of American history" to guard against "distortion and chauvinism." Their history "affected and was affected by almost everything that was going on."<sup>45</sup> Also like Knopf, Franklin pledged to avoid the "subjective and unscientific treatment of the subject" that he associated with more celebratory histories, including Carter G. Woodson's *The Negro in Our History* (1922), which Franklin later declared an "unalloyed and subjective praise of black achievement."<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, for all these intellectual affinities, even the very title *From Slavery to Freedom* suggests how Shugg simultaneously welcomed Franklin's emphasis on American ideals but both identified such ideals as only truly attainable within the American polity and rejected any suggestion that African Americans had a unique historical role in actualizing such ideals. Shugg refused Franklin's title proposal, "Freedom's People," believing that this would harm sales in the South. Franklin then suggested "Toward Freedom" as this indicated "both the element of sequential movement and the fact that complete freedom is still ahead."<sup>47</sup> Knopf finally proposed "From Slavery to Freedom." Although Franklin always maintained that his title was not intended as prophecy, together with the spine's breaking-chains motif it still implied an overall teleology, typical of racial liberalism, that slighted the African past and instead focused as *the* primary narrative of black history on an ever-increasing incorporation into an ever more deracialized liberal American polity.

Reviews of Franklin's work constantly emphasized his race, expressing surprise that Franklin, being black, demonstrated powers of detachment and objectivity implicitly considered rare for non-white scholars. These readings evidence how reviewers

<sup>42</sup> John Hope Franklin, "Review of Frank J. Klingberg, *An Appraisal of the Negro in Colonial South Carolina*," *North Carolina Historical Review* 19/4 (1942), 405–7, at 406.

<sup>43</sup> Author form attached to Franklin to Shugg, 12 June 1946, "FSTF Correspondence 1943–1947," W06, JHFP.

<sup>44</sup> Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn, viii.

<sup>45</sup> Franklin to Shugg, 4 May 1946, "FSTF Correspondence 1943–1947," W06, JHFP.

<sup>46</sup> Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn, vii–viii; Brian Purnell, "Interview with Dr John Hope Franklin," *Journal of African American History* 94/3 (2009), 407–21, at 411.

<sup>47</sup> Franklin to Shugg, 6 Feb. 1947, "FSTF Correspondence 1943–1947," W06, JHFP.

shared mid-twentieth-century liberalism's pursuit of both the "open mind" and the "ideal observer" freed from all worldly—and, implicitly, corporeal or racial—bias.<sup>48</sup> Reading indexically, several reviewers also argued that Franklin's objectivity exemplified black progress—in both historiography *and* society—toward integration. These judgments nonetheless reaffirmed racial liberalism's emphasis on educating normally "emotional" black citizens into the objective, trained, and "non-race-conscious" citizens and historians who (unlike the impassioned black historians of a past generation) could foster interracial tolerance and understanding. In a manner neglected by Peter Novick's seminal study of objectivity within the historical profession, both functions therefore policed the boundaries of black historical discourse considered acceptable to public audiences.<sup>49</sup> Anticipating dynamics prevalent throughout Franklin's career, they elevated Franklin into a model for desirable black historical practice that censured those who instead emphasized their blackness and thus wrote *with* Schlesinger's "chip on their shoulder."<sup>50</sup> This ideal worked against thinkers including George G. M. James or Joel Augustus Rogers who, particularly before the rise of black studies, rejected racial liberal justifications for American primacy and, while writing without Ph.D.s or academic positions, explicitly challenged a white-supremacist academy by vindicating the achievements of African civilizations and African-descended peoples.<sup>51</sup> It also particularly harmed black women historians, including Helen G. Edmonds, who operated strategically within the academy—or worked outside it—because of widespread accusations that their gender made them less objective.<sup>52</sup>

Reflecting the instrumentalist demands that racial liberalism placed on histories of race, several reviewers sought balanced texts capable of "disproving" outdated and uneducated prejudice. The *Chattanooga Daily Times* thus praised Franklin's contribution to a "field where the demagogue and the ignoramus have for too long held sway," while the *Christian Register* recommended this "compulsory reading for champions of white supremacy, if indeed they are able to read with comprehension its superb English prose."<sup>53</sup> White liberals frequently praised Franklin's emotional stability in a particularly backhanded manner. The *Christian Science Monitor* emphasized Franklin's restraint—"extraordinary" amid "this period of postwar reaction and reactionism"—while the Hartford, Connecticut *Times* suggested that *From Slavery to Freedom* "bespeaks the patience and temperance of the race, and its capacity for

<sup>48</sup>On the "open mind" and the "ideal observer" see, respectively, Jamie Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (Chicago, 2014); and Bruce Kuklick, "The Mind of the Historian," *History and Theory* 8/3 (1969), 313–31.

<sup>49</sup>Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988).

<sup>50</sup>This racialization of objectivity contains interesting parallels to similar dynamics in journalism analyzed in Gwyneth Mellinger, *Racializing Objectivity: How the White Southern Press Used Journalism Standards to Defend Jim Crow* (Amherst, 2024).

<sup>51</sup>Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge, 1998), esp. 92–5.

<sup>52</sup>Julie Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880–1945* (Chapel Hill, 2003), esp. 118–42.

<sup>53</sup>Thomas Gowan, "Negro's Achievement," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, 11 Jan. 1948, 17; James Marshall, "Review of *From Slavery to Freedom*," *Christian Register*, Nov. 1947, 448.

pain.”<sup>54</sup> Franklin’s work was incessantly mined for political lessons. For liberal readers, Franklin’s objectivity evidenced his claim that African Americans were steadily becoming full-fledged American citizens. The *Chicago World* praised “a forthright chronicle of the Negro’s travel through the benighted thicket of human slavery to the penetrating light of freedom!”<sup>55</sup> Religious publications were particularly likely to highlight how Franklin’s text could foster interracial understanding. Foregrounding benevolent white allyship, the *Christian Science Monitor* suggested that readers followed “an ascent from the abyss,” arguing that “the turmoil and the tenseness of today reflect not just reaction, but also greater awareness by the Negro of his capacities and his rights, and an awakened conscience, and a new perspective on the part of the American white man.”<sup>56</sup>

In so doing, many reviewers read indexically, comparing Franklin favorably to past black historians. The white southern historian Francis Butler Simkins claimed that *From Slavery to Freedom* achieved a “restrained bias satisfying to the intelligent Negro.” Franklin would not aid “Negro demagogues” precisely because he avoided Du Bois and Woodson’s “lyrical extravagances ... and boastful vindictiveness.”<sup>57</sup> Several reviewers argued that Franklin’s Harvard training exemplified this progress, ignoring the segregation and consistent intellectual isolation that Franklin experienced during his doctorate. Many eminent black reviewers also situated Franklin’s book as the latest work of synthesis demonstrating black historiography’s increasing sophistication. The philosopher Alain Locke praised a “desirable restraint” that differentiated Franklin from “unavoidable elements of counter-polemic and occasional alloys of racial chauvinism.” Like many white reviewers, Locke thereby suggested that Franklin epitomized how black historiography had evolved from “catering to minority pride and self-respect to a broader perspective and to more objective and balanced judgement.” Critically, Locke also highlighted how Franklin’s work could enlighten all Americans’ understandings of political issues, as it placed African Americans at “the crux of the issues of human rights and freedom, of truly universal suffrage.” *From Slavery to Freedom* encouraged “liberalized social understanding” and thus had a future of “constructive public serviceableness.”<sup>58</sup>

Inevitably, Franklin attracted criticism from figures with political views to the left and right of racial liberalism. In the *American Historical Review*, William B. Hesseltine praised a “highly intelligent piece of overemphasis on the Negro’s role in American history” primarily addressed to “Negrophobes,” yet criticized Franklin for condemning slavery “almost entirely, on moral grounds.”<sup>59</sup> By contrast, the Marxist historian Herbert Aptheker claimed that Franklin ignored abolitionism’s “revolutionary essence”

<sup>54</sup> Edward Orr, “Review of *From Slavery to Freedom*,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 Sept. 1947, 18; “Review of *From Slavery to Freedom*,” *The Times* (Hartford, CT), 27 Sept. 1947, page unknown.

<sup>55</sup> William Henry Hugg, “Review of *From Slavery to Freedom*,” *Chicago World*, 8 May 1948, page unknown.

<sup>56</sup> Edward Orr, “Review of Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 Sept. 1947, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Francis Butler Simkins, “Review of Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 26/1 (1949), 103–5.

<sup>58</sup> Alain Locke, “Moral Pivot,” *Saturday Review*, 8 Nov. 1947, 16.

<sup>59</sup> William B. Hesseltine, “Review of *From Slavery to Freedom*,” *American Historical Review* 54/1 (1948), 155–6.

and overlooked “evidences of national aspirations among the Negro people, which abound in this history.”<sup>60</sup> Most critically, however, James Baldwin argued that Franklin had become “very nearly fatuous and persistently shallow” by aspiring for objectivity, collating a “desperate massing of proof that the Negro is as loyal as any other citizen.” Indeed, Franklin’s pledges to write as a historian unconfined by his race were “defeated by the very necessity to formulate these expressions on the basis of color.”<sup>61</sup> Symptomatic of historians’ larger inability to capture black history’s “immense, ambiguous, uncontrollable effect,” Baldwin concluded that “what is happening to Negroes in this country has been happening for a long time and it is something quite logical, inevitable, and deadly: they are becoming more American every day.”<sup>62</sup>

In sum, Franklin’s race was never ignored. Instead, race’s omnipresence suggests how, throughout his career, Franklin’s scholarship was promoted on racial grounds that simultaneously policed the forms of black historical expression acceptable for mass, predominantly white, public audiences. Assumptions endemic to postwar publishing and academia regarding black “emotionality” led many readers to understand Franklin as both a trustworthy advocate and exemplar of postwar racial integration. Knopf, celebrating Franklin’s authenticity, Harvard training, and loyalty to American values, marketed Franklin as the exemplar indigenous interpreter who evidenced the viability of black educability and incorporation into the American polity. Particularly by the 1960s, however, critics from outside the racial liberal tradition powerfully indicated the limitations of these racial liberal tendencies: in Aptheker’s case their inattention to revolutionary black formations that challenged or transcended the political bounds of the United States, and, in Baldwin’s case, their expectation that black authors pledge their personal and methodological Americanization before their scholarship was legitimized as history proper. By the late 1960s, as dramatic changes within publishing and academia intensified these criticisms, Franklin’s text thus attained a second life of simultaneous commercial success and intellectual critique, a dynamic that increasingly exposed the creative and racial tensions between Franklin and his publisher.

### **A second life: *From Slavery to Freedom* and the black revolution on campus, c.1956–2000**

Racial liberalism’s postwar rise and 1960s denouement are perhaps best illustrated in Knopf’s struggles to sell Franklin’s text to educational markets. Initially, Knopf promoted *From Slavery to Freedom* as a supplement to texts on “American history, race relations, and minority problems,” celebrating Locke’s praise of the work’s “public serviceableness,” Arthur Link’s statement that Franklin wrote “without any hint of special pleading,” and Joseph Hines’s contention that Franklin remained restrained while still offering “the warmth and earnestness that come only from living as a Negro in the United States.”<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Herbert Aptheker, “Review of *From Slavery to Freedom*,” *Fraternal Outlook*, undated, page unknown.

<sup>61</sup> James Baldwin, “Too Late, Too Late,” *Commentary*, Jan. 1949, 96–9, at 98.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 98–9.

<sup>63</sup> Untitled advertisement, undated, “FSTF Correspondence 1948–1960,” Box W06, JHFP.

These carefully compiled testimonies demonstrate Knopf's attempts to profit from a historic phase of higher-education expansion driven by the 1944 G.I. Bill, which provided living and tuition expenses for veterans undertaking education. College enrolment grew from 1,676,851 in 1945 to 2,338,226 by 1947, of whom 1,150,000 were veterans. African American postgraduate education expanded particularly rapidly, with approximately three thousand African Americans holding master's degrees and more than five hundred holding Ph.D.s by the mid-1940s.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, *From Slavery to Freedom's* initial struggle to break into higher-education markets evidenced black history's persistent marginality in white universities. By 19 October 1948, merely thirty-one institutions had adopted it, of which only three were in the North and twenty-four were southern black institutions.<sup>65</sup> Writing to several college presidents in February 1949, one Knopf employee observed, "we are frankly disappointed to find relatively little educational use being made of this book." Illustrating Knopf's striking ignorance of the marginalization of black history, they then noted, "we cannot help wondering, however, why a course in the history of the American Negro is not more widely given."<sup>66</sup> Remarkably, only 1,277 copies were sold in *From Slavery to Freedom's* first six months, and 2,144 in its second.<sup>67</sup>

By the 1960s, however, both higher education and publishing had changed dramatically. Beth Luey describes the basic trajectory of postwar American publishing as "new and more."<sup>68</sup> Fueled by the "paperback revolution," publishing gradually became a more diverse mass enterprise: whereas, in 1947, 95 million paperbacks were sold for \$14 million, by 1959, 286 million paperbacks were sold for \$67 million. By 1960, more was spent by consumers on paperbacks than on hardbacks, despite the former being one-fifth the cost.<sup>69</sup> Critically, for Franklin, the number of university students grew exponentially, by 49 percent in the 1950s and 120 percent in the 1960s.<sup>70</sup> Nationwide, postwar textbook sales had doubled by 1958 and nearly quadrupled again by 1967.<sup>71</sup>

Scholars including Jane Rhodes have defined the 1960s as a critical period in the decline of mainstream black publishing and the rise of more radical and provocative publications, most notably the *Black Panther* and *Muhammad Speaks*.<sup>72</sup> In Kenneth Warren's framing, a proliferating black literary sphere turned increasingly retrospective, seeking to embed black heritage in daily life as "a way of keeping the past alive

<sup>64</sup> James D. Anderson, "Race, Meritocracy, and the American Academy during the Immediate Post-World War II Era," *History of Education Quarterly* 33/2 (1993), 151–75, at 157.

<sup>65</sup> "FSTF Adoption Reports," W05, JHFP.

<sup>66</sup> Frederick Haupt III to college presidents, 18 Feb. 1949, "FSTF Correspondence 1948–1960," W06, JHFP.

<sup>67</sup> Calculated from "Royalty Statements, 1947–1975," W21, JHFP.

<sup>68</sup> Beth Luey, "Modernity and Print III: The United States 1890–1970," in Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose, eds., *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Oxford, 2009), 559–72, at 559.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 567.

<sup>70</sup> "Higher Education," in Thomas D. Snyder, ed., *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington, DC, 1993), 63–74, at 66.

<sup>71</sup> Jonathan Zimmerman, "Where the Customer Is King: The Textbook in American Culture," in David Paul Nord, Joan Shelley Rubin, and Michael Schudson, eds., *A History of the Book in America*, vol. 5 (Chapel Hill, 2015), 304–24, at 306.

<sup>72</sup> Jane Rhodes, "The Black Press and Radical Print Culture," in Nord, Rubin, and Schudson, *A History of the Book in America*, 5: 286–303, at 286.

in the present.”<sup>73</sup> The civil rights movement; decolonization; increasing black literacy; the black revolution on campus, which introduced courses in black studies to approximately five hundred institutions by 1971; and the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Act, which provided federal funding for school acquisitions of multiracial materials, all increased demands for black history texts.<sup>74</sup> Black histories were therefore increasingly judged by their ability to promote personal and racial empowerment. Franklin’s reviews in the 1960s starkly reveal how this calculus departed from racial liberal tropes, particularly any teleological faith in future societal equalization.

In 1969, for example, the *Journal of Negro History*’s editor William Brewer—he who, according to Logan, accused Franklin of being a “white man’s n\*\*\*\*r” (asterisks mine)—argued that *From Slavery to Freedom*’s title was “a misnomer as Negroes are nowhere free in 1969.” Brewer challenged Franklin’s “discernible leanings” toward “sweetness and light” and also criticized his methodological orthodoxy, accusing him of lacking Du Bois and Woodson’s “seminal ideas.”<sup>75</sup> The acerbic critic of black intellectuals Harold Cruse echoed Brewer’s criticism, lambasting the absence of “anything resembling the unorthodox in the philosophy of history.”<sup>76</sup> Critically, Cruse argued that Franklin’s increasing prominence—both within the “pantheon of American historiography” and as a landmark black hire at the University of Chicago in 1964—was predicated on, and reinforced as a disciplining norm, precisely that intellectual caution which ensured that Franklin was welcomed into predominantly white universities, journals, and historical associations as “an American historian who just happened to be Black.”<sup>77</sup> More radical black historians, Cruse suggested, remained marginalized, frequently pitched against precisely those integrationist moderates whom racial liberals favored and believed Franklin to exemplify.

These dynamics exacerbated already extant tensions between Franklin and Knopf, further encouraging Franklin’s long-standing efforts to promote *From Slavery to Freedom* to the black community independently of Knopf, such was their consistent failure to understand black consumers. Franklin criticized Knopf for failing to reach these markets as early as December 1947, arguing by March 1949 that a lack of advertisements in the black press ensured the black public was “still unaware that it exists.”<sup>78</sup> By the 1960s, Franklin had acquired an increasingly essential (yet, by his estimation, unsuccessful) role interpreting for Knopf how broader political currents could affect sales. Franklin later argued that Knopf never truly appreciated how the civil rights movement drove sales of his work.<sup>79</sup> Having urged Knopf to publish a paperback edition since 1961, Franklin claimed in a remarkably argumentative 1968 letter that Knopf,

<sup>73</sup> Warren, *What Was African American Literature?*, 100.

<sup>74</sup> See Zimmerman, “Where the Customer Is King,” 310; Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*. On the number of courses in black studies see Manning Marable, “Introduction: Black Studies and the Racial Mountain,” in Marable, ed., *Dispatches from the Ivory Tower* (New York, 2000) 1–31, at 10.

<sup>75</sup> W. M. Brewer, “Review of *From Slavery to Freedom*,” *Journal of Negro History* 54/4 (1969), 416–19, at 416–17.

<sup>76</sup> Cruse, “The New Negro History of John Hope Franklin,” 209.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 199, 207.

<sup>78</sup> Franklin to Frederick Haupt III, 22 March 1949, “FSTF Correspondence 1948–1960,” W06, JHFP.

<sup>79</sup> John Hope Franklin, “A Heady Experience: Writing *From Slavery to Freedom*,” W05, JHFP.

being a white organization, could not appreciate that “many advocates of ‘black history’ are actually seeking a work that is more polemical than my own ... someone is going to come forward with a cheap polemical book that will put us out of business.”<sup>80</sup> To force the matter, Franklin refused to update his work further. When a competitively priced paperback costing just \$2.95 (around one-quarter the cost of the hardback) was finally released in 1969, domestic sales from April to September 1969 reached 43,048 in paperback and 6,459 in hardcover, a staggering increase from 1,572 total sales for April to September 1968.<sup>81</sup> “No one was more shocked than my publisher ... they could hardly keep the book in print,” Franklin later recalled.<sup>82</sup>

Thus began *From Slavery to Freedom*’s second life, fueled by a distinctive readership that brought new expectations reflecting black publishing’s increasingly activist ethos. This rebirth exemplifies Kinohi Nishikawa’s understanding of the Black Arts Movement as a “revolution in print twice over,” expanding both *what* was sayable and *how* texts were produced, marketed, and disseminated.<sup>83</sup> While proponents of black studies criticized Franklin’s politics and methodologies, their campaigns to popularize courses in black history drove sales figures to new heights as *From Slavery to Freedom* ballasted many new courses, being adopted by 351 universities by September 1979.<sup>84</sup> As the anthropologist St Clair Drake opined in 1969, courses in black studies were “running as fast as they can to get Franklin” and other “black prestige figures.” The former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Robert C. Weaver warned, however, that “most aren’t reading Franklin and [sociologist E. Franklin] Frazier. They’re putting them on the list but they aren’t reading them.”<sup>85</sup> Indeed, it is vital to remember that Franklin never considered his work a textbook. Conversely, the more Franklin achieved popular success, the more he looked to extra-academic audiences. After McGraw-Hill purchased Knopf’s college division in 1988, however, Franklin encountered a “steady effort to make it into a textbook, which means a lot of things including dumbing it down and organizing it a certain way.” The seventh edition thus introduced color images and “box documents”; the eighth, “marginal notes” and supplementary learning resources. Lambasting this “textbook fad,” Franklin later remarked that McGraw-Hill “can’t think outside the box ... they can’t think about it except in terms of classroom sales.”<sup>86</sup>

Remaining commercially relevant also required constant updates, leading Franklin to publish eight editions during his lifetime. Despite Franklin’s consistent reluctance to write contemporary history, Knopf—who edited the work’s cover, blurb, and promotional material yet gave Franklin relative free rein over the text—celebrated how

<sup>80</sup> Franklin to William Frohlich, 27 May 1968, “Alfred A. Knopf Inc.,” C25, JHFP.

<sup>81</sup> Calculated from “Royalty Statements, 1947–1975,” W21, JHFP.

<sup>82</sup> John Hope Franklin, “Writing about Africans Americans in American History,” in Benjamin P. Bowser and Louis Kushnick, eds., *Against the Odds: Scholars Who Challenged Racism in the Twentieth Century* (Amherst, 2002), 63–84, at 76.

<sup>83</sup> Kinohi Nishikawa, “From the Ground Up: Readers and Publishers in the Making of a Literary Public,” in Robert J. Patterson, ed., *Black Cultural Production after Civil Rights* (Urbana, 2019), 202–24, at 203.

<sup>84</sup> Oct. 1978 to Sept. 1979, “FSTF Adoption Reports,” W05, JHFP.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Michael Lackey, ed., *The Haverford Discussions: A Black Integrationist Manifesto for Racial Justice* (Charlottesville, 2013), 33.

<sup>86</sup> Purnell, “Interview with Dr. John Hope Franklin,” 414.



each edition progressively addressed recent racial issues. The 1956 second edition covered the Montgomery bus boycott and the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling against school segregation, the dust jacket promising that “thoughtful citizens who seek to understand the current problems of desegregation in the schools, of fair employment practices, of the right to vote, will find invaluable insights.”<sup>87</sup> Franklin cautioned, however, that “tracing and properly evaluating the numerous developments that have taken place abounds in difficulties.”<sup>88</sup>

From 1966’s third edition onwards, Franklin’s attempts to historicize what he called “the Negro Revolution” powerfully indicate his increasing skepticism regarding white liberal naivety. Strikingly, Franklin entitled a subsection covering 1964’s Civil Rights Act and 1965’s Voting Rights Act “The illusion of equality.” Most drastically altered, however, was 1974’s fourth edition. With two added final sections, “Revolution at high tide” and “Balance sheet of the revolution,” Franklin increasingly recognized this revolution’s legal achievements while nonetheless regarding it as past its peak and having left widespread economic inequalities. Demanding further action on societal structures and disparities than desired by racial liberalism while still encouraging the orthodox methods it prescribed to achieve such changes, Franklin celebrated a racial “revolution” while criticizing the alleged ineffectuality of the late 1960s more radical, Black Power-aligned activists. Revolutionary change was needed, but not revolutionary methods. This conflicted understanding highlights how even contested racial liberal norms continue to shape Franklin’s version of the “good early 1960s” and “bad late 1960s” narrative of the civil rights movement that has been criticized by recent scholarship.<sup>89</sup>

Short of time and working alone until his former doctoral student Alfred A. Moss Jr became a coauthor in 1988, Franklin’s revisions were piecemeal, frequently cutting or introducing new sentences in the easily editable introductions and conclusions of chapters and deleting the most outdated sentences altogether. Nevertheless, this always left more of the central thicket of empirical detail than it altered. In 1994, the historian Marshall Stevenson concluded that, comparing the first and sixth editions, 80 to 85 percent of the material was the same. This was “problematic.” Stevenson then offered a frequent critique: Franklin was an effective summarizer but neglected innovative methodologies, the various editions adding names, chapters, and sentences without altering the overarching conceptual framework. Franklin’s was a competent introductory text which teachers always had to supplement.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, this strategy of teaching *around* and *against* Franklin’s conclusions—themselves now increasingly open for debate—underpinned *From Slavery to Freedom*’s commercial success as black history increasingly diversified in the late twentieth century. In 1999 one reviewer noted that because their personal temperament and politics differed from Franklin and Moss’s, they taught “against their grain.” Another found the work “plagued by weakness ...

<sup>87</sup> Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 2nd edn, dust jacket.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>89</sup> See especially Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91/4 (2005), 1233–63.

<sup>90</sup> Marshall Stevenson, “A Critique of *From Slavery to Freedom*,” “FSTF 7th Edition Correspondence and Revisions, (1),” W02, JHFP.

extremely Eurocentric in analysis, worldview, and narration.” Yet, as students challenged the work’s inattention to black radicalism, they “were getting as much from their critiques of the work as they were getting from the content and substance.”<sup>91</sup> This pedagogical malleability—a persistent tactic in African American educational life—drove Franklin’s text to unprecedented commercial success during its “second life,” even if Franklin and Moss’s revisions only partially escaped the underlying theoretical framework established by the first edition.

### Evolution without revolution? *From Slavery to Freedom’s* Changing treatment of gender and Africa, 1956–2000

Closely scrutinizing *From Slavery to Freedom’s* revisions on two themes—gender and Africa—reveals how Franklin and Moss strained against yet rarely entirely superseded *From Slavery to Freedom’s* original framework and, consequently, its lingering racial liberal influences. Gradual alterations were made on both fronts, accelerating from 1988’s sixth edition onwards when Moss consulted expert reviewers to keep the text up to date with an expanding scholarship. By reading *From Slavery to Freedom’s* many editions in dialogue, we arrive at a more complex understanding of Franklin and Moss’s editorial choices and the educational, intellectual, and political contexts that shaped their text’s unexpected yet impactful second life.<sup>92</sup>

From the consistent use of “he” to chapter titles including “Land of Their Fathers,” *From Slavery to Freedom’s* first edition reflected the heteropatriarchal norms of what remained a male-dominated postwar historical profession.<sup>93</sup> Franklin’s gradual revisions on gender therefore suggest how historical writing reinforced the tendency of postwar liberalism to understand the struggle for citizenship rights as primarily a male struggle. While Franklin increasingly recognized how mid-twentieth-century gendered tropes pathologized black communities, as with his internationalism he struggled to offer an alternative framework that worked against such norms. By the 1980s, however, texts including Deborah Gray White’s *Ar’n’t I a Woman?* (1985) increasingly centered black women’s experiences, utilizing methodologies from the new social history. In 1982, Mary Frances Berry cited *From Slavery to Freedom* as black history’s leading text to charge that “Black historians and others who focus on Afro-American history are little better than other scholars on this issue.”<sup>94</sup>

Franklin’s first significant interventions concerning gender were to gradually modify statements that pathologized black family structures, an increasingly prevalent tendency in mid-twentieth-century racial thought. In the first edition, Franklin described

<sup>91</sup>“Cut and Paste Reviews, 7/e,” “FSTF 7th Edition Correspondence and Revisions, (1),” W02, JHFP.

<sup>92</sup>My approach here is greatly indebted to John K. Young, “‘Quite as Human as It Is Negro’: Subpersons and Textual Property in *Native Son* and *Black Boy*,” in George Hutchinson and John Kevin Young, eds., *Publishing Blackness: Textual Constructions of Race since 1850* (Ann Arbor, 2013), 67–92.

<sup>93</sup>Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America*; Deborah Gray White, ed., *Telling Histories: Black Women Historians in the Ivory Tower* (Chapel Hill, 2008).

<sup>94</sup>Mary Berry, “Foreword,” in Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (New York, 1982), xv–xvi, at xvi.

enslaved women as having “learned, by observing the white family unit, the basic elements of decency and self-respect.”<sup>95</sup> The fifth edition referenced “certain elements of decency and self-respect” and the eighth “certain elements of so-called decency and self-respect,” de-normalizing social values historically associated with white middle-class families.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, while the first edition noted E. Franklin Frazier’s assessment that slavery impaired family life, the fifth edition added that John Blasingame had shown the enslaved family to be a “viable institution.”<sup>97</sup> Both changes thus questioned the twinned elevation of white-oriented universality and pathologization of black particularity, particularly regarding gendered matters, that typified mid-twentieth-century liberalism. Franklin’s descriptions of gendered violence were also progressively moderated to retain a sense of personhood and resistance, implicitly rejecting the controversial thesis of Stanley Elkins’s *Slavery* (1959) that slavery permanently infantilized the enslaved.<sup>98</sup> The fifth edition thus cut the statement that “the rape of a female slave was regarded as a crime only because it involved trespassing on and destroying the property of another person” to end with “trespassing.”<sup>99</sup>

Ahead of the 1994 seventh edition, however, many reviewers argued that Franklin’s inattention to gender was symptomatic of a broader neglect of social history. The southern historian Walter Weare encouraged discussing gender beyond “dropping in more names.” Weare suggested concentrating on “what women in general were doing,” arguing that this demanded greater attention to ordinary women’s lives.<sup>100</sup> The seventh edition’s cover jacket accordingly celebrated the “particular attention given to the struggle of African-American women.”<sup>101</sup> Chapter titles were made gender-neutral and, as color images were first included, the cover image of Romare Bearden’s collage *Family* explicitly foregrounded the vitality of black social and cultural life—themes increasingly emphasized by a growing black cultural studies—and the family’s critical role in fostering intergenerational inheritances and solidarities.

Criticism continued, however. Several commentators at a 1997 fiftieth-anniversary symposium recognized improvements but nonetheless called for a more sophisticated theoretical analysis of gender.<sup>102</sup> Seventy percent of participants in a 1999 teachers’ forum encouraged including women more extensively, and reviewers urged Franklin and Moss to “go beyond specific women to a more comprehensive approach to gender.”<sup>103</sup> These repeated criticisms indicate both the historiographical marginality of black women’s stories and the persistent casualization and marginalization of

<sup>95</sup> Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn, 202.

<sup>96</sup> John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 5th edn (New York, 1980), 148; John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 8th edn (Boston, MA, 2000), 157.

<sup>97</sup> Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn, 202; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 5th edn, 148.

<sup>98</sup> Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago, 1959).

<sup>99</sup> Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn, 187; 5th edn, 134.

<sup>100</sup> Walter Weare to David Follmer, 25 June 1991, “From Slavery to Freedom 7th Edition Correspondence and Revisions (1),” W02, JHFP.

<sup>101</sup> John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 7th edn, 2 vols. (New York, 1998), 1: cover jacket.

<sup>102</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, “Paradigms, Politics, and Patriarchy in the Making of a Black History: Reflections on *From Slavery to Freedom*,” *Journal of Negro History* 85/1–2 (2000), 18–21, at 19.

<sup>103</sup> Executive summary, “FSTE, 1999,” W06, JHFP.

black women's intellectual labor in mid-twentieth-century historical practice. Only four of seventeen colleagues thanked for their assistance in the first edition were women.<sup>104</sup> Particularly notable was Dorothy B. Porter, the eminent Howard University-based librarian, curator, and bibliographer. During the 1940s, the Library of Congress redirected all enquiries regarding black history to Porter. Her brief recognition in Franklin's preface offers a tantalizing glimpse of the underrecognized "quiet infrastructure" of bibliographic labor imperative to black history's mid-twentieth-century popularization.<sup>105</sup> This recognition nonetheless remained informal: when Franklin's prefaces started to thank official reviewers, the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth editions thanked all-male panels. Altogether, while Franklin personally took great interest in women's history these persistent criticisms foreground how his early scholarship—as was typical of racial liberalism—tended to demand equal citizenship through a predominantly male-centered rhetoric of "manhood rights." Coined by Du Bois, this approach regarded race and gender as largely distinct constructs, underplaying black women's unique intersectional struggles and insights.<sup>106</sup>

Perhaps most altered, however, were Franklin's attempts to trace black history's "ancient African beginnings."<sup>107</sup> For Franklin, Africa represented a historical anchor worthy of study but neither a seamlessly appropriable nor a politically empowering identity for mid-twentieth-century African Americans. Franklin's guarded engagement with African history exemplifies both racial liberalism's emphasis on the primacy of the American national frame and prevalent tendencies within Cold War culture to discount as subversive any international project (e.g. Afrocentrism) that questioned such primacy and the American global leadership it naturalized. Within *From Slavery to Freedom's* first edition, Chapters 1, 2, and 3 covered Africa; Chapter 5 the Caribbean; Chapters 9 and 19 Latin America; and Chapter 20 Canada. This global vision reflected both Franklin's awareness of postwar anti-imperial movements and black history's long-standing diasporic reach.<sup>108</sup> It should be recognized, however, that Franklin's treatment of Africa was consistently encouraged by Shugg against Franklin's initial protests due to the limitations of his knowledge. Yet Franklin later rejected Shugg's suggestion to omit Africa to save words, informing him that it was "absolutely necessary" as black educational institutions increasingly emphasized this African background.<sup>109</sup> As other international sections were drastically cut Africa's page allocation remained broadly consistent, reflecting Franklin's keen—albeit not uncritical—awareness of its increasing prominence in courses in black history.

Franklin was most skeptical, however, about precisely the African cultural legacies that Shugg encouraged him to address. Knopf's archives reveal only one substantial theoretical question from Shugg to Franklin: whether Franklin had incorporated the

<sup>104</sup> Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn, ix.

<sup>105</sup> Laura E. Helton, "Keeping Time: Infrastructures of Black Inquiry, 1900–1950," in Brigitte Fielder and Jonathan Senchyne, eds., *Against a Sharp White Background: Infrastructures of African American Print* (Madison, 2019), 82–108, at 82.

<sup>106</sup> C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis, 2017), 103.

<sup>107</sup> Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn, vii.

<sup>108</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883–1950," *Journal of American History* 86/3 (1999), 1045–77.

<sup>109</sup> Franklin to Shugg, 9 April 1947, "FSTF Correspondence 1943–1947," W06, JHFP.

anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits's controversial, Knopf-published scholarship suggesting that contemporary African American culture maintained African cultural "survivals."<sup>110</sup> Franklin's original text equivocated on this debate. Offering his "tentative" judgment, Franklin first revealingly discussed questions of political allegiance, suggesting that African Americans held such "deep appreciation of the function of the state that obedience to law and patriotism for their new country were not at all difficult." They "were not overwhelmed or overawed by their New World experiences," Franklin citing continuities in social organization, aesthetics, and, until the eighth edition, "divinations and various cult practices."<sup>111</sup> Significantly, however, Franklin argued that acculturation "was all but stymied where there was sufficient consensus of experience among the Africans to take the Western culture and reinterpret it almost wholly in terms of their own experiences." Elsewhere, the process went on "in a normal or gradual way, but with at least some survival of African culture."<sup>112</sup> Both sentences imply that Franklin regarded African survivals as contrary to the normative acculturation of other racial groups, including white ethnics, that racial liberal readings of American history considered critical to their gradual incorporation into the expanding circle of American nationhood. As suggested in Franklin's *The Free Negro in North Carolina* (1943), Africanisms were ultimately products of the segregated world Franklin sought to extinguish.<sup>113</sup>

As the black arts movement made this position increasingly untenable, however, the fifth edition deleted Franklin's concluding suggestion that Africanisms may have survived "because of the refusal of the members of the dominant group in America to extend, without reservations, their own culture."<sup>114</sup> The seventh edition of 1994 recognized the growing celebration of African Americans' African roots yet implied that these celebrations were historically misguided, noting how recently "many blacks and some whites began to insist that a substantial portion of African culture not only survived the Atlantic crossing, but has persisted to this day."<sup>115</sup> This bracketing—typical of racial liberalism—was echoed concerning Africa itself. The fourth edition recognized how African liberation meant it was now "commonplace for Negro Americans to speak and write sensitively of the land of their fathers," noting this "deep sense of identification" despite an "only slight connection."<sup>116</sup> Substantial historical changes were made, however. Franklin gradually deleted terms including "barbaric," "native," and "savage" and removed scare quotes from references to African empires. Experts on Africa consulted by Moss in the late 1980s nonetheless declared that Franklin's analysis remained compensatory, an increasingly abandoned approach. Moss encouraged "simply stating what happened," arguing that African history found validation on its own terms.<sup>117</sup> For example, a sentence contextualizing the Songhai Empire's pursuit of West African

<sup>110</sup>Shugg to Franklin, 7 March 1946, "FSTF Correspondence 1943–1947," W06, JHFP.

<sup>111</sup>Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn, 39–40.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>113</sup>John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790–1860* (Chapel Hill, 1943).

<sup>114</sup>Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn, 41.

<sup>115</sup>Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 7th edn, 1: 25.

<sup>116</sup>John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 4th edn (New York, 1974), 39.

<sup>117</sup>Moss to Franklin, 31 Jan. 1986, "FSTF Correspondence 1986–1989," W06, JHFP.

political unity “when Spain and Portugal were disputing the control of the world before Pope Alexander VI” was deleted by the seventh edition, which concluded in a new sentence discussing African literary practices that “most important of all, however, is that they were worthy of esteem on their own terms and by their own standards.”<sup>118</sup>

Franklin and Moss nonetheless remained cautious regarding the incorporation of Afrocentric ideas. Reviewers persistently criticized their reliance on British and French archaeologists and encouraged incorporating the controversial theses of Ivan van Sertima’s *They Came before Columbus* (1976) and Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena* (1987). Van Sertima asserted that Africans visited the Americas before Columbus, while Bernal suggested that ancient Greek civilization was foundationally black. Both works vociferously criticized America-centric worldviews and anti-black positivism within the historical academy.

Reflecting Franklin and Moss’s emphasis on analytical balance, however, they agreed in 1992 that Afrocentrists would only influence revisions where “their research, ideas, and analysis have received general acceptance among historians in the relevant specialty.”<sup>119</sup> Tellingly, Franklin here reiterated precisely that juxtaposition of heterodox ethnocentrists against moderate integrationist scholars constructed by Knopf in 1947 using his example. Indeed, Franklin and Moss implicitly situated Afrocentrism as a phenomenon of post-1960s frustration, sandwiching this discussion between critiques of rap music and pictures depicting destruction following the Los Angeles riot of 1992.<sup>120</sup> Bernal and Sertima’s theses were “vigorously argued,” Franklin and Moss noted, asserting that “although most scholars have not yet accepted these claims, it is not so much because the arguments are not convincing as it is their refusal to deny claims that had become entrenched conventional wisdom for more than four centuries.”<sup>121</sup> This stance sympathized with revisionists without changing the African chapters’ essential structures or indeed explicitly stating their opinions of this controversial argument. The book’s jacket nonetheless boasted rather more unequivocally of a “rewritten chapter on Africa, including recent scholarship by notables such as Martin Bernal.”<sup>122</sup>

Ultimately, *From Slavery to Freedom* remained a work that concluded in the United States and celebrated it as *the* principal site for future black political possibilities. This is perhaps most evident in the terms utilized to refer to African Americans. *From Slavery to Freedom*’s initial subtitle, “A History of American Negroes,” positioned “American Negroes” as one subset of a broader transatlantic racial group that primarily influenced, and was influenced by, the sociocultural practices and shared histories of the United States. By contrast, the inversion “A History of Negro Americans”—adopted from 1974’s fourth edition onwards—likely reflected the work’s increasing concentration on the United States and Franklin’s belief that, after recent civil rights victories, “Negro American” now designated one racial variation of an American civic nationality. The

<sup>118</sup>Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 5th edn, 10; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 7th edn, 1: 25.

<sup>119</sup>“Franklin and Moss Confer about FSTF, 7th Edition,” 9–12 April 1992, “FSTF 7th Edition Correspondence and Revisions, (1),” W02, JHFP.

<sup>120</sup>Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 7th edn, 2: 552.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, 1: 30.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, cover jacket.

subtitle only adopted “African-American” in 1994, twenty-five years after Knopf’s advertisements first utilized the term.<sup>123</sup> Franklin evidently made this change reluctantly. When concerned historians solicited Franklin’s advice on this debate he typically lamented their “no-win” situation,” advising that if he “cared enough” he would advise that they utilize the terms interchangeably.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, Franklin’s refusal to modify his subtitle became a mark of pride. When, in 1969, one editor proposed altering the subtitle of another work that Franklin edited to “Black American,” Franklin refused to “capitulate to those who seek to infuse virtually unlimited emotion and ideology in the term that they use, especially when they are so intolerant of those who do not follow them.”<sup>125</sup> Clearly, Franklin considered “black” a term primarily utilized by those more ideological historians from whom he—and Knopf before him—sought to differentiate his scholarship. Following Henry Louis Gates Jr and Gene Andrew Jarrett, then, we might place Franklin within a generation of black intellectuals for whom “Negro” represented “plenitude, regeneration, or a truly constructed *presence*,” and “black” a “lack, degeneration, or a truly negated *absence*.”<sup>126</sup>

This guarded adaptation contrasted greatly to the liberatory possibilities that black studies located in expressing blackness through daily life and behavior. Franklin and Moss operated on a case-by-case basis, deciding “not to eliminate the term Negro, but to reduce the frequency of its use.”<sup>127</sup> Even this was reluctant, their preface noting that “African-American” was “*au courant*” yet unheard before the Civil War. Franklin and Moss thus pledged to use terms “consonant with the period under discussion.”<sup>128</sup> Moss therefore revised specific chapters, particularly later chapters, to insert “African-American” more frequently. The incorporation was consequently sporadic: Chapter 13 used “black” one hundred times, “African-American” twice, and “Negro” once. By contrast, Chapter 14 used “African-American” 108 times and “black” eighty-four times. Confusingly, the index entry “Blacks” read “see African Americans; Africans.”<sup>129</sup>

Such seemingly obscure minutiae elucidate both practical inter-edition adaptations and the distinctive generational characteristics of Franklin’s text. Reflecting particularly on African Americans’ experiences during World War II, Franklin argued that only the activism of “American Negroes” actualized the promise of liberal democratic theory within the United States, deserving for them first-class citizenship. This vision remained, however, couched in the masculinist and America-centric norms typical of postwar racial liberalism. Franklin consequently looked less to empowering African inheritances and black particularity than to promoting civic incorporation and legal equalization. Examining Franklin’s revisions thus highlights the persistence of racial

<sup>123</sup>“Back Matter,” *Journal of Southern History* 35/1 (1969), 142.

<sup>124</sup>Franklin to Morris MacGregor Jr, 22 March 1977, “M—1970s,” C05, JHFP.

<sup>125</sup>Franklin to Sharon Kanon, 27 Oct. 1969, “The Great Ones—Foreword and Correspondence, 1970,” W35, JHFP.

<sup>126</sup>Henry Louis Gates and Gene Andrew Jarrett, “Introduction,” in Gates and Jarrett, eds., *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892–1938* (Princeton, 2007), 1–20, at 3, original emphasis.

<sup>127</sup>“Franklin and Moss Confer about FSTF, 7th Edition,” 28–31 May 1992, “FSTF 7th Edition Correspondence and Revisions, (1),” W02, JHFP.

<sup>128</sup>Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 7th edn, 1: xvii.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, 2: 624.

liberal norms within a text that strained against them, yet rarely entirely superseded them. By contextualizing such assumptions, we arrive at a deeper understanding of the intergenerational stakes of a historiography inextricably connected to debates regarding the path to further liberation.

## Conclusion

This article has situated *From Slavery to Freedom* as an underexamined yet powerful lens on how racial liberalism affected mid-twentieth-century historical publishing and practice. A work that both reiterated and strained against yet rarely superseded racial liberalism's normative assumptions, it embodies racial liberalism's double-edged effects upon American historical scholarship. While racial liberalism's dematerializing and individualizing effects are well known, such assumptions were ballasted in historical teleologies that prioritized black adjustment, equalization, and incorporation into a promised non-racialized liberal nationhood. History was considered a key mechanism for promoting such goals. Knopf celebrated the universalist and patriotic in Franklin's text, marketing Franklin as an exemplar indigenous interpreter to a public audience presumed to be predominantly white. Such arguments, however, also policed those more radical black historians whom reviewers juxtaposed against this exemplar of objectivity and writing "without a chip on his shoulder." Knopf thus reaffirmed—and commercially exploited—the circumscribed routes to public readership and commercial success available to black intellectuals within postwar America. Indeed, for all Franklin's Harvard training, Knopf still utilized often remarkably crude white authentication to demonstrate that Franklin held the credentials that allowed a select, highly educated, and predominantly male few to become trustworthy indigenous interpreters. Countless reviewers thus asserted that Franklin was primarily noteworthy as an exception to an allegedly uneducated and "emotional" black norm. For more radical, heterodox, or black women scholars, these assumptions proved stubbornly persistent.

Examining *From Slavery to Freedom*'s constant reinvention underscores both black history's adaptability and the variety of uses to which readers, including fierce critics of mid-century liberalism, contorted Franklin's text. As scholarship on black print has emphasized, we must analyze any work as a collection of its versions—as a multiplicity. In utilizing the sociology of texts, this article joins calls to excavate black texts' "fundamental instability" and make visible their unsettledness.<sup>130</sup> Granted, criticisms arising from black studies, black feminist, and Afrocentric perspectives all suggested that while Franklin and Moss's text made valuable adaptations, these predominantly entailed additions rather than fundamental theoretical reevaluation. These criticisms rightfully highlighted argumentative oversights common to Franklin's generation of postwar black historiography. Infuriated by his wartime experiences of segregation, Franklin's early scholarship continuously discussed the second-class status of "American Negroes" *between* slavery and freedom. For Franklin, applying African Americans' unique insights into America's hypocrisies in order to solve this liminality represented the critical test of postwar liberal democracy. In speaking beyond race,

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<sup>130</sup>Elizabeth McHenry, *To Make Negro Literature: Writing, Literary Practice, and African American Authorship* (Durham, NC, 2021), 9.



then, *From Slavery to Freedom*'s preface—with its references to African Americans' "casting their lot" with America—both demonstrated and demanded the racial assimilability that its text celebrated. Franklin thus prioritized political equalization and societal incorporation within an eventually deracialized liberal American nationhood, a vision that—as keenly sensed by James Baldwin—risked underplaying class, African survivals, black separatism, and black women's struggles against their own distinct experiences of liminality.

Nevertheless, both Franklin's intellectual flexibility and *From Slavery to Freedom*'s subtle anger cannot be underestimated, particularly as Franklin increasingly strained against racial liberal tendencies by the late 1960s. Both Knopf and Franklin sought to place black history in the American context and bridge multiracial audiences, substituting alleged ethnocentrism for cosmopolitanism and alleged "special pleading" for "objective" social-scientific analysis. Yet Franklin simultaneously distanced himself from the previous generation's more radical critiques of capitalism and imperialism while echoing them to an extent that Knopf did not or—commercially and reputationally—was not willing to recognize. Throughout his career, Franklin keenly sensed what was publishable and unpublishable for a black scholar in Cold War America, frequently writing "mad essays" to express frustrations that he knew were unpublishable. Perhaps, then, this story is one of Franklin's ability to adapt and improvise, to smuggle a subtle radicalism amid all the intellectual expectations and uneasy commercial alliances of this period. *From Slavery to Freedom* remained a text that criticized Renaissance-derived ideas of liberty for representing "the freedom to destroy freedom ... to exploit the rights of others." Like Du Bois and C. L. R. James, Franklin freely criticized the forcible transportation and systemic oppression central to capitalism's diffusion across the Atlantic. Franklin thus recognized how "the Renaissance with its sanction of ruthless freedom, and the practice of the Commercial Revolution, with its new techniques of exploitation, conspired to bring forth new approaches to the acquisition of wealth and power."<sup>131</sup> As Robin Kelley has suggested, "cloaked in the protective armor of judicious prose was a surprisingly radical interpretation of American history."<sup>132</sup>

Franklin thus emblemizes a broader tradition of hopeful adaptation and improvisation key to those pursuing black knowledge within a white-dominated academy. Indeed, adaptability and improvisation were once again strikingly apparent in *From Slavery to Freedom*'s "second life." Frequently, teachers utilized Franklin's text as a skeletal frame for courses, highlighting recent theoretical insights by teaching *against* and *beyond* it. If the incorporation of women's and African history never entirely subverted its initial framing, the history of the ideas that *From Slavery to Freedom* put out into the world therefore remains extensive. It is a history of audiences contorting, challenging, and grappling with Franklin's arguments to clarify their own understandings of race and American history. It is a history that demonstrates black history's immense public reach; a history of University of Buffalo students carrying copies around campus in preparation for spontaneous black-history debates; or of the poet Elias Olan James,

<sup>131</sup> Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn, 43, 34.

<sup>132</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, "A Historian in the World," *Journal of African American History* 94/3 (2009), 362–9, at 363.

slowly dying of cancer, requesting a copy and writing, “I fear there will not be time enough for me to learn, nor strength enough. I am limited in strength. But the subject will not let me sleep.”<sup>133</sup>

Viewed seventy-five years after its publication, Franklin’s text stands as an exemplar product of postwar black historiography. It epitomizes black history’s public ethos yet also bespeaks a distinctive generational vision in which history could translate the defeat of fascism into the humanistic elimination of intolerance and prejudice across the globe. As observed by Benjamin Quarles, a prolific black historian and Franklin’s contemporary and correspondent, Franklin’s work rendered African Americans “the touchstone of the ability of Western culture to transcend color prejudice in the building of tomorrow’s world.”<sup>134</sup> While *From Slavery to Freedom* offers an archive of blackness contained, distorted, and commercialized, it is also an archive through which Franklin found empowerment through what Du Bois termed African Americans’ “second-sight in this American world.”<sup>135</sup> It is perhaps most telling that, in every edition published during his lifetime, Franklin’s text concluded by echoing Du Bois, noting how African Americans’ rejections provided “a perspective and an objectivity that others had greater difficulty in achieving.” While Franklin’s white reviewers considered that to be black while remaining objective was to be exceptional, Franklin here suggested that all historically informed African Americans could highlight the deficiencies inherent in American democracy. As Franklin concluded, “if America’s role in the atomic age was to lead the world toward peace and international understanding, the Negro element in the population had a peculiar function to perform in carrying forward the struggle for freedom at home, for the sake of America’s role, and abroad, for the sake of the survival of the world.”<sup>136</sup> Amid all the stubbornly persistent preconceptions and prejudices of a white-dominated academy and nation, *From Slavery to Freedom* provided historical ballast for a hoped-for age of global liberation, reckoning with American history for all that its many contradictions elucidate.

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<sup>133</sup>Lillian Serece Williams, “Participant-Observer of History: John Hope Franklin—Scholar, Mentor, and Promoter of African American Women’s History,” *Journal of African American History* 94/3 (2009), 370–76, at 372; Elias Olan James to Franklin, 15 Aug. 1949, “FSTF Correspondence 1943–1947,” W06, JHFP.

<sup>134</sup>Benjamin Quarles, “The Road We Trod,” *Phylon* 9/2 (1948), 172–3, at 173.

<sup>135</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), ed. Brent Hayes Edwards (Oxford, 2007), 8.

<sup>136</sup>Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 1st edn, 589.

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