

A LIFE OF LEARNING

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Charles Homer Haskins
Lecture for 1988



American Council of Learned Societies

Professor John Hope Franklin delivered the annual Charles Homer Haskins Lecture on April 24, 1988, at the ACLS Annual Meeting in New York, NY. It was published as ACLS Occasional Paper No. 4 in 1988. An HTML version was made available on the ACLS website in the late 1990s. This pdf document reproduces the online version and may differ slightly from the print publication.

ACLS OCCASIONAL PAPER, No. 4
ISSN 1041-536X



American Council of Learned Societies
Occasional Paper No. 4

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by

John Hope Franklin

As I began the task of putting the pieces together that would describe how I moved from one stage of intellectual development to another, I was reminded of a remark that Eubie Blake made as he approached his 99th birthday. He said, “If I had known that I would live this long I would have taken better care of myself.” To paraphrase him, if I had known that I would become an historian and the Haskins lecturer for 1988 I would have kept better records of my own pilgrimage through life. I may be forgiven, therefore, if I report that the beginnings are a bit hazy, not only to me but to my parents as well. For example, they had no clear idea of when I learned to read and write. It was when I was about three or four, I am told.

My mother, an elementary school teacher, introduced me to the world of learning when I was three years old. Since there were no day-care centers in the village where we lived, she had no alternative to taking me to school and seating me in the rear where she could keep an eye on me. I remained quiet but presumably I also remained attentive, for when I was about five my mother noticed that on the sheet of paper she gave me each morning, I was no longer making lines and sketching out some notable examples of abstract art. I was writing words, to be sure almost as abstract as my art, and making sentences. My mother later said that she was not surprised much less astonished at what some, not she, would have called my precocity. Her only reproach—to

herself, not me—was that my penmanship was hopelessly flawed since she had not monitored my progress as she had done for her enrolled students. From that point on, I would endeavor to write and through the written word to communicate my thoughts to others.

My interest in having some thoughts of my own to express was stimulated by my father who, among other tasks, practiced law by day and read and wrote by night. In the absence of any possible distractions in the tiny village, he would read or write something each evening. This was my earliest memory of him and, indeed, it was my last memory of him. Even after we moved to Tulsa, a real city, and after we entered the world of motion pictures, radio, and television, his study and writing habits remained unaffected. I grew up believing that in the evenings one either read or wrote. It was always easy to read something worthwhile, and if one worked at it hard enough he might even write something worthwhile. I continue to believe that.

I

Two factors always plagued my world of learning for all of my developing years. One was race, the other was financial distress, and each had a profound influence on every stage of my development. I was born in the all-Negro town of Rentiesville to which my parents went after my father had been expelled from court by a white judge who told him no black person could ever represent anyone in his court. My father resolved that he would resign from the world dominated by white people and try to make it among his own people. But Rentiesville's population of less than 200 people could not provide a poverty-free living even for one who was a lawyer, justice of the peace, postmaster, farmer, and president of the Rentiesville Trading Company which, incidentally, was not even a member of the New York Stock Exchange.

The quality of life in Rentiesville was as low as one can imagine. There was no electricity, running water, or inside plumbing. There was no entertainment or diversion of any kind—no parks, playgrounds, libraries, or newspapers. We subscribed to the Muskogee *Daily Phoenix*, which was delivered by the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas

Railroad as it made its way southward through the state each morning. The days and nights were lonely and monotonous, and for a young lad with boundless energy there was nothing to do but read. My older sister and brother were away in private school in Tennessee, and one did not even have the pleasure of the company of older siblings. Now and then one went to Checotah, six miles away, to shop. That was not always pleasant, such as the time my mother, sister, and I were ejected from the train because my mother refused to move from the coach designated for whites. It was the only coach we could reach before the train moved again, so my mother argued that she would not move because she was not to blame if the train's white coach was the only one available when the train came to a halt. Her argument was unsuccessful, and we had to trudge back to Rentiesville through the woods.

There were the rare occasions when we journeyed to Eufala, the county seat, where I won the spelling bee for three consecutive years. There was Muskogee to the North, where I went at the age of five for my first pair of eye glasses, the malady brought on, I was told, by reading by the dim light of a kerosene lamp. It was a combination of these personal and family experiences that forced my parents to the conclusion that Rentiesville was not a viable community. They resolved to move to Tulsa. First, my father would go, find a place, set himself up in the practice of law, and we would follow six months later, in June, 1921, when my mother's school closed for the summer recess.

That June, however, we received word that in Tulsa there was a race riot, whatever that was, and that the Negro section of that highly segregated community was in flames. At the age of six I sensed from my mother's reaction that my father was in danger. We were all relieved several days later, therefore, when a message arrived that he had suffered no bodily harm, but that the property he had contracted to purchase was destroyed by fire. He practiced law in a tent for several months, and our move to Tulsa was delayed by four years.

In the month before I reached my 11th birthday, we arrived in Tulsa. It was quite a new world, and although a city of less than moderate size at the time, it was to my inexperienced eyes perhaps the largest city in the country. I did not see much of it, however, for racial segregation

was virtually complete. I thought that Booker T. Washington, the school where I enrolled in grade seven, was the biggest and best school until one day I saw Central High for whites. It was a massive, imposing structure covering a city block. I was later to learn that it had every conceivable facility such as a pipe organ and a theater-size stage, which we did not have. I also learned that it offered modern foreign languages and calculus, while our school offered automobile mechanics, home economics, typing, and shorthand. Our principal and our teachers constantly assured us that we need not apologize for our training, and they worked diligently to give us much of what was not even in the curriculum.

Now that the family was together again I had the example and the encouragement of both of my parents. My mother no longer taught but she saw to it that my sister and I completed all of our home assignments promptly. Quite often, moreover, she introduced us to some of the great writers, especially Negro authors, such as Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson, who were not a part of our studies at school. She also told us about some of the world's great music such as Handel's Oratorio, "Esther," in which she had sung in college. While the music at school was interesting and lively, especially after I achieved the position of first trumpet in the band and orchestra, there was no Handel or Mozart or Beethoven. We had a full fare of Victor Herbert and John Philip Sousa, and operettas, in more than one of which I sang the leading role.

Often after school I would go to my father's office. By the time I was in high school, the depression had yielded few clients but ample time which he spent with me. It was he who introduced me to ancient Greece and Rome, and he delighted in quoting Plato, Socrates, and Pericles. We would then walk home together, and after dinner he went to his books and I went to mine. Under the circumstances, there could hardly have been a better way of life, since I had every intention after completing law school of some day becoming his partner.

It was in secondary school that I had a new and wonderful experience which my parents did not share. It was the series of concerts and recitals at Convention Hall, perhaps even larger than the theater at Central High School which I never saw. As in the other few instances

where whites and blacks were under the same roof, segregation was strict, but I very much wanted to go with some of my teachers who always held season tickets. My parents would never voluntarily accept segregation; consequently, the concerts were something they could forego. Even at court my father refused to accept segregation. Whenever I accompanied him, which was as often as I could, he would send me to the jury box when it was empty, or when there was a jury trial, have me sit at the bench with him. They took the position, however, that if I could bear the humiliation of segregation, I could go to the concerts.

Thus, with the money I earned as a paper boy, I could purchase my own tickets. To be more accurate, I was not the paper boy but the assistant to a white man who had the paper route in the black neighborhood. It was at one of these concerts that I heard Paul Whiteman present Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" while on a nationwide tour in 1927. I also attended the annual performances of the Chicago Civic Opera Company, which brought such stellar singers as Rosa Raisa, Tito Schipa, and Richard Bonelli to Tulsa. I am not altogether proud of going to Convention Hall, and there are times, even now, while enjoying a symphony or an opera, when I reproach myself for having yielded to the indignity of racial segregation. I can only say that in the long run it was my parents who knew best, though later I made a conscious effort to regain my self-respect.

II

There were many sobering experiences at Fisk University, which I entered on a tuition scholarship in 1931. The first was my encounter with at least two dozen valedictorians and salutatorians from some of the best high schools in the United States. The fact that I had finished first in my high school class did not seem nearly as important in Nashville as it had in Tulsa. Imagine my chagrin when a whiz kid from Dayton made all A's in the first quarter while I made two B's and a C + . My rather poor grades were somewhat mitigated by my having to hold three jobs in order to pay my living expenses. I was also absolutely certain that the C + resulted from whimsical grading by the teaching assistants in a course called Contemporary Civilization. As I

think of it now I still become infuriated, and if there was anyone to listen to my case today, I would insist that my examinations be reevaluated and my grade raised accordingly! I *was* consoled by my salutatorian girl friend, now my wife of 47 years who over the years has lent a sympathetic ear to my rantings about the injustices in that course. She could afford to be charitable. She received a grade of B + .

Another sobering experience was my first racial encounter in Nashville. In a downtown streetcar ticket window, I gave the man the only money I possessed which was a \$20 bill. I apologized and explained that it was all I had and he could give me any kind of bills he wished. In an outburst of abusive language in which he used vile racial epithets, he told me that no nigger could tell him how to make change. After a few more similar statements he proceeded to give me \$19.75 in dimes and quarters. From that day until I graduated, I very seldom went to Nashville and when I did I never went alone. It was about as much as a 16-year old could stand. I thought of that encounter some three years later and felt almost as helpless when a gang of white hoodlums took a young black man from a Fisk-owned house on the edge of the campus and lynched him. As president of student government I made loud noises and protests to the mayor, the governor, and even President Franklin D. Roosevelt, but nothing could relieve our pain and anguish or bring Cordie Cheek back. Incidentally, the heinous crime he committed was that while riding his bicycle he struck a white child who was only slightly injured.

Still another sobering, even shattering, experience was my discovery at the end of my freshman year that my parents had lost our home and had moved into a four-family apartment building which they had built. I knew that the country was experiencing an economic depression of gigantic proportions, that unemployment had reached staggering figures, and that my father's law practice had declined significantly. I was not prepared for the personal embarrassment that the depression created for me and my family, and frankly I never fully recovered from it. The liquidation of all debts became an obsession with me, and because of that experience my determination to live on a pay-as-you-go basis is as great today as it was when it was not at all possible to live that way.

Despite these experiences my years in college were pleasant if hectic, rewarding if tedious, happy if austere. Most classes were rigorous, and everyone was proud of the fact that the institution enjoyed an A rating by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. The faculty was, on the whole, first-rate, and they took pride in their scholarly output as well as their teaching. While the student body was all black, with the exception of the occasional white exchange student or special student, the faculty was fairly evenly divided between white and black. It was an indication of the lack of interest in the subject that we never thought in terms of what proportion of the faculty was white and what proportion was black.

Since I was merely passing through college en route to law school, I had little interest in an undergraduate concentration. I thought of English, but the chairman, from whom I took freshman English, discouraged me on the ground that I would never be able to command the English language. (Incidentally, he was a distinguished authority in American literature and specialized in the traditions of the Gullah-speaking people of the Sea Islands. I was vindicated some years later when he chaired the committee that awarded me the Bancroft Prize for the best article in the *Journal of Negro History*.) My decision to major in history was almost accidental. The chairman of that department, Theodore S. Currier, who was white, had come into that ill-fated course in Contemporary Civilization and had delivered the most exciting lectures I had ever heard. I decided to see and hear more of him.

During my sophomore year I took two courses with Professor Currier, and my deep interest in historical problems and the historical process and what he had to say was apparently noted by him. Soon we developed a close personal relationship that developed into a deep friendship. Soon, moreover, I made the fateful decision to give up my plan to study and practice law and to replace it with a plan to study, write, and teach history. My desire to learn more about the field resulted in his offering new courses, including seminars, largely for my benefit. He already entertained the hope that I would go to Harvard, where he had done his own graduate work. I had similar hopes, but in the mid-1930s with the depression wreaking its havoc, it was

unrealistic to entertain such hopes. With a respectable grade point average (that C + prevented my graduating *summa cum laude*), and strong supporting letters from my professors, I applied for admission to the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

Harvard required that I take an aptitude test that must have been the forerunner to the Graduate Records Examination. It was administered at Vanderbilt University, just across town but on whose grounds I had never been. When I arrived at the appointed place and took my seat, the person in charge, presumably a professor, *threw* the examination at me, a gesture hardly calculated to give me a feeling of welcome or confidence. I took the examination but cannot imagine that my score was high. As I left the room a Negro custodian walked up to me and told me that in his many years of working there I was the only black person he had ever seen sitting in a room with white people. The record that Fisk made that year was more important. The Association of American Universities placed Fisk University on its approved list. On the basis of this new recognition of my alma mater, Harvard admitted me unconditionally. Apparently this was the first time it had given a student from an historically black institution an opportunity to pursue graduate studies without doing some undergraduate work at Harvard. The University declined, however, to risk a scholarship on me.

Admission to Harvard was one thing; getting there was quite another. My parents were unable to give me more than a very small amount of money and wish me well. I was able to make it back to Nashville, where Ted Currier told me that money alone would not keep me out of Harvard. He went to a Nashville bank, borrowed \$500, and sent me on my way.

Shortly after my arrival in Cambridge in September 1935, I felt secure academically, financially, and socially. At Fisk I had even taken two modern foreign languages in order to meet Harvard's requirement, and in Currier's seminars I had learned how to write a research paper. Since I was secretary to the librarian at Fisk for four years, I had learned how to make the best use of reference materials, bibliographical aids, and manuscripts. Even when I met my advisor, Professor A.M. Schlesinger, Sr., I did not feel intimidated, and I was

very much at ease with him while discussing my schedule and my plans. After I got a job washing dishes for my evening meal and another typing dissertations and lectures, a feeling of long-range solvency settled over me. Although I had a room with a Negro family that had taken in black students since the time of Charles Houston and Robert Weaver, I had extensive contact with white students who never showed the slightest condescension toward me. I set my own priorities, however, realizing that I had the burden of academic deficiencies dating back to secondary school. I had to prove to myself and to my professors that the Association of American Universities was justified in placing Fisk University on its approved list. I received the M.A. degree in nine months and won fellowships with which I completed the Ph.D. requirements.

There were few blacks at Harvard in those days. One was completing his work in French history as I entered. As in Noah's Ark, there were two in the law school, two in zoology, and two in the College. There was one in English, one in Comparative Literature, none in the Medical School, and none in the Business School.

The most traumatic social experience I had there was not racist but anti-Semitic. I was quite active in the Henry Adams Club, made up of graduate students in United States History. I was appointed to serve on the committee to nominate officers for the coming year which, if one wanted to be hyper-sensitive, was a way of making certain that I would not be an officer. When I suggested the most active, brightest graduate student for president, the objection to him was that although he did not have some of the more reprehensible Jewish traits, he was still a Jew. I had never heard any person speak of another in such terms, and I lost respect not only for the person who made the statement but for the entire group that even tolerated such views. Most of the members of the club never received their degrees. The Jewish member became one of the most distinguished persons to get a degree in United States History from Harvard in the last half-century.

The course of study was satisfactory but far from extraordinary. Mark Hopkins was seldom on the other end of the log, and one had to fend for himself as best he could. I had no difficulty with such a regimen, although I felt that some of my fellow students needed more guidance

than the University provided. In my presence, at the beginning of my second year, one of the department's outstanding professors verbally abused a student, visiting from another institution, and dismissed him from his office because the student's question was awkwardly phrased the first time around. Another professor confessed to me that a doctoral committee had failed a candidate because he did not look like a Harvard Ph.D. When the committee told him that he would have to study four more years before applying for reconsideration, the student was in the library the following morning to begin his four-year sentence. At that point, the chairman of the committee was compelled to inform the student that under no circumstances would he be permitted to continue his graduate studies there.

III

When I left Harvard in the spring of 1939 I knew that I did not wish to be in Cambridge another day. I had no desire to offend my advisor or the other members of my doctoral committee. I therefore respectfully declined suggestions that I seek further financial aid. It was time, I thought, to seek a teaching position and complete my dissertation *in absentia*. I had taught one year at Fisk following my first year at Harvard. With five preparations in widely disparate fields and with more than 200 students, I learned more history than I had learned at Fisk *and* Harvard. I early discovered that teaching had its own very satisfying rewards. For some 52 years, there have been many reasons to confirm the conclusions I reached at Fisk, St. Augustine's, North Carolina College at Durham, Howard, Brooklyn, Chicago, Duke, and short stints in many institutions here and abroad.

After I committed myself to the study, teaching, and writing of history, I was so preoccupied with my craft that I gave no attention to possible career alternatives. Less than ten years into my career, however, when I was working on my second book, the president of a small but quite respectable historically black liberal arts college invited me to become dean of his institution. It was at that point that I made a response that was doubtless already in my mind but which I had not ever articulated. I thanked him and respectfully declined the invitation on the grounds that my work in the field of history precluded my moving into college

administration. When the president received my letter, he sent me a telegram informing me that he was arriving the following day to explain his offer. During the three hours of conversation with him I had ample opportunity to state and restate my determination to remain a teacher and writer of history. Each time I did so I became more unequivocal in my resistance to any change in my career objectives. I believe that he finally became convinced that he was indeed wrong in offering me the deanship in the first place. From that day onward, I had no difficulty in saying to anyone who raised the matter that I was not interested in deanships, university presidencies, or ambassadorships. And I never regretted the decision to remain a student and teacher of history.

There is nothing more stimulating or satisfying than teaching bright, inquisitive undergraduates. It was puzzling if dismaying when a student complained, as one did at Howard, that my lengthy assignments did not take into account the fact that his people were only 85 years removed from slavery. It was sobering but challenging when an undergraduate asked, as one did at Brooklyn, if I would suggest additional readings since he had already read everything in the syllabus that I distributed on the first day of class. It was reassuring to find that some students, such as those at Chicago, came to class on a legal holiday because I neglected to take note of the holiday in my class assignments. It was refreshing, even amusing, when students requested, as some did at Duke, that the date for the working dinner at my home be changed because it conflicted with a Duke-Virginia basketball game. As Harry Golden would say, only in America could one find undergraduates with so much chutzpah.

There came a time in my own teaching career when I realized that with all my frantic efforts at research and writing I would never be able to write on all the subjects in which I was deeply interested. If I only had graduate students who would take up some of the problems regarding slavery, free blacks, the Reconstruction era and its overthrow, it would extend my own sense of accomplishment immeasurably. That was a major consideration in my move in 1964 from Brooklyn College to the University of Chicago where for the next 18 years I supervised some 30 dissertations of students who subsequently have published more than a dozen books. In view of Chicago's free-wheeling attitude toward the time for fulfilling degree requirements, there is a possibility

that eight years after retirement, I might have more doctoral students to complete their work and write more books. Meanwhile, I continue to revel in the excitement of teaching in still another type of institution, the Law School at Duke University.

IV

I could not have avoided being a social activist even if I had wanted to. I had been barred from entering the University of Oklahoma to pursue graduate studies, and when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People asked me to be the expert witness for Lyman Johnson, who sought admission to the graduate program in history at the University of Kentucky, I was honored to do so. After all, it was easy to establish the fact that Johnson could not get the same training at the inferior Kentucky State College for Negroes that he could get at the University of Kentucky. Johnson was admitted forthwith. To me it was one more blow against segregation in Oklahoma as well as Kentucky. The defense argument collapsed when the University of Kentucky placed one of its history professors on the stand and asked him about teaching Negroes. He replied soberly that he did not teach Negroes, he taught history, which he was pleased to do!

Then, Thurgood Marshall asked me to serve on his non-legal research staff when the NAACP Legal Defense Fund sought to eliminate segregation in the public schools. Each week in the late summer and fall of 1953 I journeyed from Washington to New York, where I worked from Thursday afternoon to Sunday afternoon. I wrote historical essays, coordinated the work of some other researchers, and participated in the seminars that the lawyers held regularly, and provided the historical setting for the questions with which they were wrestling. I had little time for relaxing at my home away from home, the Algonquin Hotel, but each time I entered this establishment, I made eye contact with an imaginary Tallulah Bankhead, Agnes DeMille, or Noel Coward, who were among the more famous habitués of its lobby.

The historian, of all people, must not make more of his own role in events, however significant, even if it is tempting to do so. It would be

easy to claim that I was one of the 250,000 at the March on Washington in 1963. I was not there, and perhaps the truth is even more appealing. Since I was serving as Pitt Professor at the University of Cambridge that year, I was something of a resource person for the BBC-TV. On Richard Dimbleby's popular television program, *Panorama*, I tried to explain to the British viewers what transpired when James Meredith sought to enter the University of Mississippi. I suspect there was a bit of advocacy even in the tone of my voice. In the summer of 1963 I took British viewers through what the BBC called "A Guide to the March on Washington." Here again, with film clips on Malcolm X, James Baldwin, A. Philip Randolph, and others, I explained why the March was a very positive development in the history of American race relations. Finally, in 1965, I was actually on the Selma March. No, I did not march *with* Martin, as some imaginative writers have claimed. I doubt that Martin ever knew that I was there, far back in the ranks as I was. I was *not* at Pettus Bridge in Dallas County, but joined the March at the City of St. Jude on the outskirts of Montgomery. I took pride in marching with more than 30 historians who came from all parts of the country to register their objection to racial bigotry in the United States. And I want to make it clear that I was afraid, yes, frightened out of my wits by the hate-filled eyes that stared at us from the sidewalks, windows, businesses, and the like. It was much more than I had bargained for.

One must be prepared for any eventuality when he makes any effort to promote legislation or to shape the direction of public policy or to affect the choice of those in the public service. This came to me quite forcefully in 1987 when I joined with others from many areas of activity in opposing the Senate confirmation of Robert H. Bork as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. In what I thought was a sober and reasoned statement, I told the judiciary Committee of the United States Senate that there was "no indication in his writings, his teaching, or his rulings that this nominee has any deeply held commitment to the eradication of the problem of race or even of its mitigation." It came as a shock, therefore, to hear the President of the United States declare that the opponents of the confirmation of Judge Bork constituted a "lynch mob." This was a wholly unanticipated tirade against those activists who had merely expressed views on a subject in which all citizens had an interest.

It was necessary, as a black historian, to have a personal agenda, as well as one dealing with more general matters, that involved a type of activism. I discovered this in the spring of 1939 when I arrived in Raleigh, North Carolina, to do research in the state archives, only to be informed by the director that in planning the building the architects did not anticipate that any Afro-Americans would be doing research there. Perhaps it was the astonishment that the director, a Yale Ph.D. in history, saw in my face that prompted him to make a proposition. If I would wait a week he would make some arrangements. When I remained silent, registering a profound disbelief, he cut the time in half. I waited from Monday to Thursday, and upon my return to the archives I was escorted to a small room outfitted with a table and chair which was to be my private office for the next four years. (I hasten to explain that it did not take four years to complete my dissertation. I completed it the following year, but continued to do research there as long as I was teaching at St. Augustine's College.) The director also presented me with keys to the manuscript collection to avoid requiring the white assistants to deliver manuscripts to me. That arrangement lasted only two weeks, when the white researchers, protesting discrimination, demanded keys to the manuscript collection for themselves. Rather than comply with their demands, the director relieved me of my keys and ordered the assistants to serve me.

Nothing illustrated the vagaries of policies and practices of racial segregation better than libraries and archives. In Raleigh alone, there were three different policies: the state library had two tables in the stacks set aside for the regular use of Negro readers; the state supreme court library had no segregation; while, as we have seen, the archives faced the matter as it arose. In Alabama and Tennessee, the state archives did not segregate readers, while Louisiana had a strict policy of excluding would-be Negro readers altogether. In the summer of 1945 I was permitted by the Louisiana director of archives to use the manuscript collection since the library was closed in observance of the victory of the United States over governmental tyranny and racial bigotry in Germany and Japan. As I have said elsewhere, pursuing

Southern history was for me a strange career.

While World War II interrupted the careers of many young scholars, I experienced no such delay. At the same time, it raised in my mind the most profound questions about the sincerity of my country in fighting bigotry and tyranny abroad. And the answers to my questions shook my faith in the integrity of our country and its leaders. Being loath to fight with guns and grenades, in any case, I sought opportunities to serve in places where my training and skills could be utilized. When the United States entered the war in 1941 I had already received my doctorate. Since I knew that several whites who had not been able to obtain their advanced degrees had signed on as historians in the War Department, I made application there. I was literally rebuffed without the Department giving me any serious consideration. In Raleigh, where I was living at the time, the Navy sent out a desperate appeal for men to do office work, and the successful ones would be given the rank of petty officer. When I answered the appeal, the recruiter told me that I had all of the qualifications except color. I concluded that there was *no* emergency and told the recruiter how I felt. When my draft board ordered me to go to its staff physician for a blood test, I was not permitted to enter his office and was told to wait on a bench in the hall. When I refused and insisted to the draft board clerk that I receive decent treatment, she in turn insisted that the doctor see me forthwith, which he did. By this time, I concluded that the United States did not need me and did not deserve me. I spent the remainder of the war successfully outwitting my draft board, including taking a position at North Carolina College for Negroes whose president was on the draft appeal board. Each time I think of these incidents, even now I feel nothing but shame for my country not merely for what it did to me, but for what it did to the million black men and women who served in the armed forces under conditions of segregation and discrimination.

One had always to be mindful, moreover, that being a black scholar did not exempt one from the humiliations and indignities that a society with more than its share of bigots can heap upon a black person regardless of education or even station in life. This became painfully clear when I went to Brooklyn College in 1956 as chairman of a department of 52 white historians. There was much fanfare accompanying my appointment, including a front-page story with

picture in *The New York Times*. When I sought to purchase a home, however, not one of the 30-odd realtors offering homes in the vicinity of Brooklyn College would show their properties. Consequently, I had to seek showings by owners who themselves offered their homes for sale. I got a few showings including one that we very much liked, but I did not have sufficient funds to make the purchase. My insurance company had proudly advertised that it had \$50 million to lend to its policy holders who aspired to home ownership. My broker told me that the company would not make a loan to me because the house I wanted was several blocks beyond where blacks should live. I cancelled my insurance and, with the help of my lawyer who was white, tried to obtain a bank loan. I was turned down by every New York bank except the one in Brooklyn where my attorney's father had connections. As we finally moved in after the hassles of more than a year, I estimated that I could have written a long article, perhaps even a small book, in the time expended on the search for housing. The high cost of racial discrimination is not merely a claim of the so-called radical left. It is as real as the rebuffs, the indignities, or the discriminations that many black people suffer.

VI

Many years ago, when I was a fledgling historian, I decided that one way to make certain that the learning process would continue was to write different kinds of history, even as one remained in the same field. It was my opinion that one should write a monograph, a general work, a biography, a period piece, and edit some primary source and some work or works, perhaps by other authors, to promote an understanding of the field. I made no systematic effort to touch all the bases, as it were, but with the recent publication of my biography of George Washington Williams, I believe that I have touched them all. More recently, I have started the process all over again by doing research for a monograph on runaway slaves.

Another decision I made quite early was to explore new areas or fields, whenever possible, in order to maintain a lively, fresh approach to the teaching and writing of history. That is how I happened to get into Afro-American history in which I never had a formal course, and

which attracted a growing number of students of my generation and many more in later generations. It is remarkable how moving or even drifting into a field can affect one's entire life. More recently, I have become interested in women's history, and during the past winter I prepared and delivered three lectures under the general title of "Women, Blacks, and Equality, 1820–1988." I need not dwell on the fact that for me it was a very significant learning experience. Nor should it be necessary for me to assure you that despite the fact that I have learned much, I do not seek immortality by writing landmark essays and books in the field of women's history.

I have learned much from my colleagues both at home and abroad. The historical associations and other learned societies have instructed me at great length at their annual meetings, and five of them have given me an opportunity to teach and to lead by electing me as their president. Their journals have provided me with the most recent findings of scholars and they have graciously published some pieces of my own. Very early I learned that scholarship knows no national boundaries, and I have sought the friendship and collaboration of historians and scholars in many parts of the world. From the time that I taught at the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies in 1951, I have been a student and an advocate of the view that the exchange of ideas is more healthy and constructive than the exchange of bullets. This was especially true during my tenure on the Fulbright Board, as a member for seven years and as the chairman for three years. In such experiences one learns much about the common ground that the peoples of the world share. When we also learn that this country and the western world have no monopoly of goodness and truth or of skills and scholarship, we begin to appreciate the ingredients that are indispensable to making a better world. In a life of learning that is, perhaps, the greatest lesson of all.

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