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Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South
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the United States and South Africa by James T. Campbell
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Review Essay
Race, Ideology, and the Perils of Comparative History

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George M. Fredrickson, **Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). 390 pp.

James T. Campbell, **Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). 418 pp.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT in the United States and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa have long histories in which periods of despair were interspersed with periods when participants could confidently believe that justice would one day triumph. These histories point to the impossibility of finding a "true" path toward liberation even as they reveal the efforts of many to find such a path. Whether it be the principle of nonracial democracy, or the quest for an authentic voice for a set of people, or the vision of a distinct group raising itself by its own efforts to some apparently universal standard, or the subsumption of all such quests to class struggle, or the desire to reverse the personal devastation of enslavement or colonization via a cleansing violence—people have insisted that they had the map to find the road to liberation. It is the virtue of both books under review that in placing such claims under historical scrutiny, they reveal not only that one or another of these efforts came into focus at particular historical moments but that at any one time different visions were in contention and different strategies contributed simultaneously to people's sense of themselves as political actors.

George M. Fredrickson's *Black Liberation* and James T. Campbell's *Songs of Zion* take up these issues in quite different ways. The first book is a comparative study of liberation ideologies in South Africa and the United States across a long historical trajectory. The second is a case study, a detailed examination of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa, and it is not primarily a comparative analysis but a study of transcontinental linkages. These are two related but distinct approaches, which yield specific kinds of insights and lead authors and readers into particular sorts of difficulties.

Slavery and race are subjects into which comparative historians have sunk their teeth. As early as 1910, the Dutch scholar H. J. Nieboer classified forms of labor

around the world, arguing that coerced labor was most likely to emerge in conditions of "closed" resources, where restricted access to land proved insufficient for the owners of such resources to command control over labor. This macro-sociological historical comparison was taken up in the 1960s and debated as late as 1982.[1]

Meanwhile, Frank Tannenbaum took the comparative study of slavery in a different direction: his 1946 book *Slave and Citizen* was a work of moral discourse. He insisted that the "idea of the moral value of the individual" predated slavery and was responsible for its demise; this idea was "the chief heritage of the Western, the European world, and the very survival of European culture—perhaps of the European man—depends upon the survival of this doctrine." Written in the aftermath of Nazism and at a moment of escalating attention to race issues in American politics, his notion of what such moral values signified in Western history was a decidedly relative one. Here lay the question for social scientists. He argued that in Latin America, drawing on an Iberian heritage, the slave—even when exploited—retained an element of humanity, as subject of the crown and the church, whereas in English-speaking colonies, the slave's status as chattel was not crosscut by other imperatives. After abolition, the integration of the ex-slave into society and polity posed no fundamental problem in Latin America but a very basic one in the United States.[2] Tannenbaum's comparative history was intended to make citizens focus on this challenge.

One of the central features of Tannenbaum's influential argument was echoed subsequently: a willingness to draw direct inferences from the era of slavery to the present, leapfrogging over a messy history that lay in between. One sees this pattern in Stanley Elkins's noted book of 1959, *Slavery*, which also compared slavery in North America unfavorably with its South American versions, and one sees it later still in the debate during the late 1960s over the Moynihan Report, with its argument that allegedly pathological features of black families can be explained by the impact of enslavement on African-American males.[3] The particular resonance of the "legacy of slavery" argument and the polemical uses of comparison may be a result of the tensions of the Cold War era: in the shadow of Senator Joseph McCarthy, one could put forth a critique of American society—questioning many people's image of the United States as a democratic vanguard—while still locating its flaws in the past. Some of the most important critiques of this type of argument came from specialists on the other end of the comparison, who insisted on the importance of analyzing the specific forms of exploitation that developed in Cuba

[1] H. J. Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System: Ethnological Researches* (The Hague, 1910); Wilemina Kloosterboer, *Involuntary Labour since the Abolition of Slavery* (Leiden, 1960); Evsey D. Domar, "The Causes of Slavery or Serfdom: A Hypothesis," *Journal of Economic History* 30 (1970): 18–32; Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).

[2] Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York, 1946), viii.

[3] U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family, The Case for National Action*, by Daniel P. Moynihan (Washington, D.C., 1965). The attack on Moynihan had two elements: that he exaggerated the effects of slavery on family life and that he mistakenly absolved post-slavery American society from its role in shaping the constraints on family formation. Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York, 1976); Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago, 1959). For a useful reader on comparative slavery, see Laura Foner and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., *Slavery in the New World* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1969).

or Brazil and who feared that using them as a foil for North America's half-examined race problem would give rise to a "myth of racial democracy" that would be politically detrimental in South America itself.[4]

It is significant that a powerful work that located its critique squarely in the era of "freedom," W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*, did not resonate in the era of Tannenbaum and Elkins, and that C. Vann Woodward's *The Origins of the New South*, with its devastating portrayal of the modernizing pretensions of the South's ruling class, did not for some time spawn the rich historiography on the Reconstruction era that other works did on slavery. Woodward himself went on to write about the "burden" and the "irony" of southern history, a much less pointed way of looking at his subject than his earlier work.[5]

What made slavery a particularly attractive subject for comparative analysis was not simply the political uses to which such histories could be put but the seeming possibility of analyzing slave systems as discrete entities. But could one? Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery*—published two years before Tannenbaum's book—attempted to put the debate on a fundamentally different ground, which would only decades later become a locus for serious debate. For Williams, the point about slavery's history was not that it represented the peculiar institutions of various ruling classes but that the enormous expansion of enslavement and the exploitation of slave labor from the sixteenth century onward was part of the history of capitalism. Here was the alternative to comparative history: Williams wrote a singular history of an enormously complicated process. Indeed, Williams analyzed the end of slavery within the same framework as its rise, because, for him, free labor was not merely the absence of coercion but a system of exploitation in its own right.[6] Williams shared with Du Bois—and C. L. R. James as well—a vision that was global and political: colonization and enslavement, the Haitian revolution and southern Reconstruction, were part of the making of a new world and struggles over what that world would be; people in the current phases of that struggle could draw on its earlier manifestations, for they were part of the same history.[7]

This global perspective on the struggles over slavery was shunted aside and

[4] For a discussion of the political implications of the myth of racial democracy—and, equally important, of the politics of criticisms of that myth—see Emilia Viotti da Costa, *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories* (Chicago, 1985).

[5] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in America, 1860–1880* (Philadelphia, 1935); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge, La., 1951); C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge, 1960). As an outsider looking some years ago at studies of slavery and emancipation in the southern United States, I was struck by the way scholars looked at slavery in that region as a particular system of production and social relations but played down that perspective in regard to the era of emancipation. See my introduction to *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925* (New Haven, Conn., 1980). This is no longer true, and one of the most original efforts to change the way slavery and emancipation were talked about is Barbara J. Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, 1985).

[6] Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1944). For critiques, themselves some time in the making, see Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (London, 1975); and Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, 1977).

[7] C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London, 1938). I am indebted to Thomas C. Holt, "Slavery and Freedom in the Atlantic World: Re-thinking the Black Diaspora in an Analytic Framework," paper presented to the conference "Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora," Michigan State University, April 13–15, 1995.

largely ignored in the comparative approach of Tannenbaum and Elkins. It reappeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Eugene D. Genovese both criticized Williams's economistic arguments and took up his theme of the relationship of slavery to capitalism. For him, slavery did expand in relation to capitalism, but the consequences of that expansion were quite specific, the formation of distinct ruling classes, with distinct structures of exploitation and distinct ways of representing to themselves and the rest of the world the kind of society they were shaping. A global history was linked to a comparative history.[8] Genovese's formulations have themselves been criticized, notably by scholars who questioned whether the linkages of slave plantations to global mercantile systems could be as intense as they were without making the idea of a plantation social order self-contradictory.[9] Meanwhile, David Brion Davis persuasively argued that the relationship of capitalism and slavery was above all ideological, and herein could be understood the timing of the growth of antislavery at a time of high profitability from slave production.[10]

It is possible to see the variability and limitations of European states and capitalist enterprises from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries at the same time as one recognizes their power; the biggest difficulty comes in examining the range of oppositions to them.[11] Much of the "resistance" literature these days tries to find in the "local," the "hidden," the culturally "authentic," or the "social" movement the locus of opposition to forces that are seen as imperialist, capitalist, global.[12] Yet writers from James to Davis have brought out the equally global level at which the

[8] Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York, 1969).

[9] A similar argument could be made about politics, and it is particularly compelling when made over time: as slaveholders became caught up in the politics of independence and republicanism in eighteenth-century North America, it became increasingly necessary for them to define slaves as intrinsically different, as opposed, notably, to their being considered as part of a generalized hierarchy of subordination, in which white indentured workers would play a part. In the nineteenth century, the South's deep involvement in national politics made a plantation-centered, hierarchical conception of society contradictory, and racial slavery became increasingly racial precisely because the South (or Brazil, or Jamaica) could not constitute a discrete slave society, neatly comparable with others, set apart from integration into wider political and economic processes. See Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975); and James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York, 1990).

[10] David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975). For a debate over Davis's arguments and alternative conceptions of the relationship of ideology, capitalism, and antislavery, see Thomas Bender, ed., *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992). Such debate is particularly welcome because of the danger of "expansion of capitalism" arguments becoming reductionist, as they did in world-systems theory. On this point, see the essays of Frederick Cooper and Steve Stern in Cooper, *et al.*, *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison, Wis., 1993).

[11] Genovese's treatment of this theme is much less convincing than his earlier discussion of slavery; he assumes too neat a fit between global changes and rebellion in particular places. Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, La., 1979). For a more convincing general study, see Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776–1848* (London, 1988); and for a detailed analysis that puts antislavery ideology and politics in Great Britian and the political activities of black slaves and white planters in the same analytical framework, linking all this to struggles on plantations themselves, see Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore, Md., 1992).

[12] See the much-cited but badly flawed study of James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn., 1990).

transoceanic system of slavery was fought, in the name of ideologies of universal progress as much as of defense of community, by slaves in Saint Domingue as well as establishment ideologues in London. If parts of the struggle were subterranean, others were open, with leaders of the struggle against slavery engaging with, recasting, and eventually fundamentally changing the ideological constructs emerging from Europe; Du Bois and James—interpreting this history for later generations—saw themselves as still engaged in this process. Much the same could be said about the anti-apartheid movement—in which engagement with widely espoused ideals of liberal democracy, social justice, and pan-African solidarity coexisted for over a century with closely knit collective action in communities.

The scholar needs to understand the dynamics and interactions of movements against slavery, colonialism, or apartheid, and how they drew on whatever political and cultural resources were available to them. Both books under review make progress in such a task, Campbell's explicitly, Fredrickson's to a significant extent in spite of himself. The former study is about interaction, about a religious movement that confronted slavery and racism in two continents.[13] The latter remains in the tradition of comparative history that emerged from the study of slavery, and, while it moves somewhat beyond the limitations of the genre, it remains constrained by it. This essay explores the complementarity and the tensions between interactive and comparative approaches in two exemplary texts.

CAMPBELL BEGINS AT THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, with freed blacks in Philadelphia and Baltimore. Rev. Richard Allen and other religious leaders took from the dominant society not only a coherent set of religious beliefs but a striving for "respectability" in terms of the codes of decorum and morality as laid down by the middle and upper classes of their cities. Blacks, they argued, would melt the hearts even of slaveholders by the evidence of their uplift; by exhibiting discipline, dignity, and temperance, they would prove themselves worthy of a fuller citizenship. The founding of what became the African Methodist Episcopal church (AME) resulted from these leaders' belief that African Americans could become better Christians within an organization they controlled. Their action stemmed from despair at the conditions of racial inequality within the Methodist and other established churches as much as in the cities in which they lived, but what it meant to be a good Christian was not crucial to the schism. To be sure, the propriety of various forms of worship specific to people of African-American descent was eventually debated within the church, but overall the AME church was within the context of its time organizationally militant and culturally conservative. For all its limitations, the AME church forged a set of linkages among blacks in different

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[13] Other studies of interaction include J. Mutero Chirenje, *Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883–1916* (Baton Rouge, La., 1987); Robert R. Edgar, ed., *An African-American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J. Bunche, 28 September 1937–1 January 1938* (Athens, Ohio, 1992); and Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York, 1994). Robert Hills's work with the Marcus Garvey papers is putting both the United States and South Africa in a disaspora-wide context.

places—eventually including the South—thus providing the institutional and cultural basis for a "genuinely national African American community."[14]

Campbell tells of the ups and downs—during the era of abolitionism, reaction, the hopes of the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the tragedy of Reconstruction's failure—of AME sentiments toward "elevating" the race, especially the debate between those who sought to do so within American society and those who wanted to move the effort to Africa. The affinity that church leaders found on the African continent was rooted in the concept of race, as mediated through a history of enslavement, oppression, and discrimination. Africa's "pervasiveness in black intellectual and imaginative life" was part of the need for a focus against an "America" whose meanings were all too devastating.[15] African culture, as early African-American visitors portrayed it, was "benighted" and "barbarous"—but most often it was not talked about at all.[16] When AME members began to think seriously about Africans as people (at first in reference to Liberia), it would be to bring them enlightenment, Christianity, and civilization, a missionary effort directed at an African tabula rasa.

The originality of Campbell's research lies not so much in his explanation, revealing as it is, of how African Americans represented Africa to themselves but in his showing that the image of the African American meant as much to South Africans. In this direction, the reference was indeed a cultural one. African Americans stood for "advancement," proof that blacks could achieve something in their own right, as a possible force that could lead an assault on racism and oppression.

The splitting off of "Ethiopian" churches from missions in late nineteenth-century South Africa occurred independently of any American connection but reflected similar issues of power and autonomy.[17] The context, however, was different: it was only in the late nineteenth century that the autonomy of most African societies was fatally compromised and the power of white farmers and the mining industry strongly but unevenly imposed, while the fact that the overwhelming majority of the population was black gave a distinct set of possibilities to the future. The extent of interaction among people of color in cities like Cape Town or Port Elizabeth is a much-ignored part of the history of the Atlantic world.[18] The presence of West Indians and African Americans made linkages possible; they were cemented by an 1890s tour that an African-American singing group undertook and

[14] Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 54.

[15] Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 54.

[16] Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 83.

[17] Campbell quotes one white missionary on the subject of Africans within the mission: "They are at their best as assistants" (*Songs of Zion*, 114). The biblical reference for the term "Ethiopian" is to Psalm 68: "Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God" (119). There is a large literature on mission churches and independent church movements in South Africa. The pioneer study of the latter is Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London, 1948); while current scholarship on religion and colonization is best exemplified by Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, 1991–).

[18] For a study of an organization of African Americans and Africans in Port Elizabeth that followed a self-help ideology, engaged in trade, and owned property from at least 1893 to 1930, see Joyce F. Kirk, "Black Americans, Pan Africanism and Economic Uplift in South Africa in the Nineteenth Century," in Robert W. Harms, Joseph Miller, David Newbury, and Michele Wagner, *Paths to the Past: African Historical Essays in Honor of Jan Vansina* (Atlanta, Ga., 1994), 325–44. Keletso Atkins is currently working on a book on efforts of some African Americans to found settlements in Natal.

that found receptive attitudes among Christian Africans already forming a distinct musical tradition. These links led to visits to the United States by South African Christians, who were as taken with the idea of African Americans being "advanced" as AME leaders were with Africa as a place where they could lead a vast movement for racial uplift.[19]

The leaders of fledgling African churches in South Africa thus made contact with AME leaders in the United States, and they formalized their connection to the AME church in 1896. Soon, the AME church had sent a bishop to South Africa; missionaries went out regularly; local parishes collected funds; and South African students came to the AME-connected Wilberforce University. The connection caught the imagination of both African Americans and South Africans.

Campbell's analysis is illuminating, important, and in some ways courageous. His analysis of the belittling attitudes of AME leaders and missionaries toward the African societies they wished to transform forces readers to confront the dilemmas of persuading other people that their religious and cultural values have to be remade. Although such attitudes had their origins in the dominant ideologies of their era, Campbell's discussion of them within the AME does not allow the issue to be consigned to a distant past or to specifically racist thinking. Campbell discusses thoughtfully the implications of the AME version of the "civilizing mission" and shows that it was both a constraining and liberating approach. It was constraining because it widened rifts between Christian, Western-educated South Africans and the majority, whose religious beliefs, notions of status, and systems of knowledge pointed in different directions, as well as between the church leadership and the growing "proletarian" culture in cities and mine towns,[20] liberating because the institution itself gave its members a sense that they could act collectively and that their cause was shared within a transoceanic community of "Africans." South Africans training to be teachers and missionaries at the AME-connected Wilberforce University, or at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee, returned not only with valuable educational qualifications but with particular attitudes. Evolutionist, even Social Darwinist, ideas resonated within the Christian milieu of South Africa in the early twentieth century as much as in the cities of the United States in the late nineteenth.

It is no coincidence, Campbell argues, that many of the major leaders of the South African Native National Congress and later the African National Congress (ANC) during its formative years came out of an AME milieu.[21] The early nationalist A. B. Xuma was "thoroughly African-Americanized."[22] Campbell

[19] Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 128–31.

[20] The connections between the growth of an urban working class and cultural analysis, especially the connections of rural and urban culture, is beginning to get the attention it deserves. A collection of essays edited by Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone, *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness, 1870–1930* (London, 1982), helped to focus attention on this issue; it was the subject of the History Workshop Conference held in Johannesburg in 1993. Particularly useful studies focusing on the recent era are David Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (London, 1985); and Philip Mayer, ed., *Black Villagers in an Industrial Society: Anthropological Perspectives on Labour Migration in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1980).

[21] For a survey and analysis of literature related to these points, see Terence Ranger, "Religious Movements and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa," *African Studies Review* 29 (1986): 1–69.

[22] Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 275.

shows—and Fredrickson develops this theme further—that the AME vision of racial elevation became part of a complex political culture characterized by overlapping beliefs punctuated with sharp debates: ideas of nonracial democracy, the mythic sense of Africanness that also came with the Garvey movement in the 1920s or the (less influential in South Africa) intellectual, vanguardist pan-Africanism of Du Bois, populist ideologies in their different guises, and the urban proletarian radicalism that was springing up in the Johannesburg area in the 1920s.

The AME church, like Clements Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), recruited its members from a diverse population that defies simple sociological categorization, but both organizations did best in rural and urban situations of considerable flux, where people moved back and forth between quasi-autonomous, quasi-subordinate forms of production on white-owned farms (for instance, sharecropping) and wage labor in cities.[23] In a situation during the 1910s and 1920s of deteriorating access to land, increasing conflict on white-owned farms, and uncertainties about what wage labor and urban life would actually mean, the AME, ICU, ANC, and other organizations offered a repertoire of possible forms of affiliation, of protest strategies, of ways of articulating solidarity and asserting political voice. The very range of political possibilities kept before the imagination of rural and urban communities is a clue to the persistence of protest movements across considerable change and formidable adversity from the 1920s to the 1990s; the durability and eventual triumph of the ANC had as much to do with its flexibility and adaptability, its ability to tap the quest for dignity and respectability embodied within the AME, as the proletarian radicalism of Johannesburg and other cities. Fredrickson emphasizes this point as well.[24]

Campbell's innovative treatment of transatlantic connections stands out as a historically grounded approach to the study of what Paul Gilroy called the "Black Atlantic." Gilroy looked at the connections of thought across worlds brought together by a history of the slave trade, racial oppression, and colonization, arguing that within this Atlantic milieu people of African descent had a unique perspective from their experience of the underside of "modernity." He argued against separatist conceptions of Atlantic cultures, and instead for the intensity of engagement across continental and racial lines and the formative role of blacks' perspectives in shaping modernity. His book had two major gaps: a neglect of Africa itself in favor of a focus on interactions among people of African descent in the United States, West Indies, and Europe and a neglect of actual mechanisms of connection—who interacted with whom in what context—in favor of the reading of exemplary texts.[25] Yet Gilroy's overall perspective suggests numerous ways of filling his gaps, and this is precisely the sort of project Campbell undertakes. He is helping to turn the study of the Black Atlantic into a historical question. In so doing, he locates much of the force that was crucial to the emergence of ideologies of liberation in the linkages across the ocean and in the awareness—however mythic the view of African

[23] The leading study of this union is Helen Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924–1930* (New Haven, Conn., 1987).
[24] Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, 313.
[25] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).

ancestors and African-American saviors—of participation in a common system of oppression and a shared quest for a better future.

Some of Campbell's choices in presentation may make the book appear less profound than it in fact is: he lets his analysis emerge bit by bit from the narrative, and the first part of the book—on the AME church in the United States and the long debate on African emigration versus domestic reform—is less original than what comes next. But even for readers who know this side of the story, Campbell's perspective is clear and persuasive and the analysis of connections that is to come is well worth the wait.

SOME OF THE MOST USEFUL PARTS OF FREDRICKSON'S STUDY also discuss connections: of religious movements, the Garveyite movement, the pan-Africanism of Du Bois. But Fredrickson specifically insists that his goal is comparative, and interaction is secondary to him. Taken along with his earlier book, *White Supremacy* (1981), the current volume is part of the mainstream of comparative history writing that grew out of the slavery literature.[26]

The two volumes need to be seen together. They are an uneasy pair. *White Supremacy* and *Black Liberation* reproduce in their separate covers the segregation that forms much of their subject. Fredrickson's view of white supremacy is indeed very white.[27] To analyze an ideology of racial superiority without taking seriously the agency of black people—who often confounded certain notions of hierarchy by their actions as slaves or simple views of the virtues of free labor ideology by their insistence on integrating labor and family in their own ways—gives only a partial view.[28]

The second book is better in this regard, drawing on the first volume and analyzing mobilization and collective action among blacks in relation to a changing

[26] Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, 10; George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York, 1981).

[27] Fredrickson is right that "from the bottom up" studies should claim no special privilege, and he considers his second volume a "history from the top of the bottom up *and* down"—that is, a focus on black leaders' relations with the state, with dominant social groups, and with the people they were trying to speak for and mobilize (*Black Liberation*, 7). Fredrickson also is clear that his goal is to write a history of ideology, not a social history, but he argues that ideology must be seen in its social context (8). The question is whether he has accomplished this goal, and whether his separate volumes allow him to come to grips with the obvious fact that top and bottom exist only in relation to each other.

[28] Fredrickson's first book did an admirable job of avoiding primordialist conceptions of race, insisting that racial ideologies in both the United States and South Africa were constructed not out of initial perceptions of black people but out of the process of constructing slavery itself. But his treatment of the more recent past is less dynamic: he ends up close to the legacy of slavery argument. In South Africa, most notably, slavery was confined to one region (and most slaves were of Asian origin, most slaveowners Afrikaners), whereas the striking break in the organization of racially defined oppression occurred from the 1880s to 1910 in a different region, among English-speaking as much as Afrikaans-speaking capitalists, and under a British state, and the kinds of controls that eventually became apartheid were directed at peasants rather than ex-slaves. Fredrickson's first book appeared at a time when a compelling literature on the later period was just emerging, and he did not do it justice, taking a few pot shots at crude Marxist interpretations that reduce race to class but not taking cognizance of the more subtle arguments about South African capitalism that were then appearing. For detailed critiques of the earlier book, see Frederick Cooper, "White Supremacy in South Africa and the United States," *Radical History Review* 28–30 (1984): 393–405; and Shula Marks, "White Supremacy: A Review Article," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1987): 385–97.

structure of power in South Africa and the United States. But *Black Liberation* goes lame just when the story should be the most dramatic, especially for a book being read two years after South Africa was actually "liberated." Fredrickson's "whites" have fallen far enough into the background that the reader is left wondering why they were so unable in the end to counter the movements they faced. What collapsed in South Africa in 1994 was indeed white supremacy. Fredrickson's effort would have been more convincing had he, at a minimum, circled back to explore the vulnerabilities of the ideology whose strength he had earlier portrayed or, better still, woven together the themes of his two volumes.

As a comparative study, Fredrickson's two books fall between two stools: not systematic enough to isolate variables and prove causal relationships (something he does not claim to do) but insufficiently rich as a narrative to suggest how, over time, the causal factors impinging on South Africa and the United States worked themselves out. Models of historical processes are hard to construct, for there is no such thing as a truly independent variable, given that most basic social factors interact and change over time. Nieboer's "open resources" or Tannenbaum's different versions of Christianity did not stay put but themselves changed fundamentally during the years that slavery developed in different regions. Fredrickson recognizes and avoids this sort of pitfall, and it is probably just as well that he does not attempt to come up with a final answer to why white supremacy emerged or collapsed or with a crucial factor that separates the trajectories of the United States and South Africa. The trouble is rather the weakness of his alternative notion of comparison, how much is missing from his intertwined narratives.

Much of the problem is, once again, the binary construction of his texts: two books on half a topic each do not make a whole. The other difficulty is a tendency to treat ideologies as well as the practices of political movements as abstracted from experience. Such an abstracting process is partly a necessary price of comparison, but here it is a high price for what one gets.[29] Take his discussion of boycotts—a tactic of liberation movements found in both South Africa and the United States. Fredrickson notes this shared tactic, and this in itself is useful. But in neither Montgomery nor the Johannesburg suburbs does he tell us what boycotts meant to those involved.[30] The South African bus boycotts of the 1950s—massive movements protesting arbitrary increases in bus fares but, beneath that, protests over the very nature of work and residence—conveyed apartheid's powerful effects on gender and family relations. A bus carried a particular meaning because Africans lived in designated areas miles from where they worked; women who, as thousands did, worked as house servants in white homes could not have their children with them, so they were linked via the bus to their very existence as mothers; the bifurcated spaces in which men worked and lived forced them onto buses for hours, without giving them sufficient wages to afford alternatives. The people who rode the buses were sometimes legally resident in the townships they lived in, sometimes illegally

[29] Larry Griffin has argued for a historical sociology based on narrative, in which one tries at each stage of analysis to show just what one is abstracting, to make clear what is left out as one takes a story and tries to distill what it is in the specific story that can be related to other stories. See Griffin, "Narrative, Event Structure Analysis, and Causal Interpretation in Historical Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1993): 1094–1133.

[30] Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, 254, 270.

located there, vulnerable to police harassment and subject to deportation (a different bus) to hopelessly impoverished rural areas.[31] One can thus talk about "the boycott" as a tactic of liberation movements in both Montgomery and Johannesburg, but what one loses in a discussion so truncated is most of the human drama of these events.

Similarly, it is perfectly reasonable—and in certain respects quite illuminating—to compare the roles of the Communist Party in the two countries. But when a discussion of the sharecroppers' union in Alabama is subsumed under such a comparison—at the expense of framing the issue around the historical situation of sharecroppers, the range of possibilities they faced, and the place of the party within the constellation—much is lost.[32] So, too, Fredrickson's comparison constricts rather than enhances the history of the growing geographic mobility of South African workers in the 1940s, the wave of organizing and strikes after the war, and the significant—but hardly dominant—role of the party in postwar organizing and politics.

The framing problem is intrinsic to the very structure of *Black Liberation*, chapters that turn a lock-step comparison into a wooden periodization that undermines Fredrickson's most useful contribution, his documentation of debates and interactions among different ideological tendencies. The period 1928–1948 is framed by a discussion of communism, 1940–1965 by nonviolence, issues well worth examining comparatively but not effective as a framework for periodization. One might contrast this with the approach of William Beinart and Colin Bundy, who point to the confluence of a wide range of forms of contestation within a single district of Cape Province (Herschel) in a particular time period: church organizations with ideologies of Christian brotherhood, ANC-type arguments for liberal democracy, Garveyism, other forms of populism, arguments for the reinvigoration of indigenous chieftaincies, and women's boycott movements—all in the context of land alienation and labor migration.[33]

Then the organization of Fredrickson's book breaks down: the 1980s and 1990s in South Africa are discussed in a chapter on Black Consciousness and Black Power, whose importance in these periods is at best secondary. Fredrickson admits he is not giving a "full analysis" of the "tumultuous 1980s" but claims to be providing a "brief summary of the general pattern of black resistance and ideological development" so as to "convey a sense of the fate of Black Consciousness." The decision to slight the 1980s and 1990s means the book cannot possibly do justice to its title,

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[31] Boycotts are addressed in the context of a general discussion of politics in Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (London, 1983). See also Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, eds., *The Politics of Race, Class, and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London, 1987). For several perspectives on the most famous of American boycotts, see David J. Garrow, ed., *Walking City: The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955–1956* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1989).

[32] Fredrickson draws on Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1990), but Kelley, without Fredrickson's self-imposed constraints, integrates a discussion of communism more fully into the political and social history of Alabama.

[33] William Beinart and Colin Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890–1930* (London, 1987), particularly their chapter on Herschel. The intersection of conflicting currents in the course of a lifetime emerges from Charles Van Onselen, *The Seed Is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894–1985* (New York, 1996), a book that could profitably be read alongside Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (New York, 1975).

and the "brief summary" is distorted by trying to fit it into the wrong mold, as indeed much in the 1970s did not fit the Black Consciousness straitjacket. The Durban strikes of 1973 that brought African workers to the center of South African politics get half of one sentence; the endemic labor strife of the 1970s that led to attempts by the government to legitimize and control unions in 1979—and that in turn created an opening for overt activism eagerly and effectively seized by South African trade unions, setting off a dynamic process ending in the unbanning of the ANC—is not mentioned at all.[34]

Nor is the more sinister side of the 1980s discussed. Inkatha—the Zulu organization now known to have been linked to the security forces and an instigator of violence in Natal and the Johannesburg suburbs, as well as a key actor in the politics of the 1990s—is not mentioned, and its leader, Gatsha Buthelezi, gets one dazzlingly misleading label, as one of a group of "reformist ethnic politicians." Youth violence in the 1980s—crucial to the regime's declaration of a state of emergency and its loss of confidence in its ability to exercise control—is not mentioned (questions of violence and nonviolence having been relegated to a previous chapter and to the 1950s and early 1960s), and the awkward question of how to relate the principled views of the ANC leadership to the thuggish violence of the ANC-connected "comrades" does not come up.[35]

Fredrickson's comparative approach, for all its misframings and omissions, nonetheless has rewards to offer. The most important is typological. Although the categories in which Fredrickson places liberation ideologies become confining as he deploys them comparatively and chronologically, the categories themselves are useful: Black Christianity, the vanguardist approach of black elites, Pan-Africanism, Black Populism, Communism and Black Freedom struggles, Nonviolence, Black Power, and Black Consciousness. Throughout the text, Fredrickson is able to show that activists were choosing from a repertoire of approaches, depending on their different readings of what constituted oppression, different ways of engaging with and redeploying aspects of dominant ideologies, and different uses of notions of solidarity and self-help. It is not simply showing the range of possibilities that is important but, even more so, Fredrickson's evidence that different approaches were debated, that choices were being made.[36]

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[34] For an impressive comparative study that focuses on such issues, see Gay W. Seidman, *Manufacturing Militance: Workers' Movements in Brazil and South Africa, 1970–1985* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994). Although the events cited here were much discussed in the press, publications like *South African Labour Bulletin*, and political science literature—and were the subject of almost endless discussion among activists and concerned scholars at the time—the reader can now turn to a growing literature on politics in the 1980s, particularly on the events leading up to the 1994 elections. See Tom Lodge, *et al., All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (New York, 1991); Andrew Reynolds, ed., *Election '94 South Africa: The Campaigns, Results and Future Prospects* (New York, 1994); Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow Is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Road to Change* (1994; New York, 1995); Steven Friedman and Doreen Atkinson, eds., *The Small Miracle: South Africa's Negotiated Settlement*, published as *South African Review* no. 7 (Randburg, 1994); R. W. Johnson and Lawrence Schlemmer, eds., *Launching Democracy in South Africa: The First Open Election, April 1994* (New Haven, Conn., 1995). A general history that includes a good discussion of the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s is William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford, 1994).

[35] Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, 300. One attempt to come to grips with the issue of violence is a special issue of *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 3 (1992), particularly the introduction by William Beinart, "Political and Collective Violence in Southern African Historiography," 473–86.

[36] Fredrickson makes good use of Aldon D. Morris's concept of "local movement center," by which

The comparative endeavor is useful in another, simpler way: the sections of *Black Liberation* on South Africa are likely to be particularly suggestive to Americanists, the sections on the United States to Africanists, above all of hypotheses worth pursuing in their respective areas. Thus if the conclusion to each chapter—with its list of similarities and differences—makes for a somewhat repetitive and mechanical organization, point by point his continual efforts at comparison still provide food for further thought and research. The same is true of many individual discussions: for example, Fredrickson's analysis of the relationship of liberal theory to the question of voting rights—arguing that blacks' struggles for the right to vote radically expanded liberal theory, turning the franchise from a much-debated question over exactly who could and who could not vote into an accepted right for all within American political culture. All this is a reminder of how interesting and important the study of political ideology is.

In the end, it is not clear that Fredrickson's two intertwined tales are told better because they are told together. Fredrickson has not tied political ideology and political mobilization to fundamental questions about African daily life—about labor, family, and community. Occasionally, he shows appreciation of the vitality of urban social and political processes (for example, in the 1920s), but he misses the centrality of such themes to the 1940s, 1970s, and 1980s and, by subsuming his discussion of urban politics in the United States to topics like Black Power, fails to get at the overall milieu in which that politics evolved and the range of political possibilities and constraints to which urban situations, in North or South, gave rise. The rural United States receives some attention, but rural South Africa virtually none: Fredrickson's focus on elite ideology would have profited from at least considering the possibility of there being "organic intellectuals" within African communities, and when he writes in both cases of the mediation between "modernist beliefs" and "traditional or folk culture," the Africanist reader can only wonder what he is writing about.[37] The problem is not just that African social structure was fundamentally different from anything found in the New World but that state policy had ossified and "retraditionalized" such structures into a rigid notion of ethnicity underscored by the powerful Department of Native Affairs and eventually "homeland" governments, while political entrepreneurs, like Gatsha Buthelezi, crafted political movements and political ideologies out of such historical openings.[38] Failing to come to grips with these phenomena not only narrows the

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Morris focuses on the institutional strength within communities (which he calls the "indigenous base") and political and ideological connections across the region. Morris is trying to explain how the movement could be both locally rooted and widespread. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, 1984).

[37] The concept of "organic intellectual" is used in relation to rural societies in another part of Africa by Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison, Wis., 1990). There is no lack of material to draw on, for example, Beinart; Bundy, *Hidden Struggles*; and Bradford, *Taste of Freedom*.

[38] On the grid of race and tribe in the apparatus of domination in South Africa, see Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid 1948–1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford, 1991); Philip Bonner, Peter Delius, and Deborah Posel, eds., *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935–1962* (Johannesburg, 1993); Saul Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919–36* (Houndmills, Eng., 1989); Adam Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford, 1990); Ivan Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa* (Berkeley, forthcoming).

range of political ideology discussed but leaves what discussion there is removed from the give-and-take of actual politics.

Fredrickson has made his task more difficult for himself by setting out to write Comparative History, rather than a history that compares. He forces himself into a chronological framework that does not work, that misses or misframes key elements within each side of his comparison. He underplays discussions of transatlantic interaction or political theory, where he seems on the verge of transcending his book's limitations. He has made errors of execution, but the more basic mistake is in choosing to compare entire histories—which do not stay still long enough for him to make precise comparisons. As with writing on slavery in the Americas, the history of white supremacy and black liberation in South Africa and the United States is intrinsically interesting not because it consists of two discrete "cases" but because it is part of an immensely complicated tale of global transformation and struggle.

However, there are risks of overemphasizing connectedness, of sweeping the particular under the global, of losing track of the importance of human agency and geographic specificity, of mistaking ideal types for historical realities. Holding apparently similar instances up against each other—seeing how different contexts, different actions by individuals and groups, different ways in which conflicts played out—can give a deeper appreciation of both the rootedness of history in place and time and the connections of places and times across the world. Fredrickson's most useful insights come not from the book as a whole but along the way, where particular moments or particular events are illuminated by juxtaposition. Comparison suggests the multiple possibilities, pathways, and dead ends that exist within a broader history. A global, interactive approach to history needs comparison, and comparison needs interactive and global analysis.

Like James, Williams, and Du Bois—and Tannenbaum as well—Fredrickson turns a tale of oppression and liberation into a dialogue with his readers on moral issues. But where Tannenbaum in 1946 used history and comparison to open up a moral perspective on race that even a liberal academic community was reluctant to face, fifty years later Fredrickson writes in the tone of established verities. *White Supremacy* and *Black Liberation* both end with neo-abolitionist sermons. In the former book, he preached to whites, telling them that "one of the more general lessons of history" is that the groups can "transcend the past"; we—we whites—can overcome, he was saying, but what we need to overcome is indeed the past.[39] In the second book, whites are told, "The lesson for the United States might be that a larger number of Euro-Americans need to earn the respect of their African-American fellow citizens by showing through their actions that they are prepared to make major sacrifices for racial justice." Then he lectures "the black freedom movement" that it should "regain or reemphasize a broadly inclusive and humane vision of a society that is multi-cultural but nonetheless unified in its basic commitment of democracy and human rights."[40] One can hardly disagree with calls for sacrifice, justice, inclusiveness, and mutual acceptance, but by placing himself in the pulpit Fredrickson loses sight of who is in and who is not in the congregations— not least that he assumes them to be segregated. And what is hardest to see from

[39] Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 281.
[40] Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, 318, 323.

the pulpit is the preacher himself, to see the insights and the blind spots around the sermonizing, neo-abolitionist rhetoric.

THE ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT since the 1960s has indeed had many of the trappings of the antislavery movement of the early nineteenth century, including the widespread desire of neo-abolitionists to define evil as outside the system in which the critics lived—in a past that one can by an effort of will repudiate or on the other side of a spatial divide, in the South or the West Indies. Such tendencies in both instances were countered by other voices willing to take the critique closer to home. But reexamining both movements over long periods of time brings up a more positive parallel: both convinced a large number of people—themselves privileged within the dominant racial referents of their times—that something most members of their communities had once thought to be normal was in fact wrong. The convincing occurred across space as well as over time; it was a question of a shift in a discourse, which, while hardly universal, was at least not located within a single "community." This was not a matter of generalized benevolence—precise phenomena were defined as evil and others implicitly or explicitly exonerated of any such taint—and these boundaries were hardly independent of changing patterns of class power or economic interest. In the long struggles against slavery, colonial rule, and apartheid, minds were changed—and changed across lines of citizenship, religion, and economic interest—but the imaginative possibilities and constraints that lay beyond those condemned forms of power did not emerge so clearly.

A thoughtful literature discusses antislavery movements in such terms—moving well beyond the limits of the comparative slavery literature—and, one day, similar constructive debates will occur about anticolonial and anti-apartheid movements.[41] Campbell's contribution to this effort is significant because he talks in transoceanic terms about a movement of thought not among a white elite but among leaders of fledgling black communities, whose reference points were just as global as those of the Wilberforces or Garrisons.

His book is a step toward understanding the global, national, regional, and local interconnections that made apartheid an issue in Berkeley as well as Soweto, that disrupted the smugness of privileged whites in Johannesburg and made liberal whites in the United States uncomfortable with their investments in multinationals doing business in South Africa, that gave African and other ex-colonial leaders a basis for exposing at the United Nations or in meetings of heads of state in the British Commonwealth the limits of democracy, self-determination, and nonracialism within Western ideologies. The international networks that grew up around the issues of slavery or apartheid, the debates over "universal" human rights that

[41] The limits of anti-apartheid movements are noted in a revealing way by James Ferguson, who points out that poverty in South Africa before 1994 posed a political problem of global salience, but poverty in Lesotho, because it was a sovereign country, was merely a problem for experts in famine relief. By focusing on a defining characteristic of evil, such as violence and the deprivation of personal liberty in the case of slavery, or denial of sovereignty to black South Africans, the more ambiguous inequalities of wealth and power are elided even as an evil is denounced. Ferguson, "Paradoxes of Sovereignty and Independence: 'Real' and 'Pseudo-' Nation-States and the De-politicization of Poverty," in *Siting Culture*, Kirstin Hastrup and Karen Fog Olwig, eds. (Oslo, forthcoming).

followed World War II, and the relationship of all such discussions to the exercise of global power present interesting and difficult topics for historians to explore.[42] A group of black preachers, as Campbell demonstrates, played a part in creating transnational connections, and their own discussions over what "Africa" or "civilization" meant to their congregations helped to define the subjects of long-distance debate.

One can circle back to the question that started Fredrickson's original project and look at the demise of white supremacy in relation to black liberation. The vulnerability of South Africa's white elite lay in the very global terms in which they articulated their dominance. South African whites in the latter half of the twentieth century—and those of Alabama as well—did not simply want to profit from the exploitation of black labor, they wanted to live a life that made sense to them. Much has been written about the particular cultural norms around the peculiar institutions of southern planters and Afrikaner farmers. Perhaps too much. South African whites—English as much as Afrikaans-speaking—long saw themselves as representatives of Christianity and civilization, linked by culture and values as much as skin color to the "Western world." Such perceptions were crucial to political and moral discourse among them, and also to daily life, living as they did in an interconnected world and in the twentieth century, a world whose media were increasingly saturated with images of bourgeois life, with a sense of normality shared with similarly situated people across much of the planet. Yet it was the opposition movements in South Africa that eventually made the more convincing case in international media that their espousal of democracy and nonracialism truly represented what Europe and America stood for (however tendentious a reading of history this was). International boycotts, years of political demonstrations in South Africa, endless commentaries (however smug they might have seemed one by one) about the evils of racism, and even the ugliest forms of violence of the 1980s made it clear that South African whites could not simply go on with their "civilization" and their "bourgeois" lives. The white elites of Baton Rouge and Montgomery had learned a similar lesson: their cultural, political, and moral reference points were not self-contained. The figures discussed in Fredrickson's book, from Du Bois to Marcus Garvey to Martin Luther King—as much as A. J. Luthuli and Nelson Mandela—did much to change the discourse of white elites in international circles, by the force of their words and their courageous examples, by the skill with which they mobilized populations, by the way they pointed to possible futures without mass violence and the daily drama of oppression and struggle.

That boundaries of the normal and the morally acceptable can change does not mean that the most basic issues get resolved in ideological debate, let alone political practice. Fredrickson reminds his readers that the economic and social concomitants of black liberation remain elusive in the United States three decades after the civil rights movement won its most impressive triumphs.[43] In recent times, it has seemed even less clear than before what forms of social and cultural change are desirable.

[42] For another perspective, see Kathryn Sikkink, "Human Rights, Principled Issue-Networks, and Sovereignty in Latin America," *International Organization* 47 (1993): 411–41.

[43] Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, 319–21.

Campbell's preachers were very much involved in debates over the last type of issue, and what they said among themselves does not simply fall into condemnation of an easily externalized evil whose end we can all now applaud. Campbell describes the evolutionist vision of Africa that the AME shared with the very mission organizations it sought to separate from with a touch of irony but without being either condemnatory or apologetic. He thus leaves his readers not with a sermon but with a question, about the constraints of imagination in specific historical and political contexts. Must a self-conscious program of "improvement"—whether seen in terms of "civilization" in the 1890s or "development" in the 1990s—entail belittling and condescending ideas toward those in need of help? Or must respect for the histories and values of different groups (however ambiguously defined) render impossible the radical transformations sought by the Du Boises or the Mandelas, as much as the Richard Allens? Indeed, starkly to reverse the prejudices of the AME leaders—to assume that there is a Tswana or a Zulu or a Xhosa way of doing things that should continue within its own terms—is not only to leave questions of poverty and ill-health beyond the reach of principled debate but also to reproduce the apartheid system of treating cultural distinctiveness as absolute and immutable. If neither extreme represents a defensible position, where and how to balance conflicting values becomes even more difficult to think through. A crucial question remains after reading two books that bring out the range of political ideas emerging in long struggles for racial justice and the vigor of discussions of strategies and principles: who will be included in such debates?

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