GENERAL EDITOR'S FOREWORD

History without historiography is a contradiction in terms. No historian writes in isolation from the work of his or her predecessors, nor can the historian stand aloof from the insistent pressures, priorities and demands of the ever-changing present. Though historians address the past as their subject they always do so in ways that are shaped – consciously or unconsciously as the case may be – by the society and systems of their own day, and they communicate their findings in ways that are specifically intelligible and relevant to a reading public consisting of their own contemporaries. For these reasons the study of history is concerned not with dead facts and sterile, permanent verdicts but with highly charged dialogues, disagreements and controversies among its presenters, and with the changing methodologies and discourse of the subject over time. *Issues in Historiography* is a series designed to address such matters by means of case studies.

Black civil rights, sidelined for so long despite the emancipation of slaves after the Civil War, became in due course a burning issue in American society and politics, with figures such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X occupying centre stage in the nation's affairs. Not surprisingly the politics of the present from the 1950s have redirected attention to a neglected and shameful dimension of the national past and led to bold and insistent claims for integrating what had been a largely separate compartment of study, pursued by a minority of historians, into the mainstream picture of America's past. Feminism also played its part in the same process. Dr Verney's book on the historiography of Black civil rights in America, though not the first in the field, is distinctively different from its predecessors and offers a telling overview of the anger, turmoils and crusades associated with it. He charts a clear course through the different stages of debate from the 1890s to the present day, placing individual historians such as W. E. B. Du Bois, John Hope Franklin, August Meier and Howard Zinn within the changing context of the times in which they lived and within the changing contours of historical methodology and interpretation. Thus we see displayed here the varied

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impact of the Ku Klux Klan, the Cold War, McCarthyism and the Vietnam War on this field of study and the different questions and approaches – social, political, cultural, and gendered – to the history of Black civil rights which have been advanced and argued over. This book offers a classic case study in ‘history from below’ and, more generally, in national redefinition. Generations of activist historians – white as well as black – dedicated to a cause form the subject matter of this volume.

R. C. Richardson
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