PREFACE

For many years students looking for an analytical narrative history of black life in the United States were largely restricted in choice to John Hope Franklin's 1947 account *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*. A seminal study by a leading African American scholar, the outstanding merit of this work is attested to by the fact that at the end of the twentieth century it had passed through seven editions and still remained in print.¹ Less encouragingly, Franklin dominated the field for so long not just by virtue of his considerable scholarly ability but also, in part, because of a near total lack of serious competition.

Fortunately, times have changed. Readers in search of a one-volume history of the African American experience in the twentieth century are now able to choose from a variety of clear, concise and authoritative studies.² This notwithstanding, gaps in the academic literature still remain. In particular, despite an extensive, exponentially expanding, number of specialist studies and scholarly monographs, there is no one work that provides teachers, students and general readers with a succinct historiographical introduction to the subject, explaining how, why, and in what ways, the thoughts and ideas of successive generations of historians of black civil rights have changed over time. It is this need that this volume in the *Issues in Historiography* series seeks to address, examining the study of the principal developments and events in African American history from the 1890s through to the first years of the twenty-first century.³ It should, however, be noted that the substantial body of academic literature on the earlier slavery, Civil War and Reconstruction eras is beyond the scope of this work. A succinct and scholarly analysis of the rich, complex and diverse historiography on these periods can instead be found in Hugh Tulloch's excellent study *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*.⁴

At the same time the still broad scope of the period under consideration has also required some difficult editorial decisions. The scholarly contributions of many well-researched studies are mentioned only briefly and, in some instances, not at all. This is

both intentional and unavoidable. Intentional, because the objective of this study is to assess in broad terms the changing ways that scholars have interpreted issues in African American history, not to provide an individual review of every serious publication on black life in twentieth-century America. Unavoidable, because the sheer volume of works in this category makes any such task impossible. Similarly, the never-ending proliferation of fresh, seminal and insightful studies creates an insuperable problem of topicality in respect to keeping up with the latest developments. Readers should thus be aware that, with occasional exceptions, this book does not include works published after the end of January 2005.

On-line materials, e-publications, and the rapidly growing number of internet websites on African American history are also beyond the scope of this work. However, for readers seeking information on such sources a good recent guide is Abdul Alkalimat and Elaine Westbrooks, *African American History and Culture on the Web* (2003).⁵

Notes

- 1 John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York, 1947).
- 2 For example, John White, *Black Leadership in America, 1895–1968* (London, 1991); William T. Martin Riches, *The Civil Rights Movement: Struggle and Resistance* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1997); Robert Cook, *Sweet Land of Liberty? The African American Struggle for Civil Rights in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1998); Vivian Saunders, *Race Relations in the USA since 1900* (London, 2000); Kevern Verney, *Black Civil Rights in America* (London, 2000); Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890–2000* (New York, 2001).
- 3 The best book-length studies from a historiographical perspective are Darlene Clark Hine (ed.), *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present and Future* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1986) and August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915–1980* (Urbana, Illinois, 1986). However, neither of these works seeks to provide a sustained, systematic, discussion of all the major topics and subject areas in twentieth-century African American history. Hine's study, which grew out of a 1983 conference on 'The Study and Teaching of Afro-American History' sponsored by the American Historical Association, takes the form of a collection of essays by different scholars on selected themes, such as 'slavery studies', 'emancipation studies', 'urban studies' and 'black history and the community'. Meier and Rudwick engage in a general philosophical overview of the changing attitudes of the American historical profession in the twentieth

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century towards the study of black history.

- 4 Hugh Tulloch, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era* (Manchester, 1999).
- 5 Abdul Alkalimat and Elaine Westbrooks, *African American History and Culture on the Web* (Wilmington, Delaware, 2003).