

Ninth Edition



# American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom

Hanes Walton, Jr., Robert C. Smith, and Sherri L. Wallace



“In the ninth edition of *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom*, Professors Robert C. Smith and Sherri L. Wallace have updated the best African American politics book in the nation. This volume contains a wealth of information about the continuing quest of African American candidates and voters for economic and political power. By writing such a fine book, the authors have continued to further the legacy of the ‘Dean of Black Politics’—the late Professor Hanes Walton, Jr.”

**Sharon D. Wright Austin**, *Professor of Political Science,  
The University of Florida*

“Characterizing it as an undergraduate textbook undersells what *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* truly is. The authors demonstrate in painstaking detail that U.S. politics doesn’t make sense without explicitly considering race. Appreciating freedom means coming to grips with the reality that so many were initially denied it and died fighting for it. The nation progresses—often begrudgingly—towards its ideal of Democracy because of these Freedom Struggles. Such efforts, while central to Black politics, have improved the conditions of every American.”

**Ray Block, Jr.**, *Associate Professor, Department of African American  
Studies, The Pennsylvania State University*

“The ninth edition of *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* provides timely updates to this seminal introductory Black Politics textbook. The authors expand on their critical assessments of social movements and presidential politics to explore the recent expansion of the BLM (Black Lives Matter) movement, as well as policies of the Trump administration leading up to the 2020 presidential election.”

**Diarra O. Robertson**, *Associate Professor of Government,  
Bowie State University*

“*American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* is the most comprehensive book on African American politics in the political science discipline. It situates White supremacy and institutional racism as central to American exceptionalism and illustrates how African Americans have contested the boundaries of the U.S. constitutional process and political institutions. The book further provides a layered portrait—from the perspective of African American lawmakers, leaders, activists, policymakers, and opinion leaders—of the U.S. political culture, federalism, media and politics, and foreign policy.”

**Sekou Franklin**, *Associate Professor, Middle Tennessee State University*

“Without question, *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* is the premier textbook in the field of Black Politics. The ninth edition shines in multiple ways. It provides readers with a firm grounding in how today’s struggles against racial inequality—from socioeconomic

exclusion, health disparities, police- and state-sanctioned antiblack violence, limited political empowerment, and inequities in wealth accumulation—are rooted squarely in America’s failure to reconcile its exclusionary practices with its inclusionary ideals. The updated chapters on black representation in Congress, on the nationwide protests denouncing police brutality, and on the post-Obama electoral landscape are invaluable in that regard. Although the chapters showcase the continuity of black agitation for equality, the chapters also highlight the ways in which multiracial coalitions can achieve long-lasting equality through structural reforms and attitudinal changes.”

**Tyson King-Meadows**, *Associate Professor of Political Science,  
University of Maryland Baltimore County*

“The ninth edition of *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* is the most definitive account of African American Politics that exists in the field. It should be required reading for anyone interested in understanding the gap between the promise and the practice of American democracy. The authors provide an indictment of the tenuous path toward freedom, while asserting the agency and commitment of those challenging exclusion. The treatment of longstanding patterns with more contemporary developments—such as the coronavirus pandemic—is rich, nuanced, instructive, and powerful. Smith and Wallace help provide a greater understanding of American Politics by centering the importance of African American Politics.”

**Khalilah L. Brown-Dean**, *Associate Professor of  
Political Science, Quinnipiac University*

“In a strikingly straight-forward fashion, this timely and updated ninth edition of *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* provides cutting-edge and comprehensive coverage along with detailed analysis of the institutions and processes of government and politics in the United States from the vantage point of America’s Black citizens. The focus and nature of African American political participation is a centerpiece of this textbook, which is now the gold standard for the study of African American politics. It boldly delves into the unvarnished reality of the African American political experience, thus yielding an essential work for serious students, policymakers, and practitioners. In today’s climate of protest and participation this now classic work rises to the occasion with the provision of historical precision, clarity, and consequential guidance with regard to the American polity and the global context within which African American politics operates.”

**Michael Clemons**, *Professor, Political Science and African  
American Studies, Old Dominion University*

# **American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom**

This dynamic and comprehensive text from nationally renowned scholars continues to demonstrate the profound influence African Americans have had—and continue to have—on American politics. Using two interrelated themes—the idea of universal freedom and the concept of minority–majority coalitions—the text demonstrates how the presence of Africans in the United States affected the founding of the Republic and its political institutions and processes. The authors show that through the quest for their own freedom in the United States, African Americans have universalized and expanded the freedoms of all Americans.

## **New to the Ninth Edition**

- Updated sections on intersectionality, dealing with issues of race and gender.
- Updated section on African American music, to include the role of Hip Hop.
- Updated sections on mass media coverage of African Americans and the African American celebrity impact on politics, adding new mention of the CROWN Act and the politics of Black hair.
- Updated section on the “Black Lives Matter” movement, adding a new section on the “Me Too” movement.
- Updated sections on African Americans in Congress, with a new mention of the Squad.
- Updated voting behavior through the 2020 elections, connecting the Obama years with the new administration.
- A comparison of the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.
- A discussion of the way in which race contributes to the polarization of American politics in the 2020 presidential campaign.
- An analysis of the racial attitudes of President Trump, and the institutionally racist policies of his administrations.
- Updated chapter on state and local politics, including a new section on state executive offices and Black mayors.

- Updated sections on material well-being indicators, adding a new section on the coronavirus pandemic and the Black community.
- The first overall assessment of the Obama administration in relation to domestic and foreign policy and racial politics.

**Hanes Walton, Jr.** (1941–2013), Professor of Political Science, University of Michigan, was an architect of the modern study of African American politics. Over four decades of prodigious research (including 25 books) and conceptual refinement he helped to make the subfield of Black politics an important area of study in political science. His last book was *The African American Electorate: A Statistical Portrait*.

**Robert C. Smith**, Professor of Political Science Emeritus, San Francisco State University, is the author of multiple books and articles and of the *Encyclopedia of African American Politics*. His most recent books are *Conservatism and Racism*, and *Why in America They Are the Same* and *John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and the Politics of Ethnic Incorporation and Avoidance*, as well as the forthcoming *From the Bayou to the Bay: The Autobiography of a Black Liberation Scholar* and *Power, Philosophy and Egalitarianism: Women, the Family and African Americans*.

**Sherri L. Wallace**, Professor of Political Science, University of Louisville, has received awards for excellence in teaching and instructional design and has published articles on college textbook diversity, women of color in academe, race and politics, and community economic development.

# Praise for the Eighth Edition

“The eighth edition of Walton, Smith, and Wallace’s landmark text is better than ever. Cemented as the introductory leading text in Black Politics since its inception, this text explores the vast landscape of African Americans’ experiences as part of the American political fabric. Brilliantly, the revised edition continues its tradition of excellence by providing readers with historical details for in-depth exploration of the Black American political community. As African Americans grow increasingly diverse, the book aptly expands the text’s inclusive framework that engages many intersectionalities of Black political activity and includes a cogent and powerful analysis of the presidency of Barack Obama and its significance. This book is required reading for anyone interested in Black politics, Black American life, and the role of America’s institutions in the journey toward freedom in the Black experience.”

**Ravi K. Perry**, *Howard University*

“*American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* is the preeminent text from noted scholars in the field of Black politics. The authors provide an alternative understanding to the foundation of American politics, which is certain to broaden students’ perspectives about the true meaning of freedom in America. The new edition provides up-to-date, detailed information about the Obama presidency and the future of Black politics in America. This text is essential to any course in American politics.”

**Angela K. Lewis**, *University of Alabama at Birmingham*

“*American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* is the definitive textbook in the field of Black Politics. In this most recent edition, the authors offer an in-depth analysis of the presidency of Barack Obama, examine the influence of African Americans at the state and local levels, and provide a timely assessment of the 2016 congressional and presidential elections.”

**Diarra Osei Robertson**, *Bowie State University*

“*American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* is a very comprehensive, informative book that details the major actors, events, and



issues in African American Politics. It is a must-read for students, scholars, and laymen alike.”

**Sharon D. Wright Austin**, *University of Florida*

“I began using *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* as the textbook for my African American Studies courses with the sixth edition, and I enthusiastically anticipate the release of this eighth edition. This text documents the significance of the Barack Obama presidency while continuing to define the historic importance of terms such as *freedom*, *racism*, *inherently inferior*, and *the three-fifths clause*, as it relates to African Americans in these United States.”

**Samuel Craig**, *Wayne County Community College District*

“*American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* offers the most thorough assessment of African American politics in the discipline of racial politics. It provides both historical and theoretical insight into African Americans’ relationship to foreign policy, the federal courts, Congress, the U.S. Presidency, federalism, elections, social movements, public opinion, and the Constitution. The book shows that African American political agency is constitutive of the American political tradition, and is a must-read for all political observers interested in understanding African American politics and American politics in general, including scholars, students, elected officials, and policy advocates.”

**Sekou Franklin**, *Middle Tennessee State University*

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# American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom

**Hanes Walton, Jr.**

*Late of University of Michigan*

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*San Francisco State University*

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# DEDICATION

*We are grateful to our families for their endurance and support.*

*To Alice, Brandon, and Brent*

*To Scottie, Blanch, Jessica, Scottus-Charles,  
Karysa, and Grayson*

*To Christopher, Lou, Courtney, Gregory, Kristi, and Greg*

*“Do not call the forest that shelters you a jungle.”*

*—Ghanaian Proverb*



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# PREFACE

## Overview of the Text

The ninth edition of this text arrives at an inflection point in minority–majority coalition politics and the quest of Blacks for universal freedom: The re-election or defeat of the first white supremacist, racist president in more than 100 years; a marked shift of the Democratic Party in a more left–liberal direction in general and on race specifically; and the nationwide uprisings against the police murder of African Americans.

This book examines the institutions and processes of American government and politics from the perspective of the African American presence and influence. We want to show how the presence of Africans in the United States affected the founding of the Republic and its political institutions and processes from the colonial era to the present. Blacks, for example, took no part in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence or the design of the Constitution; however, their presence exerted a profound influence on the shaping of both these seminal documents. So it has been throughout American history.

The structure follows standard works in political science on American government and politics. It is unique, however, in two respects.

First, it is organized around two interrelated themes pursued throughout much of the textbook: The *idea of universal freedom* and the *concept of minority–majority coalitions*. We argue, in their quest for their own freedom in the United States, Blacks have sought to universalize the idea of freedom. In their attack on slavery and racial subordination, African Americans and their leaders have embraced doctrines of universal freedom and equality. In doing so, they have had an important influence on the shaping of democratic, constitutional government and on expanding or universalizing the idea of freedom not only for themselves but also for all Americans.

Blacks have not acted alone. Indeed, given their status as a subordinate racial minority group they could not act alone. Rather, in their quest for freedom Blacks

have sought to forge coalitions with Whites via *minority-majority coalitions* (or, more precisely, *minority-inspired majority coalitions*). Historically, however, because of the nation's ambivalence about race, these coalitions tend to be unstable and temporary; requiring that they be constantly rebuilt in what is an ongoing quest.

The second distinctive aspect of this study is that it is historically informed. In each chapter, we trace developments over a period of time. Relevant historical background is critical to understanding the evolution of race and the American democracy. Such material also brings contemporary events into a sharper focus.

Our principal rationale for writing this book is that we saw a void in the available literature. More importantly, we believe that race is the most important cleavage in American life, with enormous impact on the nation's society, culture, and politics. Indeed, as we show throughout this book, race has always been the enduring fault line in American society and politics—thus the need for a volume that treats this important topic with the seriousness it deserves. We seek to accomplish this in a study that has historical sweep and depth and is comprehensive in its coverage; a book that is readable and interesting to undergraduate students while maintaining the highest intellectual standards. We believe the study of the rich, varied, and critical presence of African Americans in *all* areas of the political system demands nothing less.

The intellectual tradition of this text emerges out of the African American Politics subfield. The scholars who are the founders and innovators in the study of Black Politics created this scholarly subfield out of nothing. Principally, working in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), without major financial support or grants and with large numbers of classes and students, these scholars decades ago launched in small steps and limited ways a new area of academic study. They published in obscure and poorly diffused journals and little-known presses, which resulted, in many instances, in their work being overlooked and undervalued due to racism's manifestations in academia, allowing much valuable work to remain unseen. Not only was the result of their research made invisible, but these scholars themselves became invisible in the profession. Of this unseen tradition it has been written:

The second research tradition in America's life is the unheralded, the unsung, unrecorded but not unnoticed one. Scholars belonging to this tradition literally make something out of nothing and typically produce scholarship at the less recognized institutions of higher learning. These are the places, to use Professor Aaron Wildavsky's apt phrase, where the schools "habitually run out of stamps" and where other sources of support are nonexistent. ... [Yet] here ... scholars ... nevertheless scaled the heights, and produced stellar scholarship.<sup>1</sup>



They persisted and persevered. It is out of this tradition that the National Conference of Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS) was founded in 1969 by some of these scholars who created the association's own academic journal. The first was the *Journal on Political Repression*, published from 1975 to 1979. It was relaunched as the *National Political Science Review* (NPSR) and published from 1989 to 2019. To commemorate NCOBPS' 50-year anniversary and the new chapter in the study of Black politics and the next generation of scholars, who will continue the intellectual quest of developing and disseminating knowledge to study and promote Black politics via a global African diaspora lens, in 2020 the *National Review of Black Politics* (NRBP)—a refereed journal published quarterly by the University of California Press—became the association's official publication. It marks a historic transition that affirms the association's scholarly legacy and intellectual prominence by linking the association with a premier university press. The Guest Editor for the inaugural edition were the authors of this work, Robert C. Smith and Sherri L. Wallace.<sup>2</sup>

In the beginning, these scholars' work was scattered and sometimes difficult to locate;<sup>3</sup> yet it formed the basis for a new vision and perspective in political science. Beginning in 1885, the discipline of political science emerged during an era of concern about race relations and developed its study of race politics from this perspective.

The race relations perspective became the major consensus in the discipline on the study of race until the 1960s. In essence, this framework on the study of African American politics focused on the concern of Whites about stability and social peace rather than the concerns of Blacks about freedom and social justice.<sup>4</sup>

Challenging the dominant consensus in the mid- to late 1960s, Black political scientists offered a different, more empowering perspective on political reality, which became known as the African American Politics (or Black Politics) view or perspective.<sup>5</sup> Instead of focusing on how the African American quest for freedom might distress Whites and disrupt stability and social peace, this new perspective focused on how an oppressed group might achieve power to provide solutions to long-standing social and economic problems. This perspective deals with freedom and power rather than stability and social peace as articulated by Mack Jones' "Dominant-Subordinate Group" theoretical framework (see Chapter 1 for full explanation). Our approach is part of this intellectual tradition.

The purveyors of this tradition include Professor Robert Brisbane and Tobe Johnson of Morehouse College, the ever-erudite Samuel DuBois Cook at Atlanta University, Professors Emmett Dorsey, Bernard Fall, Harold Gosnell, Ronald Walters, Robert Martin, Vincent Browne, Nathaniel Tillman, Brian Weinstein, Morris Levitt, and Charles Harris at Howard University, and Jewel Prestage at Southern and Prairie View A&M University. Their insightful ideas, cogent theories, and brilliant teaching made this book possible. When we, the original

authors—the late Hanes Walton, Jr. (1941–2013) and Robert C. Smith—sat down at the Holiday Inn in Jackson, Mississippi, in March 1991 (at the annual meeting of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists), to develop the book theme and lay out its goals and structure, we were standing on the shoulders of these pioneering political scientists. They built the intellectual foundation. We hope this work makes them proud. We hope it will do the same for our children and generations to come.

Finally, a note on the terms used. We alter the “N-word” when quoted. We use the terms Black<sup>6</sup> or black—capitalized as noun or subject and lowercased as descriptor for a theory, concept, or phrase—and African American (no hyphen) interchangeably, having no preference for either and viewing each as a legitimate and accurate name for persons of African descent in the United States.<sup>7</sup> We recognize that for the significant populations of people of African descent that have recently immigrated, often described as “pan-ethnicity,” to the United States from a myriad of countries across the African diaspora, such terms can be contentious; however, our use aligns with our historical focus. For instructors, it might be a good idea to discuss the history of the different uses of or provide links to materials that trace the use of the terms used to describe African Americans and the terms African Americans use to describe themselves as active political agents in their struggle for freedom and acts of “self-determination.”

## New to This Edition

This new ninth edition includes three core additions. The first is an assessment of the 2020 presidential and congressional elections in relationship to the themes of the text. We pay particular attention to the race–gender interactions in the 2020 Democratic primaries and explore the extent to which Biden was able to resurrect or recreate the Obama “rainbow coalition” in the general election. Second, we analyze the record of the Trump administration on race, and explain our classification of him as both the first white supremacist and the first racist president in more than a century.

While we focus on the 2020 election in Chapter 9, given the significance historically of the election of the first Black president, we have retained for purposes of history the fundamentals of Obama’s campaigns and elections in 2008 and 2012. The third core addition in this new edition is an overall, general assessment of the record of the African American elected officials in advancing the “Black Agenda.”

All chapters have been updated with new content and the latest data available, specifically:

- **Revisions to Chapter 1 “Universal Freedom Declared, Denied.”** This chapter has been updated to include a summary table on the Constitutional

provision relating to the presence of Africans in America to serve as a visual and point of reference.

- **Revisions to Chapter 3 “Political Culture and Socialization.”** This chapter has been completely rewritten with more discussion on “Elements of Black Culture” and updated material on the political significance of African American music, including Hip Hop, and the African American Church.
- **Revisions to Chapter 4 “Public Opinion.”** This chapter’s discussion on the various strands of African American ideology have been updated, and civil rights activist and LGBTQ pacifist Bayard Rustin is highlighted in “Faces and Voices in the Struggle for Universal Freedom.”
- **New addition to Chapter 5 “African Americans and the Media.”** This chapter includes a new section on the CROWN Act and the politics of black hair, and revision to the African American celebrity impact on politics.
- **New addition to Chapter 6 “Social Movements and a Theory of African American Coalition Politics.”** This chapter includes a discussion of the political significance of the increasing ethnic diversity of the Black community as a result of immigration from Africa and the Caribbean. Also, it provides extensive coverage of the “Black Lives Matter” and “Me Too” movements, including an intersectionality analysis of the movements.
- **Revisions to Chapter 7 “Interest Groups.”** This chapter now includes a discussion on African American women interest group activities from an intersectional approach. The discussion on “The State of Black Nationalist Movements” has been updated substantially. The coverage of the African American reparations movement has also been revised.
- **Revisions to Chapter 8 “Political Parties.”** This chapter has been rewritten to refine the discussion on the role of race in the polarization of American politics. It also presents full overviews of the election of the first African American president, and the significance of the Jesse Jackson campaigns on Barack Obama’s first campaign including the 2008 primaries and caucuses; and of the 2008 and 2012 general elections. This chapter includes more examination of race and gender challenges to identities and loyalties when it comes to supporting and voting for presidential candidates.
- **New addition to Chapter 9 “Voting Behavior and Elections.”** This chapter includes full coverage of the 2020 presidential and congressional elections, focusing on: The role of race and gender in the Democratic primaries and in the Trump–Biden contest; an interpretation of the Trump “phenomenon” as a manifestation of white nationalism; and the results of the congressional elections with respect to partisan control of Congress and the size of the Black congressional delegation.
- **Revisions to Chapter 10 “The Congress.”** In this chapter, the section on substantive representation has been expanded for a more detailed discussion.

A mention box on the “Squad,” a cohort of young women of color newly elected to Congress, has been added.

- **Newly structured Chapter 11 “The Presidency and Bureaucracy.”** This chapter combines previous separate chapters on the presidency and bureaucracy. It also includes an assessment of the race policies of President Obama, reclassifying him from “race neutral” to “antiracist,” and the classification of Trump as a white supremacist and a racist. The bureaucracy focus has been reduced and revised as a reflection of presidential power, and the chapter includes a discussion of institutionally racist policies implemented by the bureaucracy under Trump.
- **Revisions to Chapter 12 “The Supreme Court.”** This chapter includes new material on the Voting Rights Act, and the latest Supreme Court case testing institutional racism.
- **Revisions to Chapter 13 “State and Local Politics.”** This chapter includes: A historical overview of state and local governments during the brief era of universal freedom during Reconstruction; a discussion of constitutionalism and federalism in the states and the significance of the period of devolution; descriptive and substantive representations of Blacks in state legislatures, executive offices, and courts, highlighting intersectionality and Black women in state politics; an examination of the impact of Republican control of state governments on rights- and material-based freedoms; a discussion on the challenges for Black majority rule in “Black regime” cities and “Black-belt” counties; and a brief highlight of Black mayors in cities with populations of 40,000 or more.
- **Revisions to Chapter 14 “Domestic Policy.”** This chapter has been substantially revised, focusing on measures of material well-being in the African American community to examine historic and systemic patterns in structural inequality as manifested in rates of unemployment, underemployment, poverty, incarceration, education, and median net worth; including a new section examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Features of This Innovative Text

- Structured to accord with American government texts and courses, featuring content in all major subfields specifically relevant to African American politics.
- Each chapter opens with an updated Learning Objective keyed to chapter content.
- Each chapter concludes with a Summary and Critical Thinking Questions.
- Selected Bibliographies for each chapter include new suggested readings for students. Note that, unless otherwise stated, all websites have been accessed in September 2020.

- Boxes throughout the text focus on “Faces and Voices in the Struggle for Universal Freedom” to highlight key actors in the history of the struggle for universal freedom.
- Figures, tables, and photos have been updated (where possible) throughout.

## Acknowledgments

In early editions, Margaret Mitchell Ilugbo typed several of the draft chapters for Hanes Walton, Jr. and Greta Blake designed the tables and figures. We appreciate their years of fine work.

Robert C. Smith’s wife, Scottie, has been indispensable in the preparation of each edition. Her discerning and untiring work is deeply appreciated.

On the ninth edition, Sherri L. Wallace received research assistance from Sydney B. Finley, an undergraduate sophomore majoring in Political Science and English at the University of Louisville.

In addition to the colleagues selected by the publishers, we are pleased to acknowledge the colleagues who had an active role in criticism and preparation of this work, over all editions. **Our thanks to:**

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In addition, we are very grateful to anonymous reviewers for their insightful and valuable comments. We incorporated nearly all the helpful suggestions.

## About the Authors

**Hanes Walton, Jr.**, a pioneering scholar of Political Science and Professor at the University of Michigan, is a graduate of Morehouse College. He earned

his master's degree in Political Science from Atlanta University and was the first person to earn the doctorate in Political Science from Howard University. He served on numerous editorial boards of academic journals, was a consultant to the National Academy of Sciences, the Educational Testing Service, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. He was a Ford, Rockefeller, and Guggenheim Fellow and held memberships in several honor societies, including Pi Sigma Alpha, Alpha Kappa Mu, and Phi Beta Kappa. He also worked on Capitol Hill in the office of Congressman Mervyn Dymally (D, CA). He was the recipient of the 1993 Howard University Distinguished Ph.D. Alumni Award. Shortly after the revisions for the seventh edition, Dr. Walton died, on January 7, 2013. He was the architect of this text, and its two interrelated themes—the idea of universal freedom and the concept of minority–majority coalitions—are the product of his fertile mind. Hanes was also an architect of the modern study of African American politics. Over four decades of prodigious research (including 25 books) and conceptual refinement, he helped to make the subfield of African American politics a major area of study in Political Science. His last book was *The African American Electorate: A Statistical Portrait*. His death leaves a large void in the field, and in our personal and intellectual life, but his friendship and intellectual legacy are abiding sources of comfort and inspiration.<sup>8</sup> In 2013, the American Political Science Association established the Hanes Walton, Jr. Award to recognize a political scientist whose lifetime of scholarship made a significant contribution to our understanding of racial and ethnic politics and illuminates the conditions under which diversity and intergroup tolerance thrive in democratic societies.

**Robert C. Smith** is Emeritus Professor of Political Science at San Francisco State University. An honors graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, he holds a master's degree from UCLA and a doctorate from Howard University. He is the author or co-author of dozens of articles and 14 books. His most recent books are *Conservatism and Racism, and Why in America They Are the Same* and *John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and the Politics of Ethnic Incorporation and Avoidance*, as well as the forthcoming *From the Bayou to the Bay: The Autobiography of a Black Liberation Scholar* and *Power, Philosophy and Egalitarianism: Women, the Family and African Americans*. He is currently completing *Character: The Presidency of Donald Trump*. He is general editor of the State University of New York (SUNY) Press African American Studies series. In 1998, he was the recipient of the Howard University Distinguished Ph.D. Alumni Award. His *Encyclopedia of African American Politics* was published in 2003. In 2018, as a tribute to his late mentor, co-author, and friend, he published a definitive history of his works entitled *Hanes Walton, Jr.: The Architect of the Black Science of Politics*.

**Sherri L. Wallace** is Professor of Political Science at the University of Louisville. By participating in the American Political Science Association's Ralph

Bunche Summer Institute in 1988, she discovered her love for the discipline. She earned her master's and doctorate degrees from Cornell University, where she also received a President's Council for Cornell Women Fellowship for her dissertation research. She has published articles on college textbook diversity, women of color in academe, race and politics, and community economic development. She teaches African American politics, American politics, public policy, state politics, and urban politics. She is the recipient of awards for teaching excellence, instructional design, and diversity service. She actively engages in service in the discipline having served as an officer or member on standing (executive) committees, organized sections, and program and award committees for the National Conference of Black Political Scientists and American Political Science Association.

## Notes

- 1 Hanes Walton, Jr., "The Preeminent African American Legal Scholar: J. Clay Smith," *National Political Science Review* 6 (1997): 289.
- 2 "NCOBPS at Fifty: Living the Legacy" [Special issue], *The National Review of Black Politics*.
- 3 The NCOBPS historical archive is stored at the Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Atlanta University Center.
- 4 Hanes Walton, Jr., Cheryl Miller, and Joseph P. McCormick, "Race and Political Science: The Dual Traditions of Race Relations Politics and African American Politics," in J. Dryzek, et al., eds., *Political Science and Its History: Research Programs and Political Traditions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 145–74; and Hanes Walton, Jr. and Joseph P. McCormick, "The Study of African American Politics as Social Danger: Clues from the Disciplinary Journals," *National Political Science Review* 6 (1997): 229–44.
- 5 For an intellectually critical collection of essays by African American political scientists on race and the study of politics in the United States, see Wilbur Rich, ed., *African American Perspectives on Political Science* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007); and for a useful collection of papers by an influential political scientist whose writings contributed to the development of the scientific study of Black politics, see Mack H. Jones, *Knowledge, Power and Black Politics: Collected Essays* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010).
- 6 John Eligon, "A Debate Over Identity and Race Asks Are African-Americans 'Black' or 'black'?", *New York Times*, June 26, 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/us/black-african-american-style-debate.html?smid=em-share](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/us/black-african-american-style-debate.html?smid=em-share).
- 7 For discussion of the various controversies about names in African American history—that is, what persons of African origins in the United States should call themselves—see W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Name Negro," *The Crisis* 35 (March 1928): 96–101; Lerone Bennett, "What's in a Name? Negro vs. Afro-American vs. Black," *A Review of General Semantics* 26(4) (December 1969): 399–412; Ben L. Martin, "From Negro to Black to African-American: The Power of Names and Naming," *Political Science Quarterly* 106 (1991): 83–107; Robert C. Smith, "Remaining Old



- Realities,” *San Francisco Review of Books* 25 (Summer 1990): 16–19; Ruth Grant and Marion Orr, “Language, Race and Politics: From ‘Black’ to ‘African American,’” *Politics & Society* 24 (1996): 137–52; James F. Davis, “Who is Black? One Nation’s Definition,” from *Who is Black?* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State Press, 1991); “The Journey from ‘Colored’ to ‘Minorities’ to ‘People of Color,’” *National Public Radio*, March 31, 2014, [www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2014/03/30/295931070/the-journey-from-colored-to-minorities-to-people-of-color](http://www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2014/03/30/295931070/the-journey-from-colored-to-minorities-to-people-of-color); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Foundations of Nationalist Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987): chap. 4, “Identity and Ideology: The Names Controversy”; Erika V. Hall, et al., “A Rose by Any Other Name? The Consequences of Subtyping ‘African-Americans’ from ‘Blacks,’” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 56 (2015): 183–90; Jennifer Schuessler, “Use of ‘African-American’ Dates to Nation’s Early Days,” *New York Times*, April 2020, <http://nyti.ms/1G0zmc0>; and for a discussion on the tensions associated with the use of “Black” v. “African American,” see Gina Philogene, “Stereotype Fissure: Katz and Braly Revisited,” *Social Science Information* 40(3) (2001): 411–32.
- 8 On Hanes’ career and intellectual legacy, see Marion Orr, Pearl Ford Dove, Tyson King-Meadows, Joseph McCormick, and Robert C. Smith, “Hanes Walton, Jr.,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44 (July 2013): 674–75; “Hanes Walton, Jr.,” in Robert C. Smith, *Encyclopedia of African American Politics* (New York: Facts on File, 2003); and Robert C. Smith, *Hanes Walton, Jr.: The Architect of the Black Science of Politics* (New York: Palgrave/Pivot, 2018).



# PART I



## Foundations



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# CHAPTER 1

## Universal Freedom Declared, Universal Freedom Denied

Racism, Slavery, and the Ideology of White  
Supremacy in the Founding of the Republic

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

**Explain the idea of universal freedom and describe how it was compromised in the Constitution by racism and the ideology of white supremacy.**

So, what is this thing called freedom? In 1865, General Oliver O. Howard, commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, asked an audience of newly freed slaves, "But what did freedom mean? It is necessary to define it for it is apt to be misunderstood."<sup>1</sup> William Riker writes, "The word 'freedom' must be defined. And volumes have been written on this subject without conspicuous success on reaching agreement."<sup>2</sup> Orlando Patterson begins his book *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* with the observation that "Freedom, like love and beauty, is one of those values better experienced than defined."<sup>3</sup> Finally, John Hope Franklin, in *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, writes,

It must never be overlooked that the concept of freedom that emerged in the modern world bordered on licentiousness and created a situation that

approached anarchy. As W.E.B. Du Bois has pointed out, it was the freedom to destroy freedom, the freedom of some to exploit the rights of others. It was, indeed, a concept of freedom with little or no social responsibility. If, then, a man was determined to be free, who was there to tell him that he was not entitled to enslave others.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of freedom is therefore a contested idea, with many often conflicting and contradictory meanings. Since the idea of freedom—universal freedom—is central to this book, in this first chapter we must attempt to define it because, as General Howard said, it is apt to be misunderstood.

In the last several decades, an important body of scholarship has emerged on how the idea and practice of freedom began in Europe and the United States. These historical and philosophical studies suggest that the idea of freedom—paradoxically—is inextricably linked to the idea and institution of slavery.<sup>5</sup> With respect to Europe, “it now can be said with some confidence,” according to Patterson, “that the idea and value of freedom was the direct product of the institution of slavery. Where there has been no slavery there has never been any trace of freedom even as a minor value.”<sup>6</sup> And in the United States, “without the institution of slavery America in all likelihood would have had no democratic tradition and would not have come to enshrine freedom at the very top of the pantheon of values.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, the very idea of freedom in the Western world has its origins in the struggles of the slave to become free.<sup>8</sup>

While there is much of value in Patterson’s studies, we are not persuaded by his argument that freedom in its origins is a uniquely Western value. On the contrary, we believe freedom is a fundamental driving force of the human condition. And while slavery was undoubtedly important in the genesis of the idea of freedom in the Western world, it is also likely that the idea in the West stems from other sources such as the desire of people to be free of harsh rule, treatment, or prohibitions that fall short of slavery (freedom of religion, for example).

## Freedom: A Typological Analysis

The word *freedom* is difficult to define. Indeed, a number of writers on the subject have concluded that the effort to construct an objective or universal definition may be futile. Increasingly, therefore, students of the subject have sought not to define the term in one all-encompassing definition but rather, given the rich, varied, and conflicting meanings of the word, have sought instead to develop typologies of freedom that are broad and varied enough to cover the diverse shades of meaning held by scholars as well as ordinary women and men.

Table 1.1 displays three typologies of freedom. These typologies are drawn from the most recent scholarship on the subject. Again, these writers do not attempt to develop one universal definition of the term but see *freedom* as having

**TABLE 1.1** Typologies of Freedom

Orlando Patterson	Eric Foner	Richard King
Personal	Natural Rights <sup>a</sup>	Liberal
Sovereign <sup>b</sup>	Civil Rights	Autonomy
Civic	Political Rights	Participatory
	Social Rights	Collective Deliverance

<sup>a</sup> Foner uses the term *rights* rather than *freedoms*.

<sup>b</sup> In his article, Patterson uses the term *organic* instead of *sovereign* to refer to this type of freedom.

Sources: Orlando Patterson, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1991): 3–5; Orlando Patterson, “The Unholy Trinity: Freedom, Slavery and the American Constitution,” *Social Research* 54 (Autumn 1987): 556–59; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988): 231; Richard King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 26–28.

multiple shades of meaning. Patterson identifies three types of freedom. *Personal freedom* is defined as giving a person the sense that, on the one hand, he or she is not coerced or restrained by another person in doing something desired, and, on the other hand, that one can do as one pleases within the limits of that other person’s desire to do the same. *Sovereign* or *organic freedom* is simply the power to act as one pleases, without regard for others, or simply the ability to impose one’s will on another. *Civic freedom* is defined as the capacity of adult members of a community to participate in its life and governance.<sup>9</sup>

Foner discusses four notions of freedom—he prefers the term *rights*—that were part of the political vocabulary of the nation’s leaders on the eve of the Civil War. *Natural rights*, those rights or freedoms inherent in one’s humanity, are what Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence referred to as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. *Civil rights* can be defined as equality of treatment under law, which is seen as essential to the protection of natural rights. *Political rights* involve the right to vote and participate fully in governing the community. *Social rights* involve the right to freely choose personal and business associates.<sup>10</sup>

King identifies “four meanings of freedom within American/western thought that link up with the language of freedom and the goals of the civil rights movement.”<sup>11</sup> *Liberal freedom* is the absence of arbitrary legal or institutional restrictions on the individual, including the idea that all citizens are to be treated equally. *Freedom as autonomy* involves an internalized individual state of autonomy, self-determination, pride, and self-respect. *Participatory freedom* involves the right of the individual to participate fully in the political process.

*Collective deliverance* is understood as the liberation of a group from external control—from captivity, slavery, or oppression.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, there is considerable overlap among the types of freedom addressed by Patterson, Foner, and King, especially in the realm of politics or the right of citizens to equal treatment under law and the right to vote and participate in the governance of the community. However, two of the types identified have special relevance to the African American experience and to this book's theme of universal freedom. First, throughout their history in the United States, African Americans have consistently rejected the idea of organic or sovereign freedom, the notion that one person or group should have the freedom to impose their will on another without regard to the rights of others. This is the freedom of might makes right, of the strong to oppress the weak, of the powerful to dominate the powerless, and of the slave master to enslave. From its beginning, African American political thought and behavior has been centrally concerned with the abolition of this type of freedom, and in doing so African Americans developed the idea of universal freedom—a freedom that encompasses natural rights, civil rights, and social rights. In rejecting the Patterson notion of sovereign freedom, Blacks in the United States fully embraced King's idea of freedom as collective deliverance. As part of a captive, oppressed, enslaved people, one could expect nothing less. However, in fighting for their own liberation, for their freedom, Blacks have had to fight for universal freedom, for the freedom of all people. As Aptheker puts it, "The Negro people have fought like tigers for their freedom, and in doing so have enhanced the freedom struggles of all people."<sup>13</sup>

## Freedom, Power, and Politics

All the typologies of freedom listed in Table 1.1 are related in one way or another to power or the lack of power, and power is central to politics and political science. As Lasswell and Kaplan write in their classic study *Power and Society*, "The concept of power is perhaps the most fundamental in the whole of political science: The political process is the shaping, distribution and exercise of power."<sup>14</sup> The definition of power, like freedom, however, also has an ambiguous, elusive quality.<sup>15</sup> At a minimum, scholars agree that A has power over B to the extent that A can affect B's behavior or get B to do something B otherwise would not do. Max Weber, one of the founders of modern sociology and political science, writes, "In general, we understand by 'power' the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action against the resistance of others who are participating in the action."<sup>16</sup> Political scientists generally analyze power in terms of (1) its bases, (2) its exercise, and (3) the skill of its exercise in particular circumstances, situations, or contexts. With respect to African American politics, Mack Jones postulates that whites occupy a "superordinate" or dominant position in relationship to Blacks.<sup>17</sup> That is, historically whites have

had a near monopoly on the critical or “hard” power bases (wealth, size, status, technology, and violence) and used it to subordinate Blacks and maintain control over them. Blacks, on the other hand, have attempted to acquire power, often the “soft” power bases of morality, religion, and appeals to democratic principles, to alter their subordinate status in a quest for universal freedom. In this sense Black politics, Jones writes, “is essentially a power struggle between blacks and whites” characterized by an asymmetrical power relationship between the groups.<sup>18</sup> However, in order to fully understand Black politics and distinguish it from other group conflicts in the United States, Jones contends that it is necessary to specify that the subordination of Blacks is justified on the basis of the ideology of white supremacy.<sup>19</sup> We discuss the ideology of white supremacy later in this chapter, but in sum: In analyzing African American politics as a quest for universal freedom we need to think in terms of Blacks seeking to alter their subordinate status *vis-à-vis* whites and the asymmetrical power between the groups in the context of the ideology of white supremacy.

## Thomas Jefferson and the Writing of the Declaration

After voting to declare independence, the Continental Congress appointed a committee to draft a document setting forth the reasons for the revolution. The committee was composed of Robert Livingston, Roger Sherman, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. The other members turned the task of drafting to Adams and Jefferson, and according to Adams, Jefferson was asked to actually write the document because his writings were characterized by a “peculiar felicitousness of expression.”<sup>20</sup> The Declaration, however, is not the creation of one man. Rather, “eighty-six substantive revisions were made in Jefferson’s draft, most of them by members of the Continental Congress who also excised about one fourth of the original text.”<sup>21</sup> Jefferson was said to be extremely displeased by the changes in his draft and for the remaining 50 years of his life was angry, arguing that Congress had “mangled” his manuscript.<sup>22</sup>

Most of the substantive changes or deletions in Jefferson’s draft—including the most famous—focused on the long list of charges against King George III. Most historians say that the charges against the King as listed in the Declaration are exaggerated, and in any event they are misplaced, since many of the actions complained of were decisions of the Parliament rather than the King. The King, however, made a more convenient target than the anonymous, amorphous Parliament.

The most famous of the changes deleted from Jefferson’s draft was the condemnation of the King for engaging in the African slave trade. Jefferson had written the following:

He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating the most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another



hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market when MEN should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce; and this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting these very people to rise among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them, thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of others.<sup>23</sup>

This passage, which was to be the climax of the charges against the King, was obviously an exaggeration and an especially disingenuous one; the colonists themselves (including Jefferson) had enthusiastically engaged in slave trading and, as was made clear to Jefferson, had no intention of abandoning it after independence. Jefferson recalls that “the clause too, reprobating the enslaving of the inhabitants of Africa, was struck out in compliance to South Carolina and Georgia, who had never attempted to restrain the importation of slaves and who still wished to continue it.”<sup>24</sup> Not only was there opposition to the passage from the southern slave owners, but more tellingly, as Jefferson went on to say, “our northern brethren also I believe felt a little tender under these censures; for tho’ their people have few slaves themselves yet they have been pretty considerable carriers of them.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, virtually all the leading White men in America, northerner and southerner, slave owner and non-slave owner, had economic interests in the perpetuation of slavery. A good part of the new nation’s wealth and prosperity was based on the plantation economy. To be consistent, one might have thought that the Continental Congress would also have deleted the phrase on the equality of men and their inherent right to liberty. They did not, apparently seeing no inconsistency since the words did not mean what they said (see Box 1.1).

The magnificent words of the Declaration of Independence declaring freedom and equality as universal rights of all “men” were, however, fatally flawed, compromised in that the men who wrote them denied freedom to almost one-fourth of the men in America. To understand how the idea of universal freedom was fundamentally compromised, one needs to see Thomas Jefferson as the paradigmatic figure: author of the Declaration, preeminent intellectual—acquaintance through correspondence of eminent African American intellectual Benjamin Banneker—and also a racist, a white supremacist, and a slave owner.<sup>26</sup>

## Racism and White Supremacy Defined

We have described Jefferson—one of the great men of American history and one of the most enlightened men of his day—as a racist and white supremacist;

## BOX 1.1

## Like Humpty Dumpty Told Alice, “When I Use a Word It Means What I Say It Means”

Before the ink was dry on Jefferson’s Declaration, there was controversy about what was meant by the words “all men are created equal.” Rufus Choate, speaking in 1776 for southerners embarrassed by Jefferson’s words, said Jefferson did not mean what he said. Rather, the word *men* referred only to nobles and Englishmen who were no better than ordinary American freemen. “If he meant more,” Choate said, it was because Jefferson was “unduly influenced by the French school of thought.”<sup>a</sup> (Jefferson was frequently accused of being influenced by Jean Jacques Rousseau’s writings; a charge that he denied.)

On the eve of the Civil War, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, in his opinion in the *Dred Scott* (1857) case, said that on the surface the words “all men are created equal” applied to Blacks. Yet he concluded, “It is too clear for dispute that the enslaved African race were not intended to be included, and formed no part of the people who framed and adopted the Declaration.” Similarly, during his famous debates with Abraham Lincoln, Stephen Douglas argued that the phrase simply meant that Americans were not inferior to Englishmen as citizens.

It was Lincoln’s genius at Gettysburg in his famous address to fundamentally repudiate Choate, Taney, and Douglas in what Garry Wills calls an “audacious” and “clever assault.” Lincoln accomplished this by claiming that the Civil War had given

rise to a “new birth of freedom” that had been conceived by Jefferson “four score and seven years ago” when he wrote the Declaration.<sup>b</sup> Conservative scholars have long attacked Lincoln’s “radical” redefinition of the meaning of the Declaration. Wilmore Kendal, writing a century after Gettysburg, argued that the word *men* in the Declaration referred to property holders or to the nations of the world but not men as such, writing blatantly that “the Declaration of Independence does not commit us to equality as a national goal.”<sup>c</sup>

As Daniel Boorstin, the former librarian of Congress and author of the celebrated *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), writes, “We have repeated that ‘all men are created equal’ without daring to discover what it meant and without realizing that probably to none of the men who spoke it did it mean what we would like it to mean.”<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Quoted in Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of an Idea* (New York: Vintage Books, 1922, 1970): 27.

<sup>b</sup> Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York: Touchstone, 1992).

<sup>c</sup> Wilmore Kendal, *Basic Symbols of the American Political Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), as cited in M.E. Bradford, “How to Read the Declaration of Independence: Reconsidering the Kendal Thesis,” *Intercollegiate Review* (Fall 1992): 47.

<sup>d</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

therefore, we should define these terms since they are key distinguishing features of the African American experience in the United States.<sup>27</sup> They are also central to the analysis presented throughout this book. Racism and the ideology of white supremacy are fundamental to an understanding of certain crucial features in the development of the American democracy as well as the different treatment of Black and White Americans.

*Racism* as a scientific concept is not an easy one for the social scientist. It is difficult to define with precision and objectivity; also, the word is often

used indiscriminately and in an inflammatory way. We start by distinguishing between racism and the set of ideas used in the United States to justify it. The latter we refer to as the ideology of white supremacy or black inferiority. In the United States, racism was and to some extent still is justified on the basis of the institutionalized belief that Africans are inherently inferior people. We refer to an individual who holds such beliefs as a *white supremacist*.

By racism we mean, following the definition of Carmichael and Hamilton in *Black Power*, “the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over it.”<sup>28</sup> The definition says nothing about why this is done, about racism’s purposes or rationales; thus it does not imply anything about superiority or inferiority of the groups involved. It does not say, as many definitions and concepts of racism do, that racism involves the belief in the superiority, inherent or otherwise, of a particular group and that on this basis policies are implemented to subordinate and control the group. Rather, the definition simply indicates that whenever one observes policies that have the intent or effect of subordinating a racial group, the phenomenon is properly identified as *racism*, whatever, if any, the justificatory ideology may be.

Carmichael and Hamilton’s definition is particularly useful to political scientists because it focuses on power as an integral aspect of the phenomenon. For racism to exist, one racial group (or individual) must have the relative power—the capacity to impose its will in terms of policies—over another relatively less powerful group or individual. Without this relative power relationship, racism is a mere sentiment: Although group A may wish to subordinate group B, if it lacks the effective power to do so, the desire remains simply a wish.

Carmichael and Hamilton also write that racism may take two forms: individual and institutional.<sup>29</sup> Individual racism occurs when one person takes into consideration the race of another to subordinate, control, or otherwise discriminate against an individual; institutional racism exists when the normal and accepted patterns and practices of a society’s institutions have the *effect* or *consequence* of subordinating or discriminating against an individual or group on the basis of race.<sup>30</sup>

It is in this sense that we refer to Thomas Jefferson as a white supremacist and a racist. He believed that Blacks were inherently inferior to whites, stating in his *Notes on Virginia* that they were “inferior by nature, not condition” (see Box 1.2). He was also a racist, individually and institutionally, in that he took the race of individual Blacks into consideration so as to discriminate against them, and he supported, although ambivalently, the institution of slavery that subordinated Blacks as a group.

Just in case readers may infer that white supremacy is a phenomenon of the past, one need only look to the election of Donald J. Trump, the first president since Woodrow Wilson to express openly white supremacist and racist views (see Chapter 11 for more discussion).

## BOX 1.2

## Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia* and the Idea of the Inferiority of the African People

In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson engaged in a kind of moral reasoning to reach his conclusions as to the self-evident equality of men. In his *Notes on Virginia*, written several years later, he engaged in a more scientific approach to the analysis of the problem of racial inequality.<sup>a</sup> In doing so, Jefferson the slaveholder made an eloquent condemnation of slavery, proposing his view of a just and equitable way to end slavery in the United States while simultaneously offering what he took to be scientific proof of the inferiority of the African people. Understanding Jefferson's views on race is therefore critical to an appreciation of how racism fundamentally compromised the idea of universal freedom at the very creation of the American Republic.<sup>b</sup>

In 1780 Francois Barbe-Marbois, the secretary of the French delegation in Philadelphia, sent a letter to each of the state governors requesting that they answer questions on particular customs and conditions in their states. Jefferson delayed his response until after he left the governor's office. Although Jefferson offered a general assessment of conditions in the state, his *Notes* are best known for what he said about slavery, the African people, and Virginia society.

While defending the institution of slavery Jefferson nevertheless saw it as evil and unjust, writing, "There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submission on the other."<sup>c</sup> In a famous passage that would be echoed by Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, Jefferson suggested that God would surely punish America: "Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever.

... The almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest."<sup>d</sup>

Since slavery was an evil but a necessary one, given the need for labor in the plantation economy, Jefferson proposed a revision in Virginia law that would gradually free the slaves; train them; provide tools, seeds, and animals; and then transport them to a new land as a "free and independent people" while simultaneously sending ships "to other parts of the world for an equal number of White inhabitants" to replace them.<sup>e</sup>

Jefferson anticipated that the inevitable question would be why not simply free the slaves and integrate them into Virginia society, thereby saving the money involved in colonialization of the slaves and the transportation of the whites. His response was first that "deep rooted prejudices entertained by whites, ten thousand recollections by the blacks of injuries they have sustained, the real distinctions which nature has made and many other circumstances" made impossible the integration of the Black and White populations on the basis of freedom and equality.<sup>f</sup> Indeed, Jefferson believed that if the races were not separated, "convulsions" would occur, probably ending in the "extermination of one or the other race."<sup>g</sup>

Jefferson was not satisfied to base his argument for racial separation on these essentially practical arguments. Rather, he wanted to be "scientific," to base his conclusions on the "facts," on his "empirical observations." Thus, in the *Notes* he advocated what was one of the first of many "scientific proofs" of black inferiority as justification for black subordination. First, he argued that Blacks compared to whites were less beautiful, had a "strong and disagreeable odor," and were more "ardent after their female." Ultimately, however, for Jefferson the basis of black inferiority was his "suspicion" that Blacks were "inferior in faculties of reason and imagination."<sup>h</sup>

Noting that the differences he observed between Blacks and whites might be explained by the different conditions under which they lived, Jefferson rejected this explanation, concluding it was not their “condition” but their “nature” that produced the difference.<sup>i</sup>

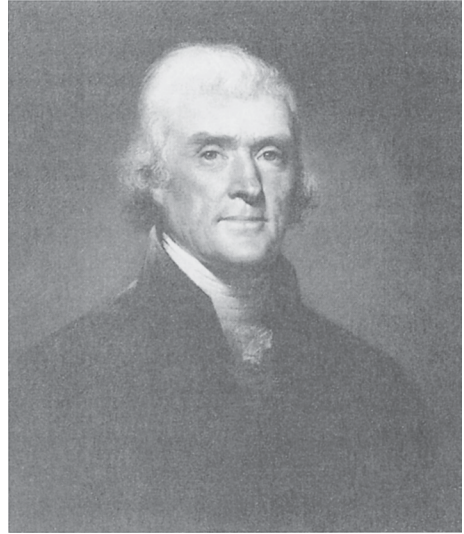
<sup>a</sup> This distinction between Jefferson’s moral reasoning in the Declaration and his scientific approach in the *Notes* is the central theme of Jean Yarbrough, “Race and the Moral Foundation of the American Republic: Another Look at the Declaration and the *Notes on Virginia*,” *Journal of Politics* 53 (February 1991): 90–105. Yarbrough argues that “the self-evident truths of the Declaration rest on a kind of moral reasoning which is morally superior to and incompatible with the so called scientific approach Jefferson adopts in the *Notes*” (p. 90).

<sup>b</sup> A comprehensive treatment of Jefferson’s views on race is in Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Baltimore, MA: Penguin Books, 1969): chap. 12, “Thomas Jefferson: Self and Society.”

<sup>c, d</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, edited by William Peden (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954): 162–63.

<sup>e</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138–39.

<sup>f</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138. This was also the view of Abraham Lincoln (see chap. 11). In *Democracy in America* (New York: Knopf, 1945)—probably the single most important and influential book ever written on the subject—Alexis de Tocqueville also reached the same pessimistic conclusion that Blacks and whites could not live together on



Thomas Jefferson is the embodiment of the contradiction in the American democracy between its declaration of universal freedom and equality and its practice of slavery.

Source: White House Collection/White House Historical Association.

the basis of freedom and equality. Tocqueville thought that whites would either subjugate the Blacks or exterminate them. See *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, edited by Phillips Bradley (New York: Vintage Books, 1945): chap. 18.

<sup>g, h, i</sup> *Notes on the State of Virginia*, p. 138–39.

## Philosophy, Politics, and Interest in Constitution Formation

The framers of the Constitution were influenced in their work by their readings in philosophy and history. But the framers were also practical politicians and men of affairs, and, as in all politics, they were men with distinct interests. In what is generally a sympathetic portrayal of the framers, historian William Freehling writes, “If the Founding Fathers unquestionably dreamed of universal freedom, their ideological posture was weighed down equally with conceptions of priorities, profits, and prejudices that would long make the dream utopian.”<sup>31</sup> The first or principal priority of the framers was the formation and preservation of the union of the United States. This priority was thought indispensable to the priority of profit—that is, to the economic and commercial success of the nation.