

## *Explorations in Sights and Sounds*

solidarity. The book contains materials from lesser-known sources and others more widely recognizable such as Mark Twain, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, Carey McWilliams, and the Industrial Workers of the World. Especially noteworthy is the portion of the book on the labor movement, given its usually strong hostility toward Asians, and the section on African Americans, which provides observations by members of one racially oppressed group about another.

This book has two primary shortcomings. Despite its title, it only contains (with a few exceptions) documents pertaining to early Chinese and Japanese immigration and settlement or Japanese Americans during World War II. It should have included materials on other Asian American groups, and from 1945-present—a period that encompasses the postwar civil rights struggles—increasing levels of political activity, and dramatic growth and greater diversity of the Asian American population.

A more serious shortcoming is the relative lack of historical analysis. Foner and Rosenberg do describe the content and context of the book's documents in a short general introduction and brief section introductions and headnotes. However, these only begin to deal with the underlying question of why various non-Asians supported Asian Americans. Many clergymen, for example, seemed to be imbued with humanitarian or democratic ideals. Certain labor leaders and unions were interested in promoting worker unity. African Americans often opposed the white supremacist emphasis of anti-Asian discrimination. Any systematic analysis needs to consider the forms of support and their explanatory cultural, social, political, ideological, and economic factors. Any analysis will be complicated by the fact that some advocates were at least partly affected by the pervasive racism of their eras. One indication of this are statements that have a paternalistic or condescending tone or that affirm common stereotypes and misperceptions of Asians.

Overall, Foner and Rosenberg present good documentary evidence for the significance of non-Asian Americans. What is needed now is a more extensive investigation of this topic so that it can better contribute to an understanding of the complexities of racism and interracial relations in American society.

Russell Endo  
University of Colorado

**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., \$35.00 cloth.**

George M. Fredrickson, Edgar E. Robinson Professor of United States History at Stanford University, has written a magisterial volume

## *Number 15 (Summer 1995)*

that complements his earlier explorations in his highly acclaimed *White Supremacy* and in some of his major essays in a collection, entitled *The Arrogance of Race*. Yet, unlike the earlier works, which compare the predominant white racism and ethnocentrism in race relations in the United States and the Union of South Africa, *Black Liberation* focuses on the political ideologies of “organic” African American and Black South African intellectuals. Fredrickson, to my mind, demonstrates convincingly that historically the ideology of “color-blind universalism” has been both more potent and effective—in more cases than not—in countering the overt claims and actions of white supremacists in both countries than “racially exclusive nationalism.”

Color-blind universalism manifested itself, he argues cogently, in attempts of African Americans and Africans during the nineteenth century to secure the ballot on the same basis as whites; in the early policies of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the South African Native National Congress; in Marxist or Communist inspired Black protest movements during the years between the 1920s and the 1940s; and finally in the American nonviolent civil rights movement and the African National Congress’ Defiance Campaign of the 1950s. Conversely, racially exclusive nationalism manifested itself in Black religious nationalism in both the United States and South Africa during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; in Pan-Africanist and Black populist movement during the 1920s—especially in the ideas and actions of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa; and finally in the American Black Power movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s and the Black Consciousness ideology in South Africa during the 1970s.

Fredrickson admits that there were many consistent advocates of the aforementioned ideologies, yet shows that most intellectuals “were actually seeking to combine the essential insights provided by both orientations”. Thus, the role of white dissenters in the struggle for Black liberation was often—though not exclusively—determined by which orientation was ascendant. As a result, in our present times when ethnic groups seek “to firm up their boundaries,” it is impossible to revive Martin Luther King, Jr.’s philosophy of “a beloved community”.

Fredrickson believes that history can help Americans solve this thorny and perhaps hazardous problem if they follow the lead of South Africa—that is, if there is “a heroic contribution of some whites to the cause of black liberation”.

Yet perhaps, there is another possibility; why not seek to eliminate a system of greed that turns even members of the same ethnic group against one another?

Vernon J. Williams, Jr.  
Purdue University