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## Book Review: Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin

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*Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin.* By John Hope Franklin. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005. xi + 401 pp. Photographs, index. \$25.00 cloth, \$15.00 paper.

With *Mirror to America* John Hope Franklin has given his colleagues an extremely valuable document for understanding American society in his lifetime. Franklin grew up in the segregated West. To those who see in segregation a lost world of unity and cohesion, Franklin offers up his account of a boyhood in Rentiesville, Oklahoma. His account leaves no doubt that so-called "black towns" were as prone to deep divisions founded in prejudice and profound pettiness masquerading as high principle as any other congregation of humans. His experiences as an adolescent in "T-Town" (Tulsa) also argue powerfully against the notion that virulent and institutional racism were imported to Oklahoma from somewhere else.

For this reader, this book's most important contribution is its consistently powerful evidence of the hard work, hardship, and disappointment that are part and parcel of living the life of an accomplished pioneer. Franklin's account of his career writing textbooks in the 1960s is especially important but least known. He recounts the direct pressure to write mere contribution histories, long on the celebration of individuals and short on long-range, systematic and systemic analysis. The chapters on Franklin's work on President Clinton's race initiative are a well-documented tribute to his scholar's temperament even when discussing

public, painful, and ultimately very personal questions. In this regard, I was especially touched by his sensitive treatment of a serious disagreement with his long-time friend (and fellow pioneer historian) C. Vann Woodward. Franklin's narrative is also valuable here for its portrait of the media as less the victim of an ideological bias than of simple sloppiness.

Franklin is proud of his work as a founder of the modern study of African American history, but he strenuously laments the racial typecasting that has been imposed on his work as a historian from the moment at Harvard University that Arthur Schlesinger Sr. suggested that he write a seminar paper on Booker T. Washington (he wrote on Lyman Abbott instead and earned an "A"). This book is but the most recent evidence of Franklin's intellectual versatility. Franklin is, ultimately, a social and intellectual historian who engaged in wide-ranging "cultural studies" of "whiteness" as well as "blackness" long before any of these terms became fashionable.

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