The Education of Black Philadelphia: The Social and Educational History of a Minority Community, 1900-1950 by Vincent P. Franklin
Review by: Clayborne Carson
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Israel's Black Hebrews: Black Americans In Search Of Identity is a comparative case study of the development of group identity among a segment of black Americans who are affiliated with a religious sect known as the Hebrew-Israelites. The author states that this is the first systematic study of the black Hebrews. Moreover, his primary purpose is to find out how the Hebrew Israelites continue to exist and to maintain their cohesiveness despite their disappointment at the failure of their millenium to materialize in 1977. The author also seeks to determine what kinds of conciliations can be reached between the black Hebrews and the Israelis.

The introduction gives a synoptic account of what the publication entails and the research methods used in collecting data. It also gives a description of the origin and the development of the black Jews, the Black Muslims, and the black Hebrews. Moreover, it gives a portrait of the founders of each of these groups. The author deals with the period following 1977 known as the post-millennial era. The author uses five sections to explain his study.

Sections one and two deal with the origin, ideology, and the formation of group identity respectively. In sections three and four, the author discusses the difference between the Hebrew-Israelites, the Black Muslims, the black Jews of Harlem, and the perception of Hebrew Israelites and Israelis toward each other successively. Finally, the last portion of the book gives a summary and conclusion of the study.

Much of the information discussed in this work has been elaborated upon in some form, particularly by those who adhere to such beliefs. Nevertheless, there are some interesting thoughts reemphasized. There is also new information, especially that which emanated from the interviews. For example, on page 52, an explanation is given by the black Hebrews as to how their history was changed after being stolen and how a racist history began. Another interesting topic in the book is found between pages 137–140. This section contrasts Black Muslims, black Jews, and black Hebrew Israelites. And they all claim to be God's chosen people. In addition, on page 154, they differ concerning their belief to remain or to leave the United States.

Finally, perhaps the most interesting of all the examples cited is found in chapter four which deals with a series of interviews. Between pages 167 and 171, when questioned about their condition in Israel, one Hebrew Israelite responded by comparing their lives in the United States with their experience in Israel. Hence, he painted a very dismal future for those blacks who remained in the United States. He concluded that they would eventually destroy themselves.

This study is well edited and has sufficient documentation. Having done some reading and research in this area, the study was enjoyable for the reviewer to read. The work is also an invaluable one in that it may be utilized in a number of ways especially by those interested in the religious groups discussed in the book.

Mississippi Valley State University


Acknowledging his indebtedness to Lawrence A. Cremin's pioneering studies in American educational history, Vincent P. Franklin has produced a work that clearly shows the historical breadth and depth of the best recent scholarship in the field of educational history. Franklin's study of public and community educational activities in Philadelphia's black community
illuminates the many facets of the black experience in the city from the colonial period to the
1970s. His comprehensive perspective, his deft use of previous scholarly research, and his
efforts to reveal connections between educational policies and changing social conditions make
this an important contribution to the literature of educational history and Afro-American
history.

Many perceptive observations are imbedded in this thoughtful study. Franklin's discussion
of the impact of intelligence testing on black education during the early 20th Century reveals
how studies that were intended to measure innate abilities were actually used to provide the
veneer of "science" for traditional anti-black educational policies. In his description of the
campaign against segregated public schools, Franklin recognizes the divisions that existed
among blacks regarding the issue. Although he generally downplays the importance of class
divisions within the black community, he notes that the group interests of black teachers led
many of them to oppose desegregation of teaching staffs during the Depression because of their
well-founded belief that all-black schools provided better employment opportunities than did
integrated schools.

Franklin's treatment of the community-wide educational programs sponsored by black
voluntary organizations demonstrates the vital role of these programs in contributing to black
social advancement. In evaluating the role of black political leaders in pursuing racial
objectives in educational fields, Franklin does not hesitate to level strong criticisms against
cautious local NAACP officials and conservative black Democrats whose ineffectiveness was
apparent during the early 1930s or against black politicians of the 1960s who "vied for the
support of the Democratic machine" and lacked the leadership qualities of the "newspaper
editors, ministers, and lawyers" (p. 213) of the preceding era. Franklin is also dubious about
the value of interracial anti-discrimination efforts during and after World War II, commenting
that there was "little evidence that the campaigns to increase interracial understanding and
tolerance had any significant impact upon the overall social conditions of the majority of black
citizens" (p. 166).

Having conceded the ambitious scope and incitefulness of Franklin's work, however, some
concerns remain about the coherence of his study and about the future direction of work in this
field. The initial pages of Franklin's book indicate the superficiality that may result when a
book attempts to cover too much ground too quickly. He breathlessly, and I think needlessly,
synthesizes previous studies of Philadelphia's black community from the creation of the first
Afro-American churches in the late 18th Century to the emergence of a black ghetto in the early
20th Century. His penetrating treatment of the years between the World Wars reaches far
beyond the public school system to examine the deterioration of black economic conditions and
the impact of New Deal programs in Philadelphia during the Depression. His discussion of
unemployment among black youth during the decades after 1930 includes an examination of
the problem of juvenile delinquency. Though the author clearly intends to show the inter-
relationships among these aspects of black life and changes and continuities over time, the
connections are often implicit rather than well-developed. Thus a section that discusses black
employment patterns during the 1920s is followed, without transitional passages, by sections on
housing conditions, crime rates, and then patterns of segregation in the public schools.
Relationships may exist linking these phenomena, but they should have been delineated rather
than implied.

The most convincing and original part of Franklin's book is his discussion of the black
campaign during the 1930s against discriminatory policies in the placement of black school
teachers, but even in this instance the analysis is somewhat unclear. Franklin mentions a variety
of factors that might have affected the success of the black campaign. These include the
depressed economic conditions of blacks in general and black school teachers in particular, the
desire of both major political parties to compete for black votes after 1934, and the limited
victories of black plaintiffs in previous anti-discrimination suits. When Franklin proceeds with his discussion of the final years of the black campaign against segregation, however, only the political factors seem central to his analysis.

While Franklin occasionally deals with topics that are not fully incorporated into his analysis of changes in educational policies, he also leaves out of his discussion other issues that could have increased the value of his study. Thus, although he includes many references to economic conditions, he does not attempt to systematically study the relationship between academic achievement and economic success. He also does not focus his attention on the differences within the black populace regarding the importance of formal education as a means toward economic advancement. He does not determine whether public education altered or simply reproduced the class structure of the black community or whether desegregation has widened class divisions among blacks by providing new opportunities to those who were already relatively successful. To be sure, Franklin does refer to some studies that indicate the relationships between academic achievement and occupational success, but these findings from other studies were not adequately pursued in his own research.

These concerns should not detract from Franklin’s considerable accomplishment in giving us an exhaustively researched, clearly written, forcefully argued account of the impact of white racism and discriminatory policies on black education during the twentieth century. Franklin’s conclusion that “public schooling did not greatly improve the overall social status of blacks” and was indeed “more an obstacle to the achievement of the larger goal of black social advancement” (p. 196) suggests the need for further studies that will combine the insights of studies of educational policies such as Franklin’s with those of the recent quantitative studies of career and intergenerational social mobility.

Stanford University

Clayborne Carson


Robert Eng’s study of the Civil War’s impact on Hampton, Virginia emphasizes black accomplishment achieved despite misunderstanding, indifference, and hostility. The author does not neglect the failures of post-war America but he takes an important lesson from the conclusions of recent studies of the antebellum period. “The people we now know to have been remarkably resourceful as slaves,” he reasons, “logically should not have been less so once they were emancipated” (p. xvi). Enough happened between 1861 and 1870 to discourage Hampton’s blacks from pursuing their version of freedom and by 1870 they accepted the fact that conditions were not and would never be optimum for achieving their goals. However, like Eugene Genovese’s slaves, they “sought to make compromises most advantageous to themselves and made Reconstruction the foundation for continued progress rather than merely an era of bitter disappointment” (p. 83).

Certainly, Engs admits that Northern intervention in Hampton’s affairs helped make possible the conditions in which the freedmen could begin to hope to exercise their rights. Located in Elizabeth City County near Fort Monroe at the tip of the strategic Peninsula, Hampton and its vicinity quickly became a refuge for “contrabands”, thanks to the continued presence of Union troops. Also, the American Missionary Association initiated at Hampton its efforts to aid the South’s former slaves. With the end of the war, Hampton became an important center of Freedmen’s Bureau activity and, in 1868, the home of Samuel Chapman Armstrong’s Hampton Institute.

Ironically, the war-time Yankee presence that had brought Hampton its early freedom led directly to the black population’s distrust of Northern promise and to the freedmen’s early