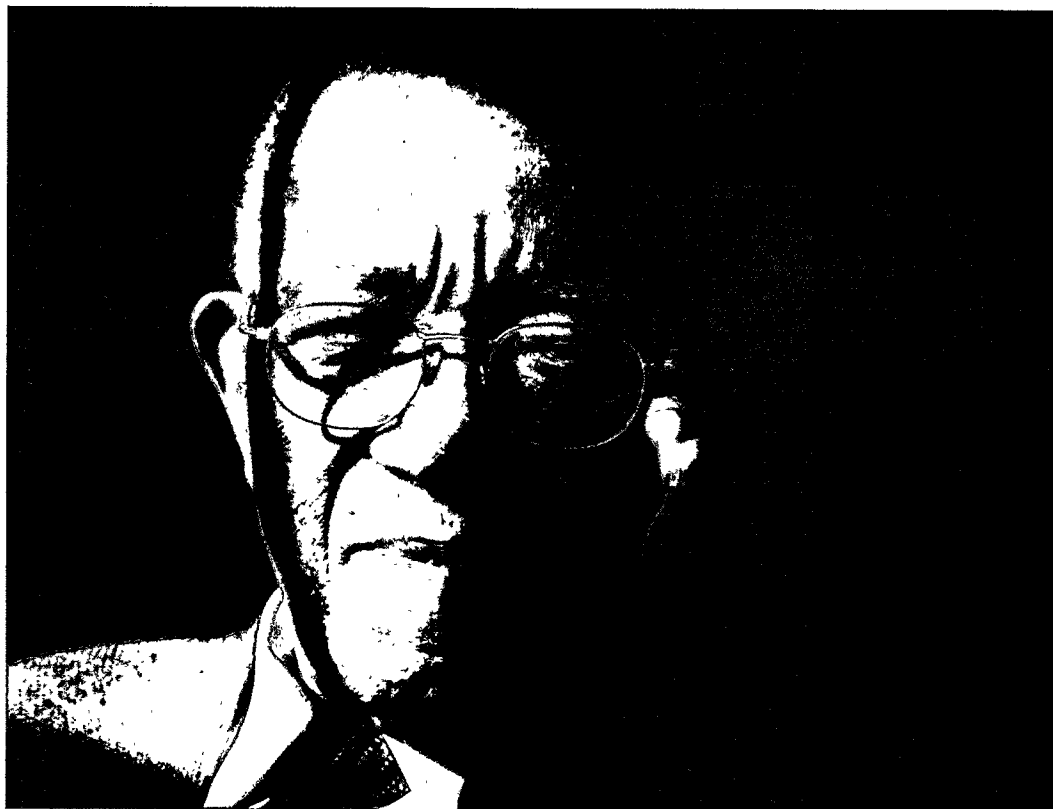


## John Hope Franklin's Perspective on Racial Progress

**E**minent historian John Hope Franklin observes black progress from a unique perspective. The 89-year-old Duke University professor—who has written or co-authored literally dozens of books on African-American history and has been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom—recalls the disappearance of his own father during the Oklahoma race riots of 1921—the day his father went off to work and did not return for a week. Franklin, at the tender age of six, wondered whether his father would return at all, or whether he had fallen victim to racial violence. This, along with his own view of history, leads Franklin to view claims of racial progress through a lens of skepticism. He has seen even the best intended efforts to address racial injustices fall short.

Franklin has lived through the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling that integrated the schools, yet seen the vision for an integrated society that ruling represented go stagnant as the races voluntarily re-segregate in the schools and elsewhere. He has seen the death of Jim Crow as a legal institution, yet seen Jim Crow live on in segregated housing patterns and institutional racism. Still, Franklin sees hope for the future if people are willing to do the work.

"There are several levels on which to look at it," says Franklin of black progress through the decades. "On one level, the black middle class has made remarkable strides. In teaching, the professions, in many aspects of business, blacks are making progress. But we are not doing well in the education *process*. The number



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of African Americans being educated has not significantly improved, and that's one of the disturbing problems.

"*Brown vs. Board of Education* has not worked out how we might have anticipated," Franklin says. "Resistance [to integration] has been institutionalized. It's no accident that more black men are unemployed in Washington, D.C., than employed. It's no accident that there are more young black men in prison than in college. It's part of the system, and it's deeply disturbing."

As for the successful black middle class, Franklin says its membership is too small and too inclined to join the white flight to the suburbs. "More and more, they are moving to the suburbs," says Franklin. "Not only do they often isolate themselves from the whites out there but from blacks back in the city. . . . Blacks move into a neighborhood and whites immediately leave. Blacks move too because they get more affluence. They want to get out and follow the country club crowd. That leaves vast numbers of blacks isolated with no leadership. They stay down, and in fact, they go further down."

Franklin also won't budge from his insistence that the situation for blacks and other minority groups in America can improve—but not without some significant work from both minority groups and the white majority.

Franklin's father, a successful lawyer, had purchased a home in Tulsa, and the family was about to move in when the Oklahoma race riot

broke out. While the child was left to wonder whether his father was even alive, B.C. Franklin spent six-days in a make-shift prison camp. He was released to find the new home destroyed—along with 35 surrounding blocks. "He came out and found the entire area where he lived had been leveled, to the point that he couldn't even find out where he lived."

Franklin sees an analogy in the state of society for vast numbers of black Americans. There is a great deal of rebuilding to do. Yet he sees hope if the nation's citizens are willing to do the work. "I hope that all of these things I mentioned can be somehow reversed," says Franklin. "We'll look at our education system and repair it. It's not good in many places. We'll transfer our expectations for success onto our children. There's nothing wrong with these kids that a little nurturing, and training, and care won't help. They can improve."

"I hope we can take the stereotypes out of our view of blacks," Franklin adds. The same goes for other minority groups, such as immigrants from Mexico. "Treat them like immigrants of the past," says Franklin. "They can make it. Just give them the chance."

Most of all, Franklin hopes that people who are concerned about the state of society will move on from idle fretting to action. "We have to be much more pro-active and do something about our society and not just moan about it and groan about it and feel like you've done your duty because you complained."

—Mike McLaughlin

Civil Rights Act in its August 1999 look at Hispanic/Latino Health in North Carolina.<sup>48</sup> The Center also recommended funding of interpreter services at local health departments as a fundamental means of meeting this requirement.

Despite these efforts to call attention to and address health disparities in North Carolina, a sizable portion of the state's racial and ethnic minorities—particularly African Americans, American Indians, and Hispanics—continue to experience a disproportionate burden of poor health and premature mortality compared to their white counter-

parts.<sup>49</sup> According to a recent report published by the N.C. Center for Health Statistics and the N.C. Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, racial and ethnic disparities in health status are apparent in almost all major health conditions and causes of death.<sup>50</sup> The report shows that African Americans, American Indians, and Hispanics/Latinos in North Carolina are more likely to have a poorer health status than the white population in the state. Moreover, these inequalities are not limited to health status but extend to the type and quality of services minority and underserved