

## Preface

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This project has been a long time coming. The editors of the Jepson Studies in Leadership series considered producing a volume on slavery and emancipation in 2013, the 150th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Though that was not possible, we continued to believe strongly that we should publish a discussion of issues pertaining to race that have plagued the United States of America for its entire history—before, during and after the four-year Civil War of the 1860s. Noting that these issues loomed as prominently and contentiously in the Reconstruction era as at any other time before or since, we subsequently decided to address them in this volume, *Reconstruction and the Arc of Racial (in)Justice*, by gathering contributions from the scholars whose work is represented here. We began before the election of Donald Trump to the American presidency, not realizing then how timely was a discussion of racial justice and injustice throughout US history.

Many foreign observers of the American scene—de Tocqueville to Myrdal, among others—have recognized the central “American Dilemma” of race in US history. In fact, one impetus for addressing segregation and disenfranchisement politically in the mid-twentieth century was international opinion. Lyndon Johnson referred to “the grave concern of many nations – and the harsh judgment of history” in his famous “We shall overcome” Voting Rights speech in 1965. And the concern was not only international. It was very national. Issues pertaining to African Americans were central in deliberations leading to the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Though Thomas Jefferson's all important “all men are created equal” words were included in the final declaration, his eloquent first draft denunciations of slavery and the slave trade were not. His insistence on them would have created disunion before meaningful union took hold. Then the founders danced around the issue of slavery in the 1787 Constitution, inserting three provisions pertaining to it, without using the words slave or slavery. The American slave trade was abolished in 1808, the earliest allowable time under the Constitution, but the trade and slavery itself remained contentious. The compromises of 1820 and 1850 delayed the Civil War, but as Lincoln said in his second inaugural address, because of slavery, “the war came.”

He noted that “All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war,” but also that the result of the war was “fundamental and astounding.” Slavery was abolished. Still, the era of Reconstruction, called by Douglas Egerton “America’s Most Progressive Era,” its cessation, the rise of Jim Crow and segregation within the US government during and after the Woodrow Wilson presidency, and then the civil rights and voting rights struggles, culminating in the momentous acts of 1964 and 1965, kept issues of racial justice persistent and unresolved for a century after the Civil War. They remain so today.

Unfortunately, as the chapters in this volume attest, after the victories of the 1960s, the moral arc of the universe did not keep bending toward justice. The path of racial (in)justice has described the motion of a pendulum, rather than anything like a continuous trajectory. What we learn here is that while undeniable progress has been made—after all, the president of our school, the University of Richmond, is African American—much more needs to be done. We are pleased that this volume in the Jepson Studies in Leadership series illuminates much of what has been accomplished and how much more still needs to be.

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