More Than the Woodward Thesis: Assessing The Strange Career of Jim Crow

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Since its publication in 1955, C. Vann Woodward's The Strange Career of Jim Crow has had a fundamental impact on the study of American race relations. Although best known for its so-called Woodward thesis, that is only part of the book as it emerged through four editions over twenty years, and no one has assessed the work in its entirety since the final edition appeared in 1974.

What I want to do, then, is to consider three of the contributions of Strange Career. The first, of course, is the Woodward thesis concerning the origins, timing, and nature of segregation or, as Woodward sometimes calls it, Jim Crow. The second is the concept of the Second Reconstruction as a way of gaining perspective on Reconstruction or, in Woodward's term, the "First Reconstruction." The third is the masterful but neglected concluding chapter to the 1974 edition, whose strengths ironically point up some of the limitations of the earlier sections and editions of Strange Career.

I suspect that I have read Strange Career in its various forms more often than I have read any other book, except perhaps Woodward's Origins of the New South. Nevertheless, as I began to prepare this essay, I was surprised to discover not only that the book was even more subtle and substantive than I had remembered but also that there was a need to get the different editions straight. In fact, the Strange Career has had several careers, and I think it important to review briefly the structure of the four editions before we consider the contributions. What we really need is something comparable to Woodward's edition of the Mary Chesnut diaries.1

Everything began with the James W. Richard Lectures, which Woodward wrote during the summer months immediately following the Brown v. Board of Education decision and presented before a biracial audience of about one hundred at the

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University of Virginia in October 1954. The manuscript for the lectures became the copy for the first edition of Strange Career, published in 1955. A brief preface and an introduction entitled “Of Reconstructions and the South” argued for the use of history to help understand the present and asserted the essential discontinuity of southern history. Woodward then turned in chapter 1 to the “Forgotten Alternatives” of fluid race relations in the post-Reconstruction South; in chapter 2 to the “Capitulation to Racism” at the turn of the century; and in chapter 3, “The Man on the Cliff,” to the course of race relations from World War I to the Brown decision.2

Two years later in a paperback edition, Woodward added a chapter 4, “‘Deliberate Speed’ vs. ‘Majestic Instancy,’” that brought events up to 1957. He sought not only to explain the worsening of race relations in the South since 1954 but also to provide renewed grounds for optimism by noting that the prospects for change were more promising than during the First Reconstruction. The 1957 edition remains a strangely forgotten one. It was the only one in which the subtitle, A Brief Account of Segregation, appeared on the cover; its foreword, which modified some of Woodward’s original argument, was not reprinted with the other prefaces in successive editions; and much of its final chapter was later eliminated, including an extended comparison of the two reconstructions.3

The 1966 revision proved longer lasting. The preface said the new version sought to take advantage of the new perspective provided by the additional years since 1955, as well as to bring the account up to date and to consider new scholarly contributions to the field. The original introduction remains intact, though without a title; the original three chapters appear as chapters 2 to 4 with sections slightly altered, especially to include more information on northern race relations. A new chapter 1, “Of Old Regimes and Reconstructions,” incorporates some of the modifications expressed in the 1957 foreword, adds some new ones, and considers the most serious challenges to Woodward’s view of segregation as a product of the turn-of-the-century South. There is also a new concluding chapter (chapter 5), “The Declining Years of Jim Crow,” that incorporates part of the final chapter of the 1957 edition and carries the story to the climactic week in August 1965 that witnessed both the signing of the Voting Rights Act and the outbreak of the Watts riot. The 1966 edition also marks the coming-of-age of Strange Career as a textbook with the addition of an index and an updated list of suggested reading.4

The process of “textbookization” was completed in the 1974 edition. Following a brief but important preface, this version is identical to the previous one until page 181; except for the deletion of some material on northern race relations, the rest of the book differs significantly from the 1966 version only in the addition of a sixth chapter, “The Career Becomes Stranger.” The new chapter begins with Watts and...
closes with a typically ironic assessment of the seeming high tide (in the early 1970s) of black separatist rejection of Jim Crow's end.5

During the process of revision, Strange Career evolved from a lecture series meant for a local, predominantly southern audience, which aimed to provide a historical foundation for hopes that desegregation would be peaceful and successful, into the most widely used survey text on the nature of American race relations since the Civil War. Along the way, Woodward drew attention to his initial qualifiers and provided further modifications. After all, as he put it in the original edition, "Since I am . . . dealing with a period of the past that has not been adequately investigated, and also with events of the present that have come too rapidly and recently to have been properly digested and understood, it is rather inevitable that I shall make some mistakes. I shall expect and hope to be corrected."6 In that spirit and with the benefit of additional years of scholarship and perspective, it is time to turn to three of the contributions of the Strange Career.

The heart of the book remains the Woodward thesis. In his recent memoirs, Woodward confirms the definition of the thesis he gave in a 1971 essay, "The Strange Career of a Historical Controversy." It was, he wrote, "first, that racial segregation in the South in the rigid and universal form it had taken by 1954 did not appear with the end of slavery, but toward the end of the century and later; and second, that before it appeared in this form there occurred an era of experiment and variety in race relations of the South in which segregation was not the invariable rule."7 As Woodward put it in the original and subsequent editions of Strange Career, it was not until the post-1890 period that a rigid segregation code "lent the sanction of law to a racial ostracism that extended to churches and schools, to housing and jobs, to eating and drinking. Whether by law or by custom, that ostracism eventually extended to virtually all forms of public transportation, to sports and recreations, to hospitals, orphanages, prisons, and asylums, and ultimately to funeral homes, morgues, and cemeteries."8 The reference to custom is misleading, however, since for Woodward, despite his partial disclaimers, the existence of a law enforcing segregation has always been the key variable in evaluating the nature of race relations. And in all editions of the book, most of the examples of flexibility before the 1890s have come from the moderate South Atlantic states.

Woodward easily weathered and even incorporated the first wave of criticism that appeared. In the new first chapter of the 1966 edition, he accepted Richard C. Wade's depiction of segregation in antebellum southern cities but discounted its importance because an all-pervasive, legally enforced system was absent and the region's urbanization limited. Leon F. Litwack's revelations about the extent of segregation in the pre-Civil War North impressed Woodward more, and he broad-

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6 Ibid., (1959), ix.
ened his treatment of the North as a result, but he reminded readers that his concern had been primarily with the roots of segregation in the South. Joel Williamson's argument for the existence of a "duo-chromatic order" by the end of Reconstruction in South Carolina, like Wade's, was found lacking because South Carolina "may have been exceptional in some respects," but more importantly because there, as elsewhere in the South, race relations had not yet crystallized. Having dealt firmly but graciously with his critics and even included some additional examples of early segregation, Woodward then added a new section to the beginning of chapter 2 ("Forgotten Alternatives") that spotlighted Charles E. Wynes's support for the Woodward thesis in Virginia.9

Woodward did not consider further historiographical developments in his 1974 edition, instead referring readers to "The Strange Career of a Historical Controversy." Other studies had appeared since Woodward's 1971 essay that aimed to document the prevalence and early appearance of segregation or to argue for its later crystallization, and more would follow after 1974. Woodward was correct to think that those subsequent works did not significantly alter the debate, and they do not merit detailed consideration here.10

Increasingly, however, some historians sought to go beyond the narrow question of what segregation did the South have, and when did the South have it, a debate that often seemed to come down to whether the bourbon glass was half full or half empty. For example, although I had entered the fray in 1967 geared to write parasitic history and was therefore delighted to discover widespread legally enforced cemetery segregation by 1865 and the presence of Jim Crow Bibles in 1868, I soon sought to move the debate in a new direction. Instead of simply chronicling the considerable segregation that existed prior to 1890, I asked what it had replaced. I discovered that it was normally exclusion of blacks, rather than integration; ironically, segregation often therefore marked an improvement in the status of blacks, rather than a


setback. That view has been widely accepted, most notably and generously by Woodward himself. John Cell embraced my view and then shed further light on the issue by comparing the origins of segregation in the American South and South Africa in a book that Woodward considers more supportive of the Woodward thesis than I do. It is worth noting, however, that Cell's experiment in comparative history and George Fredrickson's before it owed much to the pioneering comparisons with South Africa found in Strange Career, whose title for the "Man on a Cliff" chapter is taken from an essay by Alan Paton.12

The debate over the Woodward thesis has been fruitful. Yet it has often been frustrating for Woodward's critics, since the master continues to absorb what they see as knockdown blows and even to incorporate adversaries' weapons into his own arsenal. A careful reading of Strange Career helps explain why this could happen. For despite all that has been written about it, the contours of the Woodward thesis are not at all clear. Rather than being a firmly etched thesis, Woodward's argument is hedged, as he recalled in his memoirs, by "the carefully noted exception, the guarded qualification, the unstated assumption, the cautionary warning [which] was often overlooked or brushed aside."13 Indeed, Woodward went to great lengths in the various editions to avoid misinterpretation. Despite his emphasis on the importance of laws, he wrote in the first edition "laws are not an adequate index to the extent and prevalence of segregation and discriminatory practices in the South." The same phrase appears in all subsequent editions, but beginning in 1966, Woodward italicized it to make sure no one missed the point.14 He also sought to be even more

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13 Woodward, Thinking Back, 93.

precise in his use of evidence. In all editions, Woodward uses Negro journalist T. McCants Stewart's recollections of his 1885 trip along the South Atlantic seaboard to illustrate the absence of rigid segregation. The treatments are identical, except that the 1955/1957 account is introduced by the sentence "More pertinent and persuasive is the testimony of the Negro himself"; the 1966/1974 account begins, "More pertinent, whether typical or not, is the experience of a Negro."

Yet the fault for missing Woodward's point does not always rest with the careless reader, for in matters besides the importance of law, Strange Career is often contradictory. Often that is to the good, making the book more comprehensive. Woodward regularly claims that he is looking simply at segregation, defined as the physical distance between the races, but there is a wealth of valuable information about political participation, jury service, and other matters that go well beyond mere segregation. At other times the contradictions are less fortunate. Despite Woodward's reference to the progressive extension of segregation, the original edition makes clear that the claims about the fluidity of race relations did not include churches, militia companies, schools, state and private welfare institutions, and a wide range of activities. In the 1966 and 1974 versions of the book, an addition to the original paragraph on state and private welfare institutions, for example, makes Woodward's point more explicit by noting, "Both types had usually made it [segregation] a practice all along." Not only was segregation the norm in many areas from at least 1865 on, it was often, as in the case of schools, admittedly enforced by law. The Woodward thesis is therefore much narrower than commonly believed and ironically had little relevance for the cause that most concerned Woodward at the time he conceived the book, that is, school desegregation. In essence, the thesis covered the situation in public conveyances and in hotels, theaters, restaurants, and other places of public accommodation. Woodward wrote out whole aspects of southern life from the bounds of his argument, thus at the very beginning, depending on your point of view, either loading the dice or conceding much of the game to his critics.

Woodward has obviously fared best within the strict ground rules he had established. The thesis is particularly true of public conveyances, where segregation laws were generally of post-1890 origin and where a degree of integration certainly existed, though rarely on first-class railroad cars. Yet the evidence about various forms of public accommodation, most notably the limited impact of the 1875 Civil Rights Act, suggests that segregation by custom was almost certainly more common than integration. On Woodward's terms, that conclusion might be a victory for the thesis, but a somewhat hollow one.

15 Ibid. (1955), 19; ibid. (1957), 19; ibid. (1966), 38; ibid. (1974), 38. Although Woodward does not mention T. McCants Stewart's color, he was a very light-skinned Negro, and that may help explain the ease with which he traveled through the South.


The weight of the evidence seems to be on the side of those who find segregation deeply ingrained in southern life in the immediate postwar years, if not before. More importantly, it is not clear that the system of segregation became so rigid after the turn of the century as Woodward suggests, or that it did so when he averred. Recent studies of early twentieth-century Georgia and Tennessee blacks, for example, note that while segregation was pervasive, integrated activities continued to exist. I suspect further probing will reveal many instances of interracial mixing through at least the 1930s and even later, particularly among the lower classes.18 Similarly, despite Woodward’s surprising assertion that after 1900 “blacks ceased to vote,” only indirectly corrected in a later chapter, scattered blacks continued to vote throughout the South and sometimes, in cities such as Atlanta and Memphis, even played a pivotal role in local politics.19 By juxtaposing the American South and South Africa, Cell and Fredrickson remind us that the twentieth-century social, political, and especially economic barriers between the races in the South were never as great or rigid as Woodward posits. Indeed, I think we have probably been spending too much time on the wrong end of the Woodward thesis. We need to know as much about the fluidity during the allegedly rigid period of segregation as we know about the rigidity during the allegedly fluid years.20 It would also help to know if supposedly new forms of segregation such as those involving phone booths, elevators, and water fountains merely coincided with the appearance of new inventions.

What then has been the significance of the Woodward thesis? Woodward seems to have been wrong about the extent of nonsegregated behavior and the prospects for forgotten alternatives in that realm during the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction periods, but he did inject the issue of segregation into the study of nineteenth-century southern history. Woodward stated that previous observers had assumed the prevalence of segregation in the postwar period, but he does not give any names. In fact, segregation, while certainly taken for granted, was not a major

19 Woodward, Strange Career (1955); 91; ibid. (1957), 91; ibid. (1966), 106, ibid. (1974), 106. For reference to the “virtual exclusion for nearly half a century” of Negro voters, see ibid. (1955), 124; ibid. (1957), 124. For reference to the exclusion of “all but a tiny percentage of the Negroes from the polls in the Southern states for nearly half a century,” see ibid. (1966), 141; ibid. (1974), 141. On the political role of blacks in Atlanta, see Dittmer, Black Georgia, 147–48; on Memphis, see Lamon, Black Tennesseans, 42–47, 55–58, 222–23. For a broader discussion of black voting before the 1950s, see V. O. Key, Jr., Southern Politics in State and Nation (New York, 1949).
issue in the study of the postbellum South prior to *Strange Career*. Even George Tindall's penetrating, though more limited, anticipation of the Woodward thesis for South Carolina aroused little attention.

It can be as difficult to explain "great leaps" in the writing of history as in the unfolding of history itself. Perhaps even Woodward cannot fully account for the timing and shape of his argument. He certainly was able to draw on the work of Tindall and of social scientists, especially social psychologists interested in the uses of scapegoats and the nature of prejudice, such as Konrad Lorenz and Gordon Allport. Nor should we forget Woodward's own primary research for *Origins of the New South* and a supporting brief in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. But more was involved than the "facts" of history or the theories of others. Critical to opening a whole new field for study and infusing it with a startling perspective was Woodward's desire to provide southerners with a more hopeful, diverse, and discontinuous "usable past" with which to confront the challenges of desegregation.21 And in the controversy that followed in its wake, the Woodward thesis led to new findings that transcended the narrower issue of the origin and extent of segregation.

Even more important than the injection of the segregation issue into Southern historiography has been Woodward's profound insight into the importance of discontinuity in the study of southern race relations and especially the watershed nature of the 1890s. It is now clear that something highly significant happened in southern race relations during the 1890s. Though many segregation laws were already on the books, Woodward is right about the importance of post-1890 legislation. Those later laws, however, even when coming in new areas, did not create a new system of segregation. Rather, they added the force of additional laws to a system already widespread in practice. Cell reached a similar conclusion, noting that the shift during the 1890s came, not in the reality of racial contact, but in political rhetoric and law. In his recent tour de force, *The Crucible of Race*, Joel Williamson agrees but adds to the equation the sharp increase in racial violence.22

The question remains: Why did things change in the 1890s? Woodward attributed the altered racial climate to the erosion of northern liberalism and the weakened commitment of southern conservatives and agrarian radicals to defending black political rights. Yet recent scholarship has demonstrated that most Populists were, at best, always ambivalent about having a biracial coalition and that conservatives, rather than following, actually led in the fight for disfranchisement legislation.23 Besides, both those groups had already long expected to be segregated from blacks in schools, churches, and places of public accommodation.

21 Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*. In the original edition, Woodward cited several books concerned with the legal status of blacks but did not single out the most important, Gilbert Thomas Stephenson, *Race Distinctions in American Law* (London, 1910), which he may have had in mind since Stephenson had argued that Jim Crow laws often simply gave the force of law to customary practices. For influences on Woodward's new approach to the subject, including work on a brief for the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). See Roper, *C. Vann Woodward*, 171-200; and Woodward, *Thinking Back*, 81-90.


23 For Woodward's explanation, see Woodward, *Strange Career*, (1955) 51-64, which is reproduced in *ibid.*
The withdrawal of northern support for blacks alone remains a convincing reason for the changes of the 1890s. But there were other forces, treated only indirectly by Woodward. As Williamson notes, the economic hard times of the late 1880s and early 1890s and the threat of renewed northern Republican interference in southern affairs encouraged a shift in racial attitudes. Cell, drawing inspiration from Woodward's *Origins of the New South*, also emphasizes the altered economic situation in the South during the 1890s. Although I would agree with Cell and Williamson, I think they both ignore a possible source encouraging the creation of a more de jure pattern of racial segregation. As I have argued elsewhere, segregation emerged during Reconstruction in part due to the efforts of white Republicans and their black allies, two groups Woodward largely ignores. Because segregation replaced exclusion, they could see it as an improvement in the status of blacks, especially when it was presented as providing separate but equal treatment. By the 1890s white Republicans were, except in a few parts of the South, no longer a major factor in the racial equation. Blacks were, however, and their resistance to de facto segregation may have helped move white southerners in the direction of additional laws. No one, to my knowledge, has sought to follow up that line of inquiry systematically since I presented it in the mid-1970s, but I think it worth pursuing, particularly given Cell's conclusion about the role of South African blacks' "growing uppityness" in forcing whites to resort to apartheid in an effort to control them. And strange as it might seem, during the entire debate over the Woodward thesis, there has been remarkably little interest in the Jim Crow statutes themselves, and no one has satisfactorily followed the life of a statute from its origins through passage and the effects of implementation. I might add that in the process of sorting out the reasons for


change in the 1890s it would help to be more precise in the use of Jim Crow and to avoid the linkage between segregation, proscription, and disfranchisement that clouds the thinking of both the supporters and critics of the Woodward thesis. For long before the de jure disfranchisement of blacks or the frightening increase in lynching, segregation had become the norm in much of southern society.²⁷

A second contribution of Strange Career has been less controversial. Just as Woodward felt that the recent origins of segregation might make it easier to overcome, he believed that the forces of reform were better positioned in the 1950s than they had been during Reconstruction. In his view, the nation in 1955 was in the midst of a “New Reconstruction,” a term later used interchangeably with “Second Reconstruction,” until the latter unaccountably completely replaced “New Reconstruction” in the 1966 edition.²⁸ For Woodward, the New or Second Reconstruction had far better prospects for success than the First Reconstruction. In the 1955, 1966, and 1974 editions, he kept comparisons to a minimum, stressing the impact of World War II and the Cold War, the greater power of the federal government, and the commitment of both political parties to desegregation in the twentieth century. In the 1957 edition, however, during a time of renewed southern resistance to desegregation, Woodward devoted five pages of his concluding chapter to reasons why conditions favoring change were more encouraging in the mid-1950s than in the 1860s and 1870s. Unlike the earlier Reconstruction, the new one was not so strongly tied to the fortunes of a single party, blacks were in a stronger position, there was more support in the South, churches were unified in their support, the border states and mid-South were on the right side, and there were already tangible results, as in the desegregation of higher education. This time reconstruction was national, rather than sectional, in scope and support.²⁹

By 1966, Woodward evidently no longer felt the need to be so defensive about the prospects for change, and he eliminated the extended comparison while incorporating most of the chapter’s remaining material in the new edition. The rest of his treatment was essentially the same except for the expanded account of the new period of reconstruction and the name change. Unfortunately, the persistence of language from the earlier editions resulted in some confusion as to periodization. Woodward continued to date the origins of the Second Reconstruction from the late 1930s; he argued that it reached full momentum in the first decade after the war.

²⁷ Woodward expressed this view in its classic form in a passage retained in subsequent editions: “The policies of proscription, segregation, and disfranchisement that are often described as the immutable ‘folkways’ of the South, impervious alike to legislative reform and armed intervention, are of more recent origin [than the immediate post-Reconstruction period].” Woodward, Strange Career (1955), 47. John Cell’s definition of segregation is comparable to Woodward’s “Jim Crow” (which Woodward often used interchangeably with “segregation” but sometimes more broadly): “an interlocking system of economic institutions, social practices and customs, political power, law, and ideology, all of which function both as means and ends in one group’s efforts to keep another (or others) in their place.” Cell, Highest Stage of White Supremacy, 14. On Cell’s approach, see Howard N. Rabinowitz, “The Not-So Strange Career of Jim Crow,” Reviews in American History, 12 (March 1984), 58–64.


²⁹ Ibid. (1957), 174–78.
and was divided into two eras by the Brown decision. But although he retained in the 1974 edition the earlier statement that "the Second Reconstruction shows no signs of having yet run its course or even of having slackened its pace," in his new concluding chapter he observed, "The foundations of the Second Reconstruction had, in fact, begun to crumble during the Johnson Administration."30

Most other scholars and politicians still use the term to describe the situation today, though, given the policies of the Reagan administration, the number is understandably shrinking. Disregarding the questions about duration for the moment, the concept of the Second Reconstruction seems to have great value as a means of enlarging our understanding of the limitations of the First Reconstruction. For Woodward, of course, the contrast was especially useful because it suggested that the new effort had a better chance for success than the first. Yet as Woodward realized, it is best to use the term as a shorthand way of noting that after World War II federal policy once again became vitally concerned with the status of blacks in America. Obviously there were the differences between the two reconstructions with regard to prospects for success, as already noted, but in a passage found in all editions, which has been overlooked by those who glibly use the term, Woodward observed that the Second Reconstruction "addressed itself to all the aspects of racial relations that the first attacked and even some that the First Reconstruction avoided or neglected." He then mentions as examples the attacks on segregation in the armed services and in the public schools.31

And here, I think, is the key point. Unless extreme caution is employed when using the term Second Reconstruction, the effect will be to distort the meaning of the First Reconstruction. It seems to me that the First and Second Reconstructions not only differed in their chances for success; they were about very different things. For that reason Woodward might have been better advised to stick to the term New Reconstruction, which has a stronger connotation of difference. The only policy aim that really links together the two reconstructions is the desire to increase the political power of blacks, though in its enforcement provisions the Voting Rights Act is much stronger than anything earlier. For if I am correct about the First Reconstruction's emphasis on equal access and acceptance of segregation, even for those areas in which Woodward does not acknowledge its existence, then there is no comparison with the integrationist thrust of the Second Reconstruction. Similarly, it is clear that the emphasis on jobs, housing, and other economic conditions had no counterpart in the First Reconstruction, other than perhaps the largely abortive efforts at land redistribution and tax reform. And certainly there is a world of difference between the call for equal opportunity that dominated the First Reconstruction and the demand for equality of condition that, at least after 1965, threatened to control the Second Reconstruction. But I don't think we should be surprised by those differences. Nor should we succumb, as some have, to the temptation to damn the proponents of the First Reconstruction for not going far enough in their reform efforts.

a temptation Woodward staunchly resists. After all, it would be ahistorical and unjust to expect mid-nineteenth-century Americans to believe and act like their late twentieth-century descendants or to create comparable institutions to promote change.

Woodward's treatment of the Second Reconstruction led him naturally into the penetrating concluding chapter of the 1974 edition. Its contribution does not stand out like the Woodward thesis or the concept of the Second Reconstruction. Many of the ideas are derivative, and the events have been increasingly covered in more detail by others. Its greatness lies in the way Woodward has brought together an impressive amount of material in a brief space, presented it in the elegant and eloquent style that characterizes the rest of the book, and made sound judgments that continue to fly in the face of much liberal and radical cant now, as they did when written fourteen years ago.

Woodward began with the obvious question: Why, after the great successes in desegregation and voting rights, did black urban America explode? His answer was that the issues being settled did not affect poor blacks and that the emphasis on integration ignored the growing nationalist thrust of many black leaders. The fight for the end of legal Jim Crow that seemed so critical in 1954 now paled next to a rash of socioeconomic problems that neither integration nor the ballot could solve. Woodward writes with compassion of the frustration and deprivation that produced the northern riots and the shift to new leaders who espoused "liberation and separation," rather than "integration and assimilation." Yet in the midst of both black and white liberal support for such a shift, Woodward remained committed to the hopes of 1954, that is, to an integrated America.

John Roper, Woodward's biographer, interprets the 1974 concluding chapter as a product of Woodward's allegedly conservative drift during the years between the mid-1960s and 1974, a period characterized by William McFeely as Woodward's "Tory Period," and by Woodward as his "times of trouble." Another scholar, who is probably not alone, has discerned a "hostile tone" in that chapter. That period was a depressing one for Woodward, both in his personal life and in the life of the country, but it would be wrong to see the chapter as part of some psychologically induced move to the right or an example of hostility toward or deviation from the struggle for equal rights. If anything had changed, it was the times, not the man.

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34 Roper, C. Vann Woodward, 198, 232–67, esp. 246–47; remarks of anonymous reader of a previous version of this essay (in Rabinowitz's possession). Roper tends to treat Woodward's views of society and history that he agrees with as "liberal" or "radical"; when he disagrees with the assessments, Woodward is wrong and "conservative." Much of Roper's evidence, including Woodward's vote for George McGovern in 1972, undercuts claims for a Tory Woodward.
There was, however, some overreaction on his part and even some patronizing. Though he attempted to be fair minded, his language often gave him away—"the separatist impulse infected" civil rights organizations; Stokely Carmichael moved more and more "toward a license to hate, to violence and to rage." Yet at times Woodward seemed disturbed by his own pessimism—the 1974 chapter reminds us that despite all the attention they received (and in the face of his own overemphasis), the separatists captured only a small segment of black America. His heroes remained the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Bayard Rustin, and others committed to integration, and he was equally harsh toward black separatists and toward the guilt-ridden white liberals who gave into their demands. About the latter, he said "at times it was a question whether it was guilt or cowardice that prevailed." Nevertheless, he provided thoughtful, if largely negative, portraits of the new black leaders like Malcolm X (his favorite), Carmichael, Huey Newton, Eldridge Cleaver, and the rest and the groups they led. Throughout the chapter, Woodward kept in mind the difference between race and class interests, as when noting that the benefits of "Black Power" accrued to the black bourgeoisie, a process hidden by the "myth of black unity." He presents an equally compelling analysis of the white backlash.35

In short, this is perceptive and strong stuff. No one is spared. In addition to the divisions among blacks, there were many reasons for the end of the Second Reconstruction, including sheer exhaustion, the political and judicial undercutting of federal agencies' integration efforts, and the defection of white allies, especially Jews who became concerned about rising black anti-Semitism and liberals and students who became preoccupied with the Vietnam War. Woodward concludes with an essentially positive assessment of the Second Reconstruction, but he raises a number of penetrating questions about the prospects for integration in a society where "the brute facts of demography," among other forces, were moving in the opposite direction. One could therefore expect, he concluded sadly rather than bitterly, both "demand for integration and a demand for separation. Both demands would likely be heard for a long time, for the means of satisfying neither seemed yet at hand."36

It has been fourteen years since the appearance of that chapter. Like many Americans who had hoped that the end of legalized Jim Crow would lead to even greater progress, Woodward had been sobered by the experience of the previous twenty years. It is not surprising that there has been no fifth edition of Strange Career. Fortunately, Woodward has left us with a chapter that is the best single place to go in order to understand what happened to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream. Yet it is also a chapter ironically out of place in the book as it was conceived in 1954 and nominally existed in 1974. Although Woodward had continued to add material on the North to the earlier editions, because of developments at the time the new 1974 chapter devoted unprecedented space to northern race relations. Similarly, for

36 Ibid., 219, 220.
a book devoted to the origins and demise of legal segregation, the chapter gave a surprising degree of attention to matters unrelated to segregation and to the effects of de facto, rather than de jure, discrimination. The most important reason for those changes was a new emphasis in a book that had admittedly been concerned with white attitudes and behavior toward blacks. Now blacks moved to center stage, and the focus was on black attitudes and behavior.

Woodward's shift to viewing blacks as subjects, rather than objects, of history was part of a general trend in black and ethnic history then underway, but he was among the pacemakers, as had been indicated by his 1969 presidential address to the Organization of American Historians.37 In more subtle ways he had moved in that direction in the previous edition of the Strange Career. In the 1955 and 1957 editions, for example, in discussing the origins of the Second Reconstruction, he had said that "the chief agent for the advance against Southern peculiarities of racial discrimination and segregation has been the federal government in its several branches and departments, both civil and military." In 1966, in a change kept in 1974, he substituted, "Among the chief agents," thus implicitly at least increasing the importance of other elements, including blacks, who were subsequently discussed.38 There is nothing, however, to compare with the emphasis in 1974's new chapter.

It is worth noting the greater attention to blacks in 1974, not only because it would be impossible to understand the preceding years and Woodward's reaction to them without doing so, but also because by largely ignoring black attitudes and behavior for the earlier years, Woodward missed an opportunity to provide a more compelling treatment of the origins and development of segregation. Early generations of blacks are viewed as "not aggressive in pressing their rights," "confused and politically apathetic"; Booker T. Washington is described as favoring a "submissive philosophy."39 Only in the preface to the final edition did Woodward seek "to recall a certain ambivalence that black people have felt all along toward integration in white America," but he still incorrectly asserted that it had "been buried and put aside during the long struggle against segregation and discrimination." Unfortu-

38 Woodward, Strange Career (1955), 123; ibid. (1957), 123; ibid. (1966), 134; ibid. (1974), 134. At times the new emphasis produced puzzling results. In his discussion of the 1965 disturbances in Selma in the 1966 edition Woodward mentioned the murders of "Jimmie Lee Jackson, a Negro," "one of the clergymen, James Reeb," and "a woman on the highway to Selma." Ibid. (1966), 187. In the 1974 edition, he repeats the reference to Jackson, but now notes "one of the clergymen died" and "a woman demonstrator" was murdered on the highway. Neither the race nor name of the two whites is given. The woman was, of course, Viola Liuzzo whose death received more national attention than Jackson's; ibid. (1974), 184–85. The new approach also gave less emphasis to the contributions of white southerners. For the omission of Judge J. Waites Waring of South Carolina, who presided over a key white primary case, see ibid. (1955), 125–27; ibid. (1957), 125–27; ibid. (1966), 140–42; ibid. (1974), 140–42. Note especially the deletion of "As so frequently happens in this New Reconstruction, a Southern man played one of the key roles," indicating that by 1966 Woodward was less concerned about providing the South with white role models. Compare ibid. (1955), 125; ibid. (1957), 125; ibid. (1966), 141; and ibid. (1974), 141.
39 Ibid. (1966), 28, 59, 82; ibid. (1974), 28, 59, 82. For the latter two quotations, see ibid. (1955), 41, 65; ibid. (1957), 41, 65; ibid. (1966), 59, 82; ibid. (1974), 59, 82. Despite the claim that blacks were "confused," in the same paragraph Woodward shows they were not, by saying that they were beginning to think in economic terms and had seen through Democratic appeals for their votes.
nately, it was too late to rewrite the early sections of the book to incorporate the new approach found in the final chapter. Had he written, for example, about the call of Atlanta blacks in 1875 for the hiring of black teachers in their segregated schools, readers would have appreciated even more the irony of the Atlanta NAACP chapter doing the same thing a hundred years later. And, in general, Woodward would not be so surprised or think it quite as “strange” to find that “black champions of separatism joined hands with white champions of segregation.” The 1960s and 1970s were not, after all, the first time that some blacks had opted for “separate but equal treatment.”

By 1974, then, and certainly by 1988, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* no longer held together as well as it had in 1955. New research and further reflection had reinforced the qualifications and modifications already present in the initial edition, thus further lessening the purity of the Woodward thesis. Segregation itself no longer seemed so important an issue, whether in its de facto or de jure form. The guarded optimism of 1955 had given way to a guarded pessimism. The inattention to the actions and attitudes of blacks in the initiation of segregation after the Civil War had been revealed as a crippling shortcoming, not only by the work of others, but by a powerful new concluding chapter. An unquestioning commitment to integration and blindness to the voluntary aspects of ethnic cohesion had obscured the realities of the nation’s cultural pluralism. As Woodward himself had feared, but expected, the passage of time and fruits of new research had exposed the risks of writing presentist and “committed history.”

But does this mean that *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* must simply be consigned to the ranks of misguided classics that include *The Age of Jackson*, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, and *The Frontier in American History*, to be read as a period piece or the progenitor of a historiographical controversy? Woodward himself seems to take this view in his memoirs, as does his biographer. Had *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* remained the series of lectures it was intended to be, that probably would have been the case. But in the process of turning the lectures into a textbook, Woodward so broadened and modified his initial effort as to make it the best available brief account of American race relations. Historians will continue to explore the well-trod ground of nineteenth-century segregation, but Woodward has already anticipated and undercut much of what they will find, and no one has yet found fault with the essence of Woodward’s twentieth-century account of the subject. As typified by its new concluding chapter, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* remains a pathbreaking, perceptive, highly readable, judicious, and surprisingly fact-filled effort to understand far more than the roots and nature of segregation, more even than the strange career of Jim Crow.