

March 30, 2009

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Madam Speaker, I rise today to join in the tributes of a truly great American. Dr. John Hope Franklin lived an extraordinary life. Throughout his 94 years, he was both a trailblazer in the history of black America, but at the same time he was the preeminent chronicler of that history. His groundbreaking work as an historian had influences on the academic world and the Nation as a whole.

John Hope Franklin was born on January 2, 1915, in Oklahoma, the son of a successful attorney father and a school teacher mother. Despite being raised by two professionals, John's life was not immune from the pervasive racism of the time. His family lost everything in the Tulsa race riot of 1921 when the black section of Tulsa was burned and over 30 people murdered after a young black man was wrongfully accused of assaulting a white woman. There has been a campaign to provide reparations to the survivors of that riot. And tomorrow in the Judiciary Committee, we will be marking up a bill on this very issue that now bears the name of John Hope Franklin.

Despite the hardships of his youth, Dr. Franklin excelled in school and after graduating valedictorian of his high school class, he attended Fisk University. At Fisk, he was a student leader and was also president of the campus chapter of both his and my fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha. While at Fisk, he originally intended to study law, but at the suggestion of one of his professors, he took up history as his concentration. The suggestion took root and Dr. Franklin graduated from Fisk with a bachelor's degree in history in 1935. He then attended Harvard University where he received his master's in 1936 and Ph.D. in 1941.

Dr. Franklin was first and foremost a teacher. He began his academic career with instruction duties at Fisk, St. Augustine's College, and North Carolina Central College. In 1945, he was asked to write a book on black history, and that book was published in 1947. His signature book "From Slavery to Freedom: A history of American Negroes." It has been reissued eight times, translated into five languages and still is considered the cornerstone work on black history used in colleges and universities today.

That same year, Dr. Franklin accepted a teaching position at Howard University. It was there that his work as a scholar and his interest in law intersected. Dr. Franklin provided research that

Thurgood Marshall and the lawyers of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund used in the crafting of their legal arguments in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. He would later lend his scholarly weight to the civil rights movement, even marching with Martin Luther King in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965.

Dr. Franklin was among the first black scholars in America to earn a prominent post at a predominantly white college or university. In 1956, he broke the color barrier at Brooklyn College where he was the first black man appointed to chair a history department at a predominately white institution. Dr. Franklin's accomplishment was tinged with the acknowledgment of how far race relations still needed to come in America because despite his credentials, he was denied service by banks and realtors in his quest to purchase a home near Brooklyn College. Real estate officials tried to redline him into African American-only neighborhoods. It took him nearly as long to find a home near his school as it did to write *From Slavery to Freedom*."

Dr. Franklin continued his teaching career at other prestigious schools--Harvard, the University of Chicago--and finally settling at Duke University as the James B. Duke Professor Emeritus of History, the first African American to hold an endowed chair at that institution.

The title of his autobiography, *Mirror to America*," is a perfect description of his life and work. With deep knowledge of American history, Dr. Franklin was able to reflect on the root causes of many of the problems of the day. In 1997, there was national recognition of Dr. Franklin's knowledge of race when Bill Clinton tapped him to chair the President's Initiative on Race in America.

Dr. Franklin received over 100 honorary degrees, the NAACP's Spingarn Award and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Nation's highest civilian award.

On a personal note, Madam Speaker, my parents were long-time friends of Dr. Franklin. In fact, he participated in their wedding in 1942.

Madam Speaker, America has lost a truly great thinker, a preeminent scholar, a dear friend of liberty and freedom. I know we will continue to learn from his work for years to come. I thank you.