

Safundi

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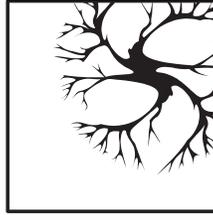
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Safundi and White Supremacy

AN INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE 21

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When the idea to create an online journal to compare the United States and South Africa occurred to me seven years ago, the first resource I consulted to gauge the viability of such a comparison was George Fredrickson's *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History* (1981). Review after review lauded it a remarkable achievement, praising it equally as his next book, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (1995). These were the first two books I ordered and studied before turning the mere idea for an online comparative community into "virtual" reality.

It would be overreaching to claim that Fredrickson's research catalyzed the creation of *Safundi*. Other works published around the same time as *White Supremacy*, and discussed tangentially in this special issue, would have served the purposes of my preliminary, exploratory research. However, the breadth and depth of Fredrickson's comparisons in the two monographs and their spot-on applicability to *Safundi's* future goals shined a light across a vast comparative landscape. I saw the tremendous value, and the extraordinary potential, of relating United States and South African histories, literatures, and other disciplines. Furthermore, it was clear these academic explorations could be amplified by utilizing the Internet's particular advantage of minimizing geographical distances. Fredrickson's scholarship, particularly in *White Supremacy*, served as a subconscious motivator as the journal developed its first few issues. And while *Safundi* indirectly owes much to Fredrickson's first U.S.-South African comparative book, our journal has aimed to fill in the gaps left by his broader investigations, by focusing on specific comparisons between, for example, historical events, individual authors, related policies, and transnational themes. As Fredrickson himself writes in this issue's first article, "If there is a current trend in South Africa-United States comparative studies it takes the form of tracing very specific relationships rather than making broad general comparisons involving the two societies taken in their entirety." This type of research, as opposed to sweeping birds-eye comparisons, suits an online academic journal best.

However, I do hope that papers published in *Safundi* will expand one day into larger monographs with more broadly defined research, in much the same way that a conference paper delivered in 1972 eventually became *White Supremacy*.

It is therefore appropriate for *Safundi*'s twenty-first issue to examine how *White Supremacy* was developed, written, and published, and how it has been received, from the early 1980s to today. Published twenty-five years ago, Fredrickson's landmark book remains atop the comparative field. *White Supremacy* appeared when the comparative landscape was fertile: three other texts analyzing U.S. and South African history emerged around the same time; as this special issue of *Safundi* shows, it is impossible to examine one without addressing the others. Networks of scholars, conferences, and current events all coalesced in the early 1980s, perhaps, most importantly, as apartheid began to confront a growing international resistance movement.

In order to measure *White Supremacy*'s impact on the field, in compiling this issue, I requested contributions from scholars in the United States and South Africa with personal and intellectual connections to the work. I encouraged contributing authors to examine—anecdotally or analytically—how the book relates to them and their research, how they first encountered *White Supremacy*, how it continues (or doesn't) to influence their work, or where the book might point for future comparative studies. The resulting articles provide a well-balanced mixture of personal response, theoretical critique, and historiographical development. Not intending the issue to be a *festschrift* full of uncritical praise, I welcomed critiques of Fredrickson's study, too. Be that as it may, it is necessary to acknowledge the impact that his research had on the field.

Fredrickson received his A.B. and Ph.D. from Harvard in 1956 and 1964, respectively, matriculated as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Oslo (1956-1957), and was awarded an honorary M.A. from Oxford University in 1988. Before joining the faculty at Stanford in 1984, he taught at Harvard and at Northwestern, where he was William Smith Mason Professor of American History. His main interests are the history of racism and black-white relations in the United States, the comparative history of slavery and race relations with special attention to the United States and South Africa, and nineteenth-century American history with an emphasis on the sectional crisis, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. He is the author of five original books in addition to *White Supremacy* and *Black Liberation*, all of which are currently in print: *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (1965), *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (1971), *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality* (1987), *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements* (1997), and *Racism: A Short History* (2002). In addition, he has edited four books, published numerous articles in general as well as scholarly journals, including more than twenty-five pieces in the *New York Review of Books*. Fellowships and special appointments include a Guggenheim, two NEH Senior Fellowships, fellowships from the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences and the Humanities Center at Stanford University, the Ford Foundation Fellowship at the Du Bois Institute of Harvard University, the Harmsworth visiting Professorship of American History at Oxford, and the Fulbright Lectureship in American History at Moscow University. He has been active in the Organization of American Historians and was its president for 1997-1998. Other

active affiliations include the American Historical Association, the Southern Historical Association, and the American Antiquarian Society. In 1985, he was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Fredrickson leads this special issue by recounting how *White Supremacy* originally began as part of a session on comparative racism at the American Historical Association's annual meeting in 1972. What started as a conference paper quickly turned into a much bigger project, fueled by a five-month research trip to Cape Town in 1974. He traces the project's expansion and development into the book we now know as *White Supremacy*, and he responds to criticism, ultimately concluding that, after twenty-five years, "most of [the book] stands up fairly well."

While conducting research in Cape Town in 1974, Fredrickson first met and was helped by Christopher Saunders, who is now Professor of History at the University of Cape Town, and who has written the second article in this issue. Saunders recounts how he first became interested in American studies and comparisons after a ninety-day bus trip throughout the United States in the summer of 1967, and how, twelve years later, he attended a conference (as did Fredrickson) comparing the U.S. and South African frontiers, the culmination of a series of graduate seminars convened by Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar, both of Yale University, in the 1970s. Saunders then weighs the merits of *White Supremacy* and *Black Liberation* individually, and writes that "[w]hat is needed now is for someone to bring the two stories together and to write a fully comparative study of both processes in both countries."

As Saunders and Fredrickson both suggest, connections were made amongst many comparativists in the 1970s thanks in part to Thompson's and Lamar's comparative frontier seminars and conference, which resulted in their edited collection, *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared* (reviewed by Fredrickson for the *New York Review of Books* in 1982). For this reason I invited Howard Lamar, Sterling Professor of History Emeritus at Yale University and an eminent scholar of the American West, to contribute an article recollecting his collaboration with the late Leonard Thompson. Lamar shares with us how he hired Thompson and later created with him the graduate seminar series. Lamar's essay adds context to that first group of comparative monographs of the early 1980s, and it particularly reveals the interconnectedness of those comparative circles, reinforcing that *White Supremacy* can't be fully understood outside of the historiographical context of its time.

This historiographical development is most completely analyzed by Ran Greenstein, the second South African contributor to this issue and author of *Genealogies of Conflict: Class, Identity, and State in Palestine/Israel and South Africa* (1995) and *Comparative Perspectives on South Africa* (1998). Greenstein sets *White Supremacy* alongside another comparative text, Stanley Greenberg's *Race and State in Capitalist Development* (1980), and concludes that what is needed today is "a comparative approach that combines Fredrickson's historical sense...with Greenberg's theoretical daring...and add to the combination social history's focus on ordinary people as the makers of history." By reexamining past monographs, Greenstein sketches a picture of future comparative studies.

In recent issues, *Safundi* has sought to address Greenstein's call for more "bottom-up" comparative analysis. One debate, involving Lewis Baldwin and Derek Catsam, looked at the lasting legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. on the South African anti-apartheid movement.

Safundi readers will remember this began with an article by Baldwin, Professor of Religious Studies at Vanderbilt University and author of *Toward the Beloved Community: Martin Luther King, Jr. and South Africa* (1995). The fifth contributor to this issue, Baldwin writes how personal experiences with “racial apartheid” in the U.S. South inspired his theological scholarship, how Fredrickson’s *White Supremacy* subsequently informed his own research, and how “religious scholars and liberation theologians can learn from Fredrickson’s works.” Baldwin’s discussion of Fredrickson’s scholarship exemplifies the wide range of applications inherent in comparative studies.

Derek Catsam opens up comparative historical studies to other disciplines, as well, in the concluding article of this special issue. Catsam, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Texas of the Permian Basin, relates *White Supremacy* to trends in transnational studies and diplomatic and international history. He contends that future scholarship is headed toward “[c]omparison at the micro and macro levels, transnationalism, and a reinvigorated view of Africa’s international role.”

Catsam correctly identifies the shifting focus of research from the comparative to the transnational, but in many ways, transnational studies today derive from analyses of the African diaspora in the 1990s and comparative inquiries advanced in the 1980s. In other words, past scholastic successes generated today’s academic trends. And although *Safundi* expands its focus on occasion to include comparisons of other North or South American countries, or those of southern Africa, and although the journal publishes material not explicitly comparative, we—the editorial board—recognize the vast intellectual influence that Fredrickson’s *White Supremacy* had on *Safundi*’s later development. By devoting this issue to examine the impact of *White Supremacy* and, by extension, other comparative works of the time, we acknowledge our academic predecessors and reassess the course we are charting today.