The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South. By John W. Cell. (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1982. xiv + 320 pp. Notes and index. Cloth, $34.50; paper, $8.95.)

In this provocative, well-written extended essay, based on unusually keen reflections on the major secondary literatures on race relations in South Africa and in the southern United States, rather than on an independent examination of primary documents, British Empire specialist John W. Cell takes issue with several recent interpretations, including that of George M. Fredrickson's *White Supremacy* (1981). Racial segregation in both countries, Cell argues, was not primarily an outgrowth of their slave or frontier or agricultural histories. Rather, their self-conscious, formalized systems of discriminatory racial separation crystallized relatively suddenly after 1890 in the United States and after 1905 in South Africa; flourished in the "modern" urban and industrial, rather than the "traditional" agrarian, sector of society; were imposed by political, not social or economic, means; represented responses to political or economic threats or potential threats by persons of color, rather than mere legalizations of their already deprived socioeconomic status; and were fostered largely by white moderates, not extremists. Distinguishing it from such other, harsher forms of social-dominance relationships as informal stratification systems enforced largely by violence, slavery, and total exclusion, Cell observes that segregation gained strength and flexibility by holding out the promise of diminishing existing inequities within separate institutions, as well as by allotting an economically fairly comfortable niche to a black elite. Dangling the hope that there could be important improvements without the total abolition of segregation and giving merchants, professionals, and, in Africa, leaders of tribes and "native councils," who serviced the segregated black economy and its largely powerless social and political institutions, something to lose from attacks on segregation silenced or at least muted the tones of some potential antisegregationist leaders.

Cell's stress on the ideology, instead of the practice, of segregation; his widening of the definition of segregation to include, not only separation, but also racially biased suffrage restrictions and racial discrimination in wage

rates; and his notions of causality should incite useful scholarly debates. It is easier to chronicle laws and writings than behavior, but, as the historiography of comparative slavery shows, preachment may not always be a safe index to practice; and most historians believe the latter more important than the former. Pervasive legal segregation would have been difficult, if not impossible, to impose or to maintain had blacks enjoyed much real political power, and what Cell refers to as the "exploitation color bar," which has allowed South African employers to pay grossly discriminatory wages to blacks, was temporally concomitant with and probably dependent on the imposition of legally segregated land policies. Nonetheless, these are closer to "vertical," or exclusionary, devices than they are to "horizontal" differentiations, and it is stretching the term to include them under the rubric of segregation. Adopting a semi-Marxist stance, Cell also contends that although the politicians who passed the crucial laws were not merely the errand boys of industrial or planter capitalists, the state-sanctioned discriminatory system was "appropriate to" or "related to" urbanization and "the formation of the Southern [and South African] capitalist power elite[s]." Is Cell just unwilling to spell out his explanation explicitly, or is the argument merely nebulous? If the economic power elite was not responsible for putting the discriminatory systems into place, just how did the political, social, and economic spheres come to be related, as Cell thinks they were?

Cell's book demonstrates again not only how productive a comparative approach can be but also how hard it is to resolve such fundamental matters as the relation of the economy to the polity and how much difficult primary research on even relatively well-studied questions remains to be done. One may hope that some in the wide audience that this book deserves will build on Cell's insights and respond to his provocations.

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