

OUTLINE FOR TV SHOW ON “MIRROR TO AMERICA”

1. Why did you entitle your autobiography *Mirror to America*? A mirror reflects. What was it that you intended the book to reflect?
2. All of us, especially when young, have experiences, often traumatic ones, that we never forget and that shape us. You discuss several, going back to when you were only a small child, were only six years old. Tell about:
 - A. The time when and the reasons why you, your mother and a sibling were put off a train in the middle of the countryside, and what your mother told you.
 - B. The blind white woman who rejected your help crossing the street.
 - C. The effect of the Tulsa riot. (Also describe what happened in Tulsa. Why do you think the riot became lost to history, as it were, for about 80 years?)
 - D. The attendant who denounced you in Nashville when he was making change.
 - E. The time when you may have come close to being lynched in Mississippi.
 - F. The time when you were refused service in a Cambridge restaurant while at Harvard.
 - G. The treatment you received when you tried to volunteer for the navy and then for the Pentagon’s corps of historians in World War II.
 - i. Also tell of you and other African Americans being crowded into the half of a railroad car reserved for blacks while just a few white German prisoners occupied the half of the car reserved for whites. (I understand that this kind of experience was not so uncommon in WWII, e.g., in movie houses where African Americans were confined to balconies.)
 - H. The denial of a loan to buy a house in Brooklyn in the 1950s.
 - I. The time a woman asked you to get her coat at the Cosmos Club when, at age 80 I believe, you were in Washington to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom. (This story illustrates that it never stops, doesn’t it? And that is one of the (many) points of the book, I believe?)

- 3(a). Through it all you persevered and for many decades have been among the country's most eminent historians. I get the sense from your book that you are a very driven person (a psychological state which I'm afraid I know very well). Is this accurate in your own judgment?
- A. In a way, doesn't it go right back to what your mother told you when the conductor made you get off the train in the middle of the countryside at age six?
- (b). Early on, as we shall discuss, you decided to be the very best historian that brains and hard work could make you, and to use academic excellence and eminence as a vehicle to make your contribution to creating a better, more equal life for African Americans, correct? Accomplishment as a scholar and teacher was your chosen vehicle, right?
- A. Explain that, as you said in the Preface to *Race and History*, a scholar who is also an activist must separate these two roles and adhere to the highest standards of scholarship in his role of scholar, even if he is a vigorous advocate as an activist). As a scholar, one provides context and background for current problems, since what happened previously *is* the context and background of today's problems.
- B. You have used the vehicle of scholarship and teaching as a platform, as it were, to not only write and edit numerous books and articles on problems relating to black Americans, but also to be asked to make uncountable numbers of speeches on those questions, to discuss these problems in foreign nations too, to serve as an expert and/or an expert witness in cases like *Brown v. Board*, to serve on or chair numerous government commissions on the questions, to represent the government abroad, and to become head of several prominent organizations of historians, right?
- C. Explain why you say that your ambition and work effort were in themselves sufficient to bring you into conflict with the mores of white America.
- D. Your use of scholarship and teaching as a vehicle puts one in mind that, as you say, after the Civil War African Americans desperately hungered for education, but were denied it by the white South (where the vast, vast majority of them lived at the time). (Explain that it was only by chance that your father got a college education.) Of all the terrible things that happened during and after Reconstruction, was this denial one of the worst, at least in terms of its long run effects?

- (b). Describe (I) the physical differences in the black and white high schools in Tulsa, and (ii) how your teachers demanded the very best out of you and your classmates.
- A. I have read, in biographies and elsewhere, that the kind of externally and internally enforced compulsion to do well that you describe in your high school existed in other all black schools of the time such as Dunbar in Washington, D.C., and the kind of proud black business districts you describe in Tulsa and Durham also existed in Washington. Do you think it possible that, notwithstanding the need for and gains from integration, something was lost from it too because it marked the disappearance, even destruction, of these kinds of schools, business districts and, for that matter, neighborhoods?
7. Describe your career as a student at Fisk, including: how Fisk began and how it financially survived because of the Jubilee Singers; the close nature of the student body; the fact that you worked a couple of jobs and the importance of your skill with shorthand; your extraordinary study ethic (people knew not to barge in on you or disturb you when you were studying); the death of Juliette Derricotte, the lynchings of the era, including that of Cordie Cheek, who was grabbed just a few blocks from the campus, the way the white power structure deflected you and your colleagues from petitioning FDR, thus showing its adroitness at such deflection; your romance with the woman you later married, Aurelia; the nature of the class of 1935; and, of shaping consequence for the entire rest of your life, Ted Carrier.
- A. Explain who Carrier was; his background; the effect on you of his classes, which caused you to go into the field of history; his belief in you; the rigor of his thought process and how he inculcated the same kind of rigor into you, thus preparing you well for Harvard -- so well, indeed, that you had no difficulty competing at Harvard; and Carrier's almost automatic belief that you would of course go to Harvard -- where else would one go, after all? -- and obtain a Ph.D.
- B. Describe the financial situation you faced in the summer of 1935 and how Carrier asked you to come to Nashville and took out a loan of \$500 -- a lot of money in those depression-ridden days -- so that you could go to Harvard.
8. Describe your times at Harvard, including: your first meeting with Schlesinger, his having you in his seminar first before the general course and your view of the reason; having tea at his home; your crack about only needing one A from him; your friendships with Louis Zucker and Joe Kennedy, Jr.; the impersonality and coldness of Cambridge after the warmth and closeness at Fisk; social life in Roxbury and the

African American woman who had bought into the system and resented outside agitators, so to speak; your desire to write on Lyman Abbott, not Booker T. Washington and your reason; taking down in shorthand the lectures of Professor Abbot, who used to ask you for permission to begin; the friendship you formed with Elliott Perkins; the cocksure self assurance and pretensions of those to the manor born; your research on Edward Bellamy and meeting his wife (tell who he was); the antisemitism you found in the Henry Adams club and your reaction to it; the grants and loans you got, including a crucial one from Harvard during your first year; Morrison's comment about coming from good abolitionist stock; Harvard's failure to give you any kind of teaching position despite the excellence of your work; the oral exams you took; the racism at Harvard and its prejudice against the white fellow with the southern drawl; the reason you decided to get a master's degree before a doctorate; how the insular clubbiness of Harvard honed your own determination to succeed.

- 9(a). Describe the year you spent teaching at Fisk.
 - (b). Explain that your MA, plus your year teaching at Fisk, caused you to be confident that the question was not *whether* you would succeed, but just how far you would get.
10. Describe what happened at the North Carolina archives with regard to a separate room and a key to the stacks, and the reaction to the latter of the white researchers.
11. Describe the situation with Aurelia and her parents and how it finally was resolved (and why).
12. Describe your teaching at St. Augustine. Tell of the remark made by the President of St. Augustine -- who did not seem pleased by an accomplishment which at the time was very unusual -- that you should not become immodest or overbearing because of your Ph.D., and explain what he *said* his reasons were for saying this and what you think they were. (I have assumed he was black. Is this incorrect? Was he white?)
13. Tell the story about stopping at the house of the sister of Joe Robinson. (Am I right that FDR was thinking of appointing Robinson to the Supreme Court, but he suddenly died right after the court packing fight?)
- 14(a). Describe the reaction to your thesis of the Director of the North Carolina archives, who had made you use a separate room.
 - A. Tell the story of what happened later at the Alabama archives.
 - (b). Describe obtaining the Bancroft prize and your sense that we can and should learn

history not just through the “great men,” but also through the lives and characters of the unsung “little people.”

15(a). Describe the Double V philosophy.

(b). Describe the terrible treatment your brother received in the army.

(c). Describe your own reaction of “to hell with it” (if I may put it that way) after the racially-based rebuffs to your efforts to enlist in a way that would make use of your abilities.

A. Explain your view that African Americans had been trying to participate in the nation’s wars, in order to gain full rights, from the Revolution onward, and had met rebuffs and/or subsequent failure of their aspirations in the Revolution, the Civil War, and WWI, in which we fought for freedom and against authoritarianism, or so we said. And both WWI and WWII were fought with segregated armed forces.

i. There are historians who say that black soldiers were ultimately a mainstay of Washington’s army. And it is accepted that, without its 200,000 black soldiers, the North could not have won the Civil War (in which the navy was, as I understand it, about 20 percent or one-third African American).

ii. Would it be right that, at the beginning of World War II, there was no particular reason to believe that this war would cause the lot of African Americans to become better any more than prior wars had?

(a) Tell about A. Phillip Randolph’s demand upon Roosevelt (and that the projected march on Washington was the precursor to the 1963 march).

(b) I have read, and wonder whether you agree, that what caused the aftermath of WWII to be different was a combination of (1) the determination of African Americans (who were taking matters into their own hands as, without receiving historical credit for it until recent decades, had the slaves who voted with their feet and left the plantations during the Civil War), and (2) the discovery of the death camps, with consequent realization of what racist philosophies could lead to.

16. Tell what your wife did in Durham, and what she subsequently did in Washington, New York and Chicago. Whenever necessary she made sacrifices in her own career in order to help you advance in yours.
17. Explain why you switched from St. Augustine to North Carolina College (which today is North Carolina Central, isn't it?).
18. Describe the episode of weaving down the road because you were looking over with delight at your newly published book as Aurelia read from it. Were you surprised that the cop who pulled you over acted so decently?
19. Describe your work in the Duke library when you were at North Carolina College; your talks with Sydnor; his failure to even consider that whites might be the ones to lose jobs in competition with blacks if there were integration; the meetings between Duke and North Carolina College faculty members arranged by professor Mannasse (whose last name reminds me of the completely irrelevant, recently learned fact that the battle of Manassas is the only Civil War battle named after someone who was Jewish); and the secret Duke/North Carolina College basketball game that became known 50 years later.
20. Explain why Dr. Sheppard could not fathom why you did not want to become a dean: the limited opportunities in academia at the time for African Americans. Also explain how this barrier very slowly broke down during the course of your career so that African Americans became professors and/or leaders at all schools and in academic associations.
- 21(a). Explain why you desired to write, and began writing, the book which, ten years later, in 1956, became *The Militant South, 1800-1861*. Discuss the reaction of northern historians and of southern historians to this book when it appeared, including the false view that, as you put it in the preface to the 2002 edition, it was "a Negro view of the Old South."
 - A. The book further augmented your reputation as a historian and opened the way for subsequent historical works about Southern bellicosity and honor, works that revised false prior "moonlight and magnolia" views about the old South.
 - B. I gather it is your view (it certainly is mine) that, as you put it in the preface to the 1969 edition, "if America in general has been a land of violence [as I think it surely has and is], it was the South that institutionalized it and gave it respectability . . . by such time-honored institutions as the code duello, the militia muster, the military academy . . . and the lynching party" and by its

violent reaction to Reconstruction legislation.

- C. The South -- actually starting with the suppression of freedom of speech in the 1830s or so in order to protect slavery -- was not only lawless, but anti-constitutional, which occurred again big time after *Brown v. Board*, correct?
- i. It was the South's lawlessness -- which was *violent* lawlessness, however -- that the non-violent civil rights movement had to emulate in order to obtain change, correct?
- (a) Of course this ultimately transmogrified into sometimes violent movements like the Black Panthers, right?
- D. My personal view of the South, which was formed in the 1950s and 1960s -- the days of Emmett Till, mass resistance to integration, southern violence in support of "segregation now, segregation tomorra, and segregation forever" (if I have the quote from Wallace right) -- is, if anything, far less favorable than what you have expressed. (One can call me an anti-Southern-redneckism bigot if one wishes.) I consider the South -- always one party (first Democrats and then Republicans), always conservative to reactionary, always militaristically inclined, often lawless always socially retrogressive -- to be the most important single reason why the country has been so retrograde in so many ways and has made so many mistakes in foreign affairs. I have enclosed a blog posting (a lengthy essay, actually) in which this is discussed on pages 4-6, and would like your views pro or con on the notions expressed there and above. (I get the sense from various chapters in *Reconstruction After The Civil War* that you place a large share of blame on the North too, which gave up what it fought for in favor of rampant industrialism and lucre. Is my sense correct?)
22. Describe how and why you got sidetracked in your work on *The Militant South* to write *From Slavery To Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*. Explain, among other things, that there was a need for work that integrated black history into, and made it a part of (as it in fact was), the history of America as a whole.
- A. You say that when you were done you felt as if you had seen 500 years of black life pass in front of your eyes, including savagery toward and killing of African Americans. You also say you were "bewildered." Why were you bewildered after everything you had seen and experienced for over 30 years of life, and first hand knowledge of how badly whites could act? Was it bewildering that *anyone* could act as the whites had?

- B. Describe the reviews you received -- all very good except for one from a competitor. But Knopf did not know how to or care about promoting the book in a major way in either the general market or the African American market.
23. Describe the event in which you could have become the first Rosa Parks so to speak.
24. Describe your friendship with Howard Beale, who hung up on a Trustee when you were lecturing to his class and later went to Wisconsin (where he got you invited to teach one summer), and Arthur Link, who later went to Princeton and became famous for work on Woodrow Wilson.
- 25(a). Describe how you came to move to Howard at age 32. This looked, in a sense, like the end of the line because at the time Howard was the most prestigious position an African American scholar could aspire to.
- (b). Tell who some of the leading lights then were at Howard.
- (c). Tell how Washington -- large, impersonal, government centered -- was vastly different from what you had experienced at Fisk, St. Augustine or North Carolina College (That was my experience too when I moved there to teach after five years in Lawrence, Kansas.)
- (d). Discuss your new friendship with C. Vann Woodward.
- (e). Discuss the criticisms you made of new books on Reconstruction, like that of E. Merton Coulter, and the reactions of other historians to your views.
- A. I presume the public at large "didn't want to hear it," so to speak. That is the usual reaction to views that challenge the conventional wisdom. This ties in with your view that, if one wanted to change views, one had to change the textbooks that people were reading when young and that, written by southern philes, put forth false views.
- (f). Discuss the talks you begin to give at meetings of historians, the fact that you began to be quite active and a leader in those organizations, the problems with hotels and the slow changes in this respect. (Tell about the waiter who dropped his tray when he saw you in the hotel room.
- A. I gather that changes in the intellectual views of Southern historians, and their beginning to examine the South's past more honestly, were in part the result of criticism by Northern historians.

26. Tell of the work you did for and with Thurgood Marshall on the Kentucky history student case, and in *Brown v. Board*.
- 27(a). Explain that schools would invite you to teach for a semester, or a year, or a summer - which would salve their consciences and earn them points for liberalism (which you did not think proper), but there was never any thought of hiring you on a permanent basis.
- A. The students at Cornell even petitioned that you be hired.
- B. Hawaii *was* interested in having you come there permanently, and much about it was attractive, but in the final analysis it simply was too far from the struggle.
- i. Discuss orchids in Hawaii and elsewhere.
- 28(a). Describe the way in which you came to be hired as Chair of the History Department at Brooklyn College, the faculty split there, what you did to cure the situation, the publicity about your appointment in the New York Times, the talks you were asked to give, and how the latter points caused you to realize that you might be able to reach a wider audience.
- (b). Describe the problems you had buying a house and getting a mortgage loan in Brooklyn. The realtors and the insurance company were particularly reprehensible, right?
- A. Describe the conduct of the neighbors. Ultimately they did come around though, didn't they?
- (c). Why were people so disbelieving when you spoke at the birthday celebration for WEB Du Bois?
29. Describe your two month trip to Australia, and how people treated you there. Contrast the lack of staring with what happened in England and Austria.
- A. Explain that Aussies somehow or other saw no connection between their treatment of aborigines and American treatment of blacks.
30. Your book on Reconstruction was a revisionist view, was it not, and opened the door to the wholly different view that prevails today, as opposed to the false "Redeemer"

view that Southern historians put over for 80 years or more. You discuss the Freedmen's desire to farm and for education, plus the seriousness of relevant African American organizations like the churches. Your book played hob with the self serving views of southerners and southern historians, right?

A. The now rejected view was merely a way of keeping down African Americans and of reinstating the old power structure and the old slave system of labor defacto, wasn't it? In regard to the system of labor, what happened in the South was not much different from what happened after the freeing of slaves in the Caribbean and South America, was it?

- 31(a). Describe the history you wrote for the US Civil Rights Commission for the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Tell how the Commission rejected your work because, telling the truth, it was insufficiently celebratory, because over half of it was about the period prior to 1930 (i.e., was about a 300 year period rather than the last, merely 30 year period), and because you considered the achievements of people like George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington to have been accomplished not in furtherance of civil rights, but despite their denial.
- (b). Describe how the Commission turned your work into bureaucratese.
- (c). You felt that once again the government had used you, did you not?
- (d). Explain who the man you dealt with, the Commission Director, Berl Bernhard, was. (He was a putative big time Washington liberal who subsequently co-founded a major Washington Law firm called, I believe, Verner, Lipfert, Bernnard and McPherson (the last of whom was a major staffer for LBJ, I believe.)
32. Describe the bewilderment of the English at the fact that the effort to enter the University of Mississippi of a single black man, James Meredith, could result in such an uproar.
33. At the Daedalus conference in Paris you learned that the Japanese, Brazilians and Indians all discriminated by the darkness of their people's skin. African American writers have said that this also happens within the African American community. Do you agree with that view?
34. Describe how the University of Chicago recruited you, was a major research university with extensive resources and was in the midst of a comeback. Also your son, Whit, could go to the famous lab school.

- A. This time there was no problem buying a house.
- B. Explain how and why you gave graduate students a chance to teach.
- C. Describe your trip to the North Carolina archives with a group of undergraduates, and how they reacted. Tell the story of the student who said he was fine but C. Vann Woodward wasn't doing so well.
- D. Describe Levi's insistence that you become Chairman of the History Department, the kind of administrative work you had left Brooklyn to escape, and the pressure put on you by colleagues like Daniel Boorstin.
 - i. Tell why Boorstin later left to become the Librarian of Congress.
- E. Describe your liking for the vigor of the city.
 - i. Tell of your friendship with Jay Pritzker, and the circumstances that caused you to approach Robert Abboud of the First National Bank for a loan for Fisk.
- F. Describe your ever increasing opportunities to make speeches, the view set forth in your Ryerson lecture that historians should keep people aware of lines of action that have been taken and the reason(s) they succeeded or failed, and your view that the scholar has a duty to speak out on subjects of affecting him/her and the wider community.
 - i. Did this happen during Viet Nam?
 - ii. Has it been happening with regard to Iraq? If not, why not in your judgment?
- G. Describe your service on boards like those of the Museum of Science and Industry and the Chicago Symphony. I got the sense -- is it wrong?-- that you were more active in civic affairs in Chicago than anywhere else. Was this in some way a reflection of the character of the city? A result of the position you held? Both?
- H. Describe the points you made in your 1980 spring convocation speech, including: we had a revolution which continued human bondage; in the 19th century we got crazed rationalizations for bondage; we acted terribly toward Mexico; we fought World War I to make the world safe for democracy and got

fascism; we fought World War II for freedom and got Stalinism and McCarthyism; supposedly good conduct is often *misconduct*; bondage and exploitation lead to wrath and bad situations; bombing innocent people leads to scorn and bad results.

- I. Describe points made in your Jefferson lectures, including: the deferral of black dreams for centuries; fighting in the revolution did not lead to freedom; even free blacks were not allowed in the military; Jefferson denigrated Benjamin Banneker and Phyllis Wheatley; blacks were not allowed to join abolitionist groups; African Americans received truly awful treatment after the Civil War and no attention was paid to their protests until after WWII; it took the courts (which gutted the Civil War amendments in the period 1870-1900) until the 1950's and 1960's to act (and starting in the 1970's, after they began, in effect, to reverse themselves, the right wing took over American politics -- Reagan symbolically opened his presidential campaign in Philadelphia, Miss -- how disgraceful was that? - - (and later went to Bitburg).
 - J. When you reached retirement age at Chicago you left the city (after the University released you from your agreement to stay on), despite your liking for it. The primary reason you left was the impossible cold and snow. (I grew up in Chicago and in a book have described it as an unbearable combination of the bitterest cold in winter and brutal heat-waves-rising-off-the-downtown-pavement heat in the summer. Wild horses couldn't get me to live there.)
- 35(a). Describe the civil rights events of 1964 and 1965, including: the passage of the public accommodations and voting rights acts; the freedom summer of 1964, including the deaths; the sit ins; the Selma and Montgomery marches of 1965, with dogs, hoses, etc: the participation of historians in the 1965 Montgomery march and the killing of Violet Liuzzo that day. (Because one didn't know what they might do, the people behind closed windows reminds one of Lincoln's dangerous walk through Richmond in April, 1865, where the whites stayed behind their windows and any of them could have taken a potshot at Lincoln.)
- (b). Describe the increasing radicalism of black and rights advocates in the later 1960's, and the increasing interrelationship of civil rights and Viet Nam.
 - (c). Tell about the Margaret Dixon affair at the University of Chicago..
 - (d). Tell about the increasing leadership roles of women in the civil rights movement.
 - (e). Tell what happened to Ted Currier at Fisk.

- (f). Explain your view that a truly major problem is that too many people do not care about others, that humans act inconsistently and do not stay committed to lofty principles; that after 1964 and 1965 discrimination continued by means of glass ceilings, parental “preferences” regarding schools, housing discrimination, and (like Ivy League schools in the first 60 years of the 20th century), small concessions are made in order to maintain large scale discriminations. (There always have been *some* successful blacks, you say, so that the success of a few proves nothing as to the whole.) Also explain that young black males are alienated from and reject the norms of a society that rejects *them*, and that society will not become healthy until this ends.
36. Describe the family assemblage, and what it meant, at your son’s graduation from Stanford.
37. Tell the one sided nature of the knowledge of Chinese scholars about American civil rights.
38. Describe how you happened to come to Duke and what you’ve done there, including:
- A. Your discussions with Charles Frankel.
 - B. Buying a house.
 - C. The history department keeping after you to teach courses, until you finally agreed.
 - D. The episode in which students kept talking at your home instead of going to the Duke basketball game.
 - E. The course in constitutional history you taught in the law school along with Dellinger and William Leuchtenburg, and the way in which teaching law students was different than your prior experiences.
39. Describe the absurdities of the US government in connection with the Belgrade conference on communication.
40. Describe your attack, at the Richard lectures at U. VA, on those who claim slaves were contented.
41. Describe your (40 years of) work on the biography of George Washington Williams, and explain that he wrote a history of Negroes in America though he did not learn to

write until he was, I believe, nineteen years old and had no formal training as a historian.

- 42(a). Describe your testimony against Bork and why you feel the federal judiciary has been politicized to the great detriment of civil rights.
- (b). Explain why you feel the color line will be the great problem of the 21st century as it was of the 19th and 20th centuries.
43. Tell of receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom.
44. Describe your many experiences chairing the Presidential initiative on race, which was, as I understand it, supposed to be an effort to obtain dialogue on this question. Discuss Gore's views, Clinton's views, private and public meetings, people's misunderstanding of what your group could do and, most of all, the misinterpretations (which you considered deliberate) of Steven Holmes and the New York Times, the Times' refusal to correct itself, your view that the Times reported what it wanted to report rather than what happened, the fact that the rest of the media follow the Times' (false) lead, the fact that the media felt that, if there were no toe-to-toe fireworks, there was no story, and the media fixation on the Lewinsky matter to the exclusion of serious matters like discussions of race.
 - A. Deplorably because it is far and away our most important newspaper, the Times has an unhappy history of such falseness, including Watter Duranty's articles on the Soviet Union in the 1930's, Herbert Mathew's articles on in the late 1950's , and Judith Miller's articles on alleged WMDs in the run-up to the current Iraq war. (It likewise has a history of too often failing to reveal, or of downplaying major stories, like its *vast* downplaying of the holocaust while World War II was in progress, its failure to disclose the existence of the army of Cuban exiles who invaded at Bay of Pigs, and its recent one year failure to disclose the spying on civilians by NSA.
 - i. Of course the Times has also done many great things, e.g., its coverage of Viet Nam, the Pentagon papers, its series on race and class, its *ultimate* disclosure of the domestic spying. What is your opinion regarding that newspaper, and how does your experience with it in regard to the incitive on race fit into your overall feeling.
45. Explain why you think that successful black professionals are not doing enough to assist and uplift other African Americans.

46. Explain your view that slavery sealed the fate of this country and turned it into a nation of hypocrites. The test of a society, you say, is not how many millionaire it has, but how many hard working, respected, and self respecting citizens.

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