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Against the Odds: Scholars Who Challenged Racism in the Twentieth Century

Paul Grant

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This volume records the testimony of 11 scholar-activists who challenged prevailing racial beliefs and practices while engaging in resistance and reform. The group includes nine African Americans (Kenneth B. Clark, John Henrik Clarke, St Clair Drake, W.E.B. Du Bois, John Hope Franklin, John Glover Jackson, Hylann Lewis, Frank Snowden Jr and Robert C. Weaver), one Sri Lankan who lives and works in Britain (A. Sivanandan) and one white American (Herbert Aptheker). Most of these men began their careers before World War II, in a time when biological conceptions of race dominated public policy and severely limited the opportunities available to people of colour. By struggling with these impediments in their personal and professional lives, each, in his own way, helped redefine race as the social and cultural construct it has always been. To highlight both the similarities and differences in their experiences, the editors asked each of the subjects the same set of general questions about formative influences, major obstacles and principal accomplishments. These were followed by more narrowly focused queries about specific writings. Most of the responses were recorded on tape as interviews; several were submitted as written reminiscences; and one, the essay on Du Bois, as the shared recollection of two associates who had worked closely with him for many years. The result is a singular collection of autobiographical accounts that not only testify to the personal courage of these individuals in overcoming the ravages of racism, but also document their contributions to the establishment of a vital anti-racist tradition in American thought and culture.

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