

armies, and its pretensions to civilization.

Historians will doubtless take issue with elements of Fromkin's case. He may go a little easy on the tsarist court, on British equivocation, and on the French high command. But they should also ponder the second and in some ways more profound argument he deploys in his conclusion. "The decision for war in 1914 was purposeful; and the war itself was not, as generations of historians have taught, meaningless," Fromkin maintains. "On the contrary, it was fought to decide the essential questions in international politics: who would achieve mastery in Europe, and therefore in the world, and under the banners of what faith." That is a far more pungent and arresting matter to ponder than yet another sift through the rumbling bones of blame.

—MARTIN WALKER

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*FROM JIM CROW TO  
CIVIL RIGHTS:  
The Supreme Court and the  
Struggle for Racial Equality.*

By Michael J. Klarman.

Oxford Univ. Press. 655 pp. \$35

This luminous study explores the relationship between the Supreme Court and the quest for racial justice. Michael J. Klarman, a professor of law and history at the University of Virginia, has produced a sweeping, erudite, and powerfully argued book that, despite its heft, is unfailingly interesting. Klarman maintains that *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and other Supreme Court rulings didn't transform American society as profoundly as "changes in the social and political context" influenced the Court. In his analysis, *Brown* might have come out differently but for a variety of developments during and after World War II.

In the South, the black middle class expanded; black militancy grew more widespread, a result of the war; and many black southerners moved from farm to city, which enabled most to live in somewhat more tolerant settings and allowed civil rights leaders to mobilize the black population more readily. But, according to

Klarman, southern racial oppression was so pervasive that other, external, factors were also essential for abolishing Jim Crow: the northward migration of blacks, which increased their political clout; the ideological shift brought on by World War II, which delegitimized racist thought; and the Cold War, which cast a harsh light on domestic racial oppression as Washington grappled with Moscow in the name of freedom and democracy.

These factors helped reshape American politics, society, and attitudes about race. The new attitudes, in turn, influenced the Supreme Court. Indeed, from *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) through the early 1960s, the Supreme Court never "clearly contravened national public opinion," Klarman writes. Even in the case of *Brown*, at least half the country supported the Court's decision.

The book is most arresting and original when Klarman analyzes *Brown's* indirect impact on the trajectory of the civil rights struggle. The ruling made it possible for extremists such as Alabama's George Wallace and Mississippi's Ross Barnett to assume power. As a result, some of the movement's aims in the early 1960s, such as voting rights and desegregated lunch counters, met with unyielding and often violent resistance. The violence in turn provoked white revulsion in the North. Like many Americans, John F. Kennedy was sickened by the snarling German shepherds and the fire hoses that confronted blacks in Birmingham in 1963, and he moved to secure passage of effective civil rights legislation. The following year, Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. *Brown* thus did little to desegregate southern schools in the 1950s, but it helped make possible the Civil Rights Act a decade later, which *did* substantially achieve that goal.

Klarman concludes that the Supreme Court did not stand in the vanguard of the campaign for racial equality. Instead, the Court endorsed changes that were already emerging in American society—changes that had little to do with nine robed men in Washington.

—JONATHAN ROSENBERG