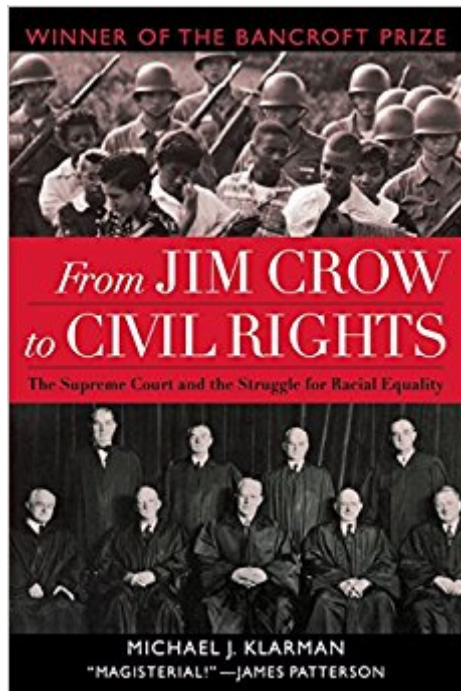


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From Jim Crow To Civil Rights: The Supreme Court And The Struggle For Racial Equality



Synopsis

A monumental investigation of the Supreme Court's rulings on race, *From Jim Crow To Civil Rights* spells out in compelling detail the political and social context within which the Supreme Court Justices operate and the consequences of their decisions for American race relations. In a highly provocative interpretation of the decision's connection to the civil rights movement, Klarman argues that *Brown* was more important for mobilizing southern white opposition to racial change than for encouraging direct-action protest. *Brown* unquestioningly had a significant impact--it brought race issues to public attention and it mobilized supporters of the ruling. It also, however, energized the opposition. In this authoritative account of constitutional law concerning race, Michael Klarman details, in the richest and most thorough discussion to date, how and whether Supreme Court decisions do, in fact, matter.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Professor Klarman's book is a study of the interplay between Politics, Social Forces, and legal doctrine. He's searching for the links between political realities and legal rulings. How are they shaping each other? In studying the relations between the decisions of the US Supreme Court and the reality of White-Black relations in the American South, Klarman's conclusion is that the Supreme Court's opinions are very much shaped by the social and political realities. The effect of the Supreme Court's decision on the political landscape is more subtle. Between the 1890s and the outbreak of the Second World War, the Court's rulings became slowly but steadily more pro-blacks. The earlier decisions were epitomized by the *Plessey* case, which held that states were allowed to

discriminate in public transportation. Only one Justice, former slave-owner John Marshall Harlan had dissented, and argued that the "constitution is color-blind". But even Harlan did not doubt the propriety of segregation in education, and neither he nor any other Justice did much to prevent Lynching, voter intimidation, all-white-Juries and a variety of other discriminatory practices. In this, the Justices were very much men of their time, an era of unquestioned white supremacy. America was a white man's land; with the Civil War receding into distant memory, White Northerners, who faced increasing immigration of blacks, Asians, and East Europeans, did not feel compelled to intervene on behalf of Southern Blacks. But even if the Justices were inclined to combat Jim Crow (the popular name of the racist Southern regime), there was not much they could have done. Unlike the post-World War 2 era, the Federal government was not closely engaged within Southern states.

I will admit that I only started this book a few days ago and I am only at 5% completion (I bought it for the Kindle), but I am struggling a bit. Not with the subject matter, because I am a lawyer, but with the way in which it is written. Thus far I feel like I am reading a treatise for a civil rights course in law school. If that is the intention, then mission accomplished and I stand corrected. However, if this book was written for all who wish to be enlightened on Jim Crow and Civil Rights, I would try another text first. The author does state up front that it is meant to be factual. And it is. It is disturbing to understand our nation's history - a history not so long ago. We are a young country and the systematic intentional disfranchisement of blacks is incredibly disturbing, especially in our judicial system and government. Though the original intent of the book may not necessarily be to incite passion, I think one may have to be emotionally dead inside not to be moved, shocked, or horrified. And ultimately thankful that the jurisprudence of our Courts (and public opinion) have evolved. That said, I really feel there's a way to represent this information in a fashion more suited for reading than for study. When I first bought the book, I thought perhaps it was for a general audience - a way of helping the nonlawyer understand a fascinating but complex topic. Upon initial reading, I am now guessing that the target audiences are law students, scholars, lawyers, judges or perhaps government actors - not the enlightened citizen.

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