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### ***Quest for Equality: The Failed Promise of Black-Brown Solidarity***

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*Quest for Equality: The Failed Promise of Black-Brown Solidarity.* By Neil Foley. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010. xvi, 223 pp. \$24.95, isbn 978-0-674-05023-5.)

A concise history of the African American and Mexican American struggles for racial equality in post–World War II America, *Quest for Equality* demonstrates how the two groups sometimes collaborated but generally acted independently. Focusing on the multidimensional struggle for social justice, the book follows the path blazed by Neil Foley’s *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (1999).

The book begins by introducing the not altogether trusting opinions of blacks and Latinos toward each other and their lingering uncertainty about being partners in political coalitions. While Mexicans historically sought to adopt a white identity in hopes of securing the privileges of whiteness, African Americans long have feared competition from Mexican workers. Along these lines, many blacks viewed all persons of Mexican ancestry as “foreigners,” while Latinos worried that association with blacks would undermine their claim to whiteness. Activists from both groups “during and after World War II only rarely viewed their campaigns as a common struggle for equality and full citizenship rights” (p. 15). The result was “missed opportunities and the failed promises of these groups to work together for economic rights and equal education” (p. 19).

Chapter 1 studies how U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America affected the treatment of Latin American immigrants in the United States. American foreign policy goals, as has been well documented, militated for civil rights improvements for African Americans and, due to immigration, operated in similar but different ways for Latinos. Chapter 2 considers the independent and at times conflicting struggles of blacks and Latinos for equality in the workplace. While Mexican Americans found it necessary to fight for inclusion in the postwar civil rights agenda, African Americans found themselves at the center of the civil rights discussion. The “betwixt and between nature of Mexicans in the Southwest—neither Anglo nor Negro” complicated their treatment and “in practice, appearances often mattered more than ethnic identity, surname, or even citizenship” (p. 71).

Chapter 3 considers the civil rights cases culminating in the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Although Thurgood Marshall’s role in filing an amicus brief in the 1947 Mexican American school desegregation case of *Mendez v. Westminster* has been much analyzed, *Quest for Equality* highlights the independent campaigns pursued by black and Mexican American civil rights strategists. Latino civil rights groups, for example, did not assist the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (naacp) in its fight to ensure black access to the University of Texas Law School.

The book ends with a whirlwind tour of civil rights developments after 1954, tantalizing the reader with references to immigration as a dividing line between blacks and Latinos and the

occasional coalition between marginalized communities (such as naacp support for the United Farm Workers' grape boycott).

Unlike Nicolas C. Vaca's *The Presumed Alliance: The Unspoken Conflict between Blacks and Latinos and What It Means for America* (2004), *Quest for Equality* does not exaggerate the conflict between African Americans and Latinos in the United States. Rather, it thoughtfully analyzes the intricate relationship between African Americans and Latinos in the multiracial struggles for civil rights in the United States.

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