In Memoriam: Henry Shaffer
effect real change, or do they become change’s worst enemy once they’re inside. This is when the friction kicks in, that sandpaper place where change happens and the nerve endings of ambition become exposed and frayed.” Challenge notwithstanding, Deval Patrick’s efforts to change Massachusetts’ political culture, should he succeed, will be a breakthrough.

Ifill also notes early in *Breakthrough* that she does not believe Barack Obama’s election victory represents a “postracial” moment.” Admitting her uncertainty over what the phrase means, Ifill suspects that the phrase is “code language that conveniently means different things to different people. For those interested in resisting any discussion of racial difference, it is an easy way to embrace the mythic notion of color blindness. For civil rights veterans, it is a term that sparks outrage” in its suggestion that “getting past” race is a good thing while just below the surface lurks the implication that race itself is a “bad thing.” Near the end of the book, Ifill writes that “perhaps a wholesale shift in racial understanding was too much to hope for in a single electoral cycle. But then again, what did happen was no small thing. Americans were willing to place a widespread acceptance to African American culture, previously limited to arts, letters, sports, and entertainment, into a broad political context.” As President Obama has inhabited his office and shown the same disciplined, unflappable temperament he displayed as a candidate, I think citizens have grown increasingly comfortable with him and his message that much more unites than divides us. He may never find his face engraved on a treasury note or his image sculpted on Mt. Rushmore. I have no doubt that the story of his presidency will figure prominently in the history of America’s third century. We may not as yet have overcome, but we have broken through.

—Charles Angell is Professor of English and Book Review Editor of the Bridgewater Review.