



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

EFLA STUDY GUIDE

INTRO UNIT: The Politics of Education: Propaganda vs. Empowerment

CLASS 1: The Miseducation of the “Negro”

OVERVIEW

“If you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one.”

- Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*

“Why not exploit, enslave, or exterminate a class that everybody is taught to regard as inferior?”

- Carter G. Woodson

“Black History cannot help but be politically oriented, for it tends towards the total redefinition of an experience which was highly political. Black History must be political, for it deals with the most political phenomenon of all, the struggle between the master and the slave, between the colonized and the colonizer, between the oppressed and the oppressor...all histories of peoples...are shaped by political and ideological views.”

- Vincent Harding, 1970

The systematic study of African contributions to world civilization are often omitted or glossed over in school curricula. Formal educational institutions in the United States have failed to expose students to the truth of Black history and its profound legacy in the shaping of our nation and the world. In order to understand what drives these omissions and distortions, especially when it comes to the history and cultures of people of African descent, it is critically important to examine the relationship between POLITICS, EDUCATION, POWER, and IDEOLOGY.

This unit explores these issues by posing a fundamental question, “Why study Black history?” To answer this inquiry, we begin by introducing students to the work and legacy of Carter G. Woodson, also known as “The Father of Black History.” Woodson, a pioneer in the study of Black History and the founder of Negro History Week (later expanded to Black History Month), insisted that the American education system — a

system of mis-education as he would say — played a critical role in the perpetuation of racial oppression, inequality and mental brainwashing. “The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies,” wrote Woodson.

Although written in 1933, the central thesis of Woodson’s argument remains relevant today, and the problems of “mis-education” have yet to be rectified. In his classic book, *The Mis-education of the Negro*, Woodson argued that public education has historically been developed as “propaganda” to legitimize unequal power relations as opposed to providing a strong foundation for individual and community empowerment. In this lesson, students will explore Woodson’s mission to tell the truth about African history and the strategies he used to combat mis-education.

In addition to Woodson, this lesson will introduce students to pioneering historians, scholars, librarians and bibliophiles who dedicated their lives to unearthing, documenting and disseminating facts about African history such as Arthur Schomburg, J.A. Rogers, Vivian Harsh, Charlamae Hill Rollins, John Henrik Clark and Dorothy Porter Wesley. These individuals, along with many others, worked tirelessly to counter the prevailing mis-education and propaganda that proclaimed that Black people had no history or could speak of no worldly accomplishments. This was no easy task. They operated in a racist academic climate where access to books and literature that affirmed the contributions of Africans to world history were rare if nonexistent. Through their work, African Americans began to learn the truth about their history and the walls of mis-education began tumbling down.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- ✓ Identify Carter G. Woodson and discuss his contributions to African American and American history
- ✓ Define the term “propaganda” and examine how it relates to the teaching of African American and African history in the past and present
- ✓ Discuss the concept “miseducation” and identify its potential effects
- ✓ Identify and differentiate between a primary and secondary source
- ✓ Examine a primary source document and make inferences regarding its audience, author, message and relevance

ASSIGNMENT

Read the following materials and answer the study questions.

Carter G. Woodson, *The Miseducation of Negro*—Preface

Link: <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/misedne.html>

Study Questions

1. What is the primary goal of education, according to Woodson?
2. What has Woodson identified as the difficulty of the “educated Negro”?

The Miseducation of the Negro, Chapter III—“How We Drifted from the Truth”

Link: <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/misedne.html>

Study Questions

1. In Chapter 3, Woodson makes a distinction between “social uplift” and “actual education.” What is the difference between the two? Why was Woodson critical of “social uplift” as a primary education strategy?
2. According to Woodson, how did teachers of Black children continue to perpetuate Black inferiority? Why did he believe teachers failed to change or challenge the biased curriculum in the schools?

The Miseducation of the Negro, Chapter XIII—“Understand the Negro”

Link: <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/misedne.html>

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between “learning facts” and “learning to think”? And why is this distinction important to Woodson?
2. Why did Woodson believe it was important to teach the youth the truth about African culture and history at a young age in elementary and secondary school?

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Books by Carter G. Woodson

A Century of Negro Migration. Washington: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1918.

African Heroes and Heroines. Washington: Associated Publishers, 1944.

African Myths, Together with Proverbs; A Supplementary Reader Composed of Folk Tales from Various Parts of Africa, Adapted to the Use of Children in the Public Schools. Washington: Associated Publishers, 1948.

History of the Negro Church. Breinigsville, PA: Nabu, 1921.

The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861; A History of the Education of the Colored People of the United States from the Beginning of Slavery to the Civil War. New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1915.

Books about the Life and Legacy of Carter G. Woodson

Pero Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement: Carter G. Woodson and Lorenzo Johnston Greene*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

Jacqueline Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993.

Books Related to Education and Miseducation

Na'im Akbar, *Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery*. Tallahassee, FL: Mind Productions and Associates, 1996.

-- *Know Thy Self*. Tallahassee, FL: Mind Productions and Associates, 1998.

James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Tom Burrell, *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority*. New York: Smiley Books, 2010.

Jawanza Kunjufu, *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys, Volumes 1-4*. Chicago, IL: African American Images, 1985.

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906-1960*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973.

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1986.

Bell Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Charles M. Payne and Carol Sills Strickland, *Teach Freedom: Education for Liberation in the African American Tradition*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2008.

Theresa Perry, Claude Steele and Asa G. Hilliard, III, *Young, Gifted and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African American Students*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003.

William Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2001.