



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants Curriculum

EFLA STUDY GUIDE

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

CLASS 1: Why Africana Studies?

INTRO OVERVIEW

The Politics of Education

The African proverb above prophetically captures the political nature of education, especially as it has played out for African people. The history of Africa – of the world, was rewritten by the Europeans who conquered the Western Hemisphere in the 15th-19th centuries during what scholars refer to as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. It was rewritten to justify European enslavement of Africans and indigenous Native North, Central and South Americans, and to legitimize European domination of the Western Hemisphere and the subsequent colonization of the African continent.

To defend these actions, Europeans feigned ignorance of what they knew about Africa and declared that African people were innately inferior. Some went so far as to declare that Africans were sub-human. Leading European historians, scientists, philosophers, biologists, archaeologists, politicians, and even the Church, began to sing in unison that Africans were primitive, and that Africa had no record of achievement. Thus, they declared, it was the European's duty to “bring the light” to the “backward” and “uncivilized” non-white world. This racist ideology also extended to all of the indigenous peoples and lands Europeans conquered in “the New World.” From this pivotal moment in history racism was born, and with it a relentless campaign to re-educate the world in this new philosophy of white supremacy. It was the lion hunters (re)writing the history of the lion.

During American slavery, white legislators banned enslaved Africans from learning to read. Slave traders sold members of the same tribes to different locations to prevent them from communicating and from retaining their religion and culture, which they believed fueled resistance and revolt. They were told that their religion was false and given a new one – Christianity – the religion of their conquerors. Yet, in most instances, enslaved Africans were not allowed to read the Bible, and were forbidden from congregating and worshiping on their own. Instead, they could only receive Bible instruction from white ministers, who exhorted passages that sanctioned slavery like Ephesians 6:5-8.

As for their culture, they were told that it was primitive and given a new one – European culture – the culture of their conquerors. The goal was to indoctrinate Africans in the belief of their own inferiority so that they would eventually accept their enslavement – or the rule of white people – as

the natural order. Over the course of three centuries, Africans were re-educated from everything they knew into a hostile worldview, culture, and religion that placed them at the lowest level of humanity.

Fortunately, the story doesn't end here. Despite the relentlessness of their slave masters, enslaved (and free) Africans, as well as countless white Americans and Europeans, exhaustively rejected this new philosophy of racism as [propaganda](#), having no basis in fact. They opposed slavery on all grounds on which it was supported; presenting scores of [empirical](#) evidence that backed their position. Brilliant intellectuals and spokespersons like Phyllis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Henry Highland Garnett, Martin Delany, Edward Wilmot Blyden, David Walker, and Sojourner Truth among many others, stood as living contradictions to the doctrine of African inferiority. White [Abolitionists](#) in both Europe and America, such as the legendary John Brown, Thaddeus Stevens, and William Lloyd Garrison, made careers of ending slavery and the new racist philosophy it spawned. They were accompanied by European historians such as Volney and Massey, whose works affirmed that black Africans were the orchestrators of ancient Egypt, and that Africa was the [progenitor](#) of civilization. Volney and Massey cited physical proof as well as the testimony of the ancient Greeks, who openly credited Egypt for much of their knowledge. Together, these individuals, and scores more, helped to counter the racist propaganda that sought to make slavery a permanent institution in the Americas, and racism a dominant world philosophy. They declared slavery morally indefensible and a mockery to the ideals of American freedom and equality and the principles of the Enlightenment. Their work became the ideological foundation of the Civil War that ultimately destroyed the institution of slavery.

After slavery, the racist propaganda that had been developed to justify slavery continued to define social relations and shape American culture. It had been [ingrained](#) in the minds of society for hundreds of years. Over time, many people – white and black – came to accept this racist indoctrination. As a result, the public education system that was created after the Civil War to educate the newly freed Blacks, or “Freedmen” as they were called, utilized textbooks and outdated materials that upheld the racist philosophy that had [undergirded](#) slavery. Although Africans were now free, the stamp of inferiority followed them into freedom. They were equal citizens in the eyes of the Constitution, yet they were still “niggers” in the eyes of the larger white world, in the South as well as in the North.

Segregation [permeated](#) public education and reinforced a racial [hierarchy](#) in which separate and degrading facilities reserved for Blacks marked their supposed inferior status. Images in popular culture portrayed Black people as mentally, physically and morally inferior. Through comically exaggerated lips, eyes, noses, teeth and other physical features, racist caricatures were created to humiliate and represent Blacks as coons, pickanninies, sambos or bumbling idiots. Through the new education system and popular representations, Americans were re-indoctrinated in white supremacy in the decades after slavery.

Yet throughout the twentieth century, waves of Black consciousness emerged to combat this propaganda, beginning with the Harlem Renaissance and continuing with the Garvey Movement, the early Black Studies Movement of the 1930s and 1940s, the Civil Rights and Black Power

movements in the 1960s and 1970s, and the Independent Schools Movement in the 1970s through the 1990s. This ongoing struggle sought to restore the image of Africa in the minds of Blacks, and redeem Africa's place in world history. The *Standing on the Shoulders of Giants* Black History curriculum is a part of this legacy.

This Intro Unit **probes** the idea of “*education as propaganda*” and the ongoing struggle to combat it. These classes demonstrate Black peoples’ perpetual battle against racist propaganda and mis-education, and the relentless war still being waged to uphold the philosophy of white supremacy. Yet many conservatives believe that only a flattering history of America and Europe should be taught to prevent generations of white students from experiencing "white guilt" over the deeds of their ancestors, and to exempt America and Europe from responsibility for past and present genocide, racism, discrimination and exploitation of the non-white world. Fortunately we are now in the Information Age! No longer do those in power have a monopoly on information and knowledge. With the Internet, we now have access to all of the knowledge that has been hidden and omitted from the history books. The challenge now is, Are you ready to re-educate yourself, or are you willing to settle for the propaganda that you have been taught? Knowledge is power – it is also its own reward, and the value of enlightenment is immeasurable.

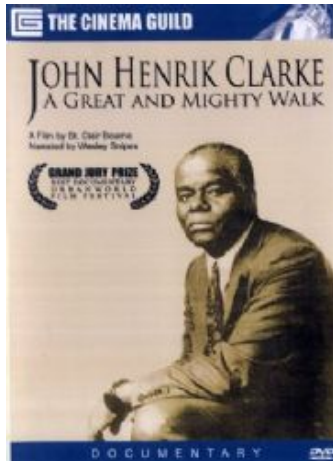
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- ✓ Recognize the political nature of education, specifically as it relates to African history
- ✓ Understand the importance history plays in how a race or group functions as a people
- ✓ Understand the syllabus, class format and class expectations

HOMEWORK

INTRO CLASS 2 HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT



Synopsis

Documentarian St. Claire Bourne takes a close-up look at author and historian John Henrik Clarke, who, on camera for much of the film, bounces back and forth between a description of his own personal history, and his views on the history of Africa and of Pan-Africanism. His points are backed up by old newsreel footage, and by images of artwork depicting Africans and their civilization over the centuries. Actor Wesley Snipes executive produced the film and serves as a narrator. John Henrik Clarke: A Great and Mighty Walk was made in 1996, with Clarke suffering from glaucoma, barely able to see as he gives his sweeping account. He talks about his own upbringing, and his

growing interest in Pan-Africanism, the failures of the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement, his close friendship with Malcolm X, and his critical assessment of Louis Farrakhan's Million Man March. He also gives a primer on the history of African civilization, and argues that no conquering or colonizing power ever "brought civilization" to Africa, but rather these nations destroyed what civilization they didn't understand, and brought many of Africa's ideas back to their bases in ancient Greece and Rome. He also describes how Black Africans were methodically removed from the history of the civilization of the Nile. He details how leaders like Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Ghanaian Kwame Nkrumah spread the ideas of Pan-Africanism throughout the U.S. and the world. John Henrik Clarke: A Great and Mighty Walk was shown at the 1997 Sundance Film Festival, and won the Best Documentary award at the 1997 UrbanWorld Film Festival. Clarke died of a heart attack in 1998. ~ Josh Ralske, *All Movie Guide*

Cast

Wesley Snipes Narrator

Crew

Saint Clair Bourne Director

Kimiko Jackson Producer

Lou Potter Screenwriter

Larry Banks Cinematographer

Wesley Snipes Executive Producer

Chris Flore Editor

Kipper Jones Songwriter