



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants Curriculum

EFLA STUDY GUIDE

INTRO UNIT: The Politics of Education: Propaganda or Empowerment?

CLASS 2: The Mis-education of the Negro

CLASS OVERVIEW

“If you 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

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 Dr. 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. To combat this propaganda, Woodson collaborated with African American educators, historians and librarians all over the country to found the Journal of Negro History (now the Journal of African American History) and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History – ASALH), which celebrates its 100th Anniversary in 2015.

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 "mis-education" and identify its potential effects.
- ✓ Examine a primary source document and make inferences regarding its audience, author, message and relevance.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Read/View the following:

1. [John Henrik Clark: A Great and Mighty Walk Parts 3, 4, and 5](#) (50 min.)
2. [Carter G. Woodson Letter to Thomas Barnes](#) (5 min.) click on image to enlarge
3. [Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-education of the Negro*](#) (Excerpts)
 - ✓ Preface (10 min.)
 - ✓ Chapter III: How We Drifted Away from the Truth (15 min.)

✓ Chapter XIII: Understand the Negro (15 min.)

4. "History," by Gil Scott Heron (5-7 min.)

Advanced Study: [Carter G. Woodson - Pioneer in Black Studies & History](#) (30 min.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (non-graded)

Instructions: For the Intro Unit, the classes quizzes take the form of discussion questions. Answers to the discussion questions are below but will vary.

From Carter G. Woodson Letter to Thomas Barnes

1. What is a primary source document? What is a secondary source document? Which source is the most reliable? Why? Provide examples of each.
2. How does the information in this document relate to the state of Black history today?

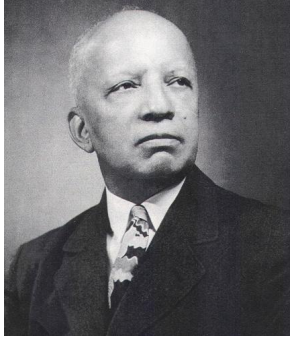
From Mis-education of the Negro Excerpts

3. In the preface, Woodson argues that Black people and white people should be educated differently. Why does he believe the public school system is negative for Black people?
4. In the preface, what does Woodson state is the primary goal of education?
5. In chapter 1, what does Woodson consider "The Seat of the Trouble?"
6. Why does Woodson argue against imitating White culture?
7. Why do you think blacks were trying to conform to white standards and imitate white culture instead of developing their own educational system and culture instead?

From Gil Scott Heron's "History"

8. What does Gil Scott Heron mean when he says that, "Libya and Egypt used to be in Africa but they've been moved to the 'middle east'?"
9. Towards the end he speaks of "word games" and "semantics." What does he mean by this? When Heron uses the term "his story" whose perspective is he referring to?

Carter Godwin Woodson



Carter Godwin Woodson, “the Father of Black History,” was born in Buckingham County, Virginia on December 19, 1875. One of seven children born to James and Anna Eliza Woodson, who were formerly enslaved, Woodson was forced to work on the family farm throughout his youth. However, his parents emphasized the importance of education and racial pride. Due to the demands of sharecropping, Woodson was only allowed to attend school four months out of the year, between harvesting and planting. His love for learning grew exponentially when he moved to work in the coal mines of West Virginia. There, Woodson became acquainted with Oliver Jones, a man he described as well-educated although he was illiterate.

When Jones learned that Woodson could read, he engaged Woodson to read the daily newspapers to him and his customers in exchange for free treats. By subscribing to "black" and "white" newspapers, Jones sought to keep abreast of the news in the black community, as well as in the nation and the world. Woodson, in acknowledging the educational value of this experience, wrote:

"I learned so much myself because of the much more extensive reading required by him than I probably would have undertaken for my own benefit. ... In seeking through the press information ... for Oliver Jones and his friends, I was learning in an effective way ... history and economics" (Woodson 1944).

The "history of the race" was a frequent topic at Oliver Jones's place. Woodson would listen intently as the veterans and "old-timers" talked of their experiences during slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction. He would later become a pioneer in the use of oral history.

He began his formal education when he was 20 years old. His dedication to study enabled him to earn a high school diploma in West Virginia. In 1901, he graduated from Berea College and later worked as a teacher and school supervisor in the Philippines. He became fluent in both French and Spanish and traveled to Paris to study at the acclaimed Sorbonne for one semester. He went on to earn Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the University of Chicago in just a few years. In 1912, Woodson became the second African American to earn a PhD at Harvard University.

Recognizing the dearth of information on the accomplishments of blacks in 1915, Dr. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History to dispel the myth that the Negro had no history, and to promote the scholarship of black historians. Under Woodson's pioneering leadership, the Association created research and publication outlets for black scholars with the establishment of the *Journal of Negro History* (1916) and the *Negro History Bulletin* (1937), which garners a popular public appeal. Woodson also formed the African-American-owned Associated Publishers Press in 1921, which produced several of his own works, including *The Negro in Our History* (1922) and the time-honored classic, *Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933).

In 1926, Dr. Woodson initiated the celebration of Negro History Week, which corresponded with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. In 1976, this celebration was expanded to include the entire month of February, and today Black History Month garners support throughout the country as people of all ethnic and social backgrounds discuss the black experience. In honor of all the work that Dr. Carter G. Woodson has done to promote the study of African American History, an ornament of Woodson hangs on the White House's Christmas tree each year.

It is important to note that Woodson developed a thirst for knowledge from elders who could not read or write. These men and women, though illiterate, were extremely knowledgeable about Black history and they instilled in young Woodson the value of knowing the “truth.” Woodson’s lifelong commitment to rewriting history and education inspired generations of scholars, teachers, students, activists and ordinary men and women to seek the truth about Black contributions to civilization and the development of the modern world.

Additional Resources:

Association for the Study of African American Life and History

Link: <http://www.asalh.org/index.html>

Gil Scott Heron



Gil Scott Heron was a spoken word artist who fused his poetry with jazz and blues. An author, singer and songwriter, Heron began performing during the Black Power and Black Consciousness era in the 1970s and he continued to perform throughout the 1980s. Heron’s work inspired future music genres including Hip Hop and Neo-Soul. [Contemporary artist Jill Scott, who also combines music and poetry, borrowed her stage name from Heron who served as a role model for her art.] Heron is also widely remembered for “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised,” one of his most popular compositions. In this poem, “Black History,” Heron shows how history is just one “version” of a story—“his story.”

Additional Resources

More on Gil Scott Heron on his excellent official webpage (features live music, his books, performances and more):

Link: <http://gilscottheron.net/about/>