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Culture, Curriculum, and Consciousness: Resurrecting the Educational Praxis of Dr.
Carter G. Woodson, 1875-1950

By

Jarvis R. Givens

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

African American Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Ula Y. Taylor, Chair
Professor Na'ilah Suad Nasir
Professor Daniel H. Perlstein

Spring 2016

**Culture, Curriculum, and Consciousness: Resurrecting the Educational Praxis of
Dr. Carter G. Woodson, 1875-1950**

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by

Jarvis R. Givens

Abstract

Culture, Curriculum, and Consciousness: Resurrecting the Educational Praxis of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, 1875-1950

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While Black educational history generally centers the infamous debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, this dissertation re-conceptualizes this framing through an innovative exploration of the work of Dr. Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950). *Culture, Curriculum, and Consciousness* analyzes Woodson's argument that the ideological foundations of schools relied on a human history of the world that centered Whiteness and distorted the humanity of Black people. He not only advocated for a transformation that would supplant the ideological stronghold White supremacy had on Black education, but he simultaneously created an alternative model that centered Black humanity and cultural achievements. Coupling archival methods with critical text analysis and coding schemes, I examine how Woodson institutionalized his educational praxis through the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), self-published textbooks, and his close relationship with Black teacher networks. Most importantly, the dissertation exposes the theoretical, pedagogical, and curricular insights Woodson's model of education offers for contemporary challenges in Black schooling.

I analyze letters between Woodson and key educational figures, sales documents regarding his textbooks and publishing company, annual reports published in Woodson's *Journal of Negro History*, reflections by his past students and mentees, and pamphlets he disseminated amongst Black teachers. In building on these materials and more, the project utterly unmasks Woodson's educational praxis and the findings present him as a pioneering scholar in Black educational reform.

Woodson's absence in the historical narrative, despite his prominence amongst Black teachers, is evidence of the failures of the prevailing frameworks. To address this elision, *Culture, Curriculum, and Consciousness* writes Woodson and his iconic educational model directly into the historical narrative and, in doing so, reimagines the Black educational trajectory. The pinnacle of this study lies in the *Black Educational Heritage*, a new analytical framework for studying schooling and Black life. This more expansive framing of Black educational history is born at the intersection of education, freedom, and affect.

Culture, Curriculum, and Consciousness presents Woodson as an educational theorist. His philosophy offers a counterweight against contemporary discourse on "the

Black educational crisis,” which largely fails to engage the role of power, hegemonic culture, and racial ideology in facilitating what has been termed African American underachievement. This rigorous historical and theoretical engagement with Woodson’s educational model urges us to deal with the most pressing moral and intellectual challenges as it pertains to American schooling. The first step in any purposeful education is the recognition of a people’s humanity—the failure to do so only sustains schools as a site of Black suffering.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I arrived to graduate school with the intention of studying the Million Man March of 1995; however, after taking a class on race and educational policy, and reading Vanessa Siddle Walker's *Their Highest Potential*, my research trajectory evolved. The striking similarities between this high achieving, vibrant school community in the segregated South and my own experiences at St. Timothy's, an all-Black private school in Compton, CA, intrigued me. The ethic of care that characterized the school in Siddle Walker's study and the communal nature of the learning environment forced me to reconsider what I thought I knew about the history of African American education. I was compelled to study historical questions around the relationship between schooling and Black life, in a way that speaks to the present.

My dissertation topic surfaced in a casual statement made by Professor Daniel Perlstein about Carter G. Woodson's textbooks. I began to ask questions about where I could find these textbooks, who had used them, and about Woodson's absence in the histories I had read on Black education. One book after another, my research agenda changed and I knew that I was doing the work I was set out to do. The gap in the literature was clear, but for me what was even apparent was that Woodson educational philosophy was one that obviously surpassed his time. Its imprints were all throughout my own educational journey, which was marked by a series of phenomenal Black teachers (an anomaly within itself). My interest in this project was both academic and personal.

I can recall having a conversation with my kindergarten teacher about what it meant to be a Black boy that lost his father to gang violence. I do not recall if I was sad in the moment, or if I was confused, all I remember is that I felt cared for. I came to trust the idea of education because I trusted her, my teacher. This school instilled in me a confidence and sense of purpose that continues to inform my identity as a scholar. I will never forget the words to the Lord's Prayer, "Life Every Voice and Sing," or "Dreams" by Langston Hughes, because these were words that we sang and spoke every morning before school. I cannot emphasize enough the impact this school had on my life and the work that I do as a researcher.

My dissertation committee has been an all-star cast of intellectual supporters and for that I am beyond grateful. Dr. Na'ilah Nasir has always encouraged me to ask the types of questions that speak to my own intellectual interests, while helping me keep a pulse on pragmatic approaches to doing the work I care about. Her mentorship has been critical for my professional development as a scholar. I am thankful for Dr. Ula Taylor for pushing me to be imaginative in my thinking throughout the dissertation process. She has done this while holding me accountable to the demands of being a disciplined historian and a principled scholar of African American Studies. Dr. Daniel Perlstein has been the wild card on my committee since he haphazardly introduced me to my dissertation topic. He continued to ask deeply investigative questions that I would never think to ask, which helped me get at unique detail in my writing. I am grateful to have such a supportive committee of scholars who offered practical advice, engaging feedback, and humanizing mentorship.

Good scholar-friends are hard to come by, but my graduate school journey has been fruitful in this regard. I am thankful for my enduring friendship with Mahasan

Chaney, who has been present every step of the way since college and who continues to be a great intellectual sounding board. To the SRATUS research team: Na'ilah Nasir, Maxine McKinney de Royston, kihana ross, Sepehr Vakil, Tia Madkins and David Philoxene—it has be the best experience working together as researchers and essentially as family. I am deeply appreciative for the collegiality within African American Studies—Zachary Manditch-Protas and Michael Myers, II, I appreciate your friendship and the team effort we've had working through the woes of our doctoral studies, even while at different stages of the process. Christina Bush has been one of the highlights of my graduate school experience—our conversations in the graduate lounge have proven to be exceptional learning experiences. To say the least, my peers have been some of my greatest teachers.

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My fraternity (Alpha Phi Alpha), my church (Covenant Worship Center), and the CAL Black community have been my home base. I am especially grateful for the friendship and support of Nzingha Dugas and the African American Student Development Office. I love the Black community at UC Berkeley and am grateful for the laughs and struggles we have experienced together.

Finally, I would like to thank my family who has been unflinching in their love and support. Any time I was in need they were there and have always been more than generous in their celebration of my accomplishments. No lesson in any classroom can compare to the fundamental principles I have learned from my family—strive to be selfless in my living, give to others, “do something constructive,” and adapt when life requires it. My grandmothers and my mom gave me their best, and it was more than enough.

PROLOGUE

The Educational Praxis of Dr. Carter G. Woodson

From the outskirts of the mainstream educational sphere, Black teachers engineered their own conceptions of learning and prescribed their own objectives for teaching students. This was the case during the period of slavery throughout the Jim Crow era; and contemporary scholarship has demonstrated how many Black teachers continue to possess political convictions that they carry into their work with Black students.¹ In short, Black teachers' pedagogical objectives have been motivated by aspirations of freedom, which I understand to be human recognition manifested in the form of equal citizenship rights (legally and civically) and the dismantling of White supremacy as a socio-political order.² Black educators, and the communities they partnered with, have made extreme sacrifices for the purposes of schooling, at times imposing a "double tax" on themselves because of their conceptual, symbiotic understandings of freedom and education.³

¹ Thomas L Webber, *Deep like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1865* (New York: Norton, 1978); Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Ronald E Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010); James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 1 edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Michele Foster, *Black Teachers on Teaching* (The New Press, 1998); H. Richard Milner, "The Promise of Black Teachers' Success with Black Students," *Educational Foundations* 20 (January 2006): 89–104.

² "Freedom" has been an illusive trope in the socio-political history of Black America. Robin Kelley recounted how at times freedom was imagined through plans of emigrating back to Africa or beyond the U.S. to build a new Black world; scholars who explore notions of Black futurity offer useful discussion in this area. The radical Black imagination has been a space where Black people conceived of possibilities for the future that seemed inaccessible in the present. In other cases, freedom has also been articulated in more practical, measurable terms—emancipation, civic recognition, etc. For instance, in *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*, Vincent Harding recounted how even "before their freedom from slavery had been officially recognized by the nation...the Black community was moving forward...seeking out their own way, defining their own freedom...Freedom meant education. Freedom meant land" (265). Thus, the ways in which Black America made appeals for freedom looked different at particular moments in history, but I would argue that what undergirds all these appeals are Black demands for human recognitions. This has been the enduring antagonism of Black life; the misrecognition of Black life that has been articulated through civic denial, educational exclusion, and of course the paradox of their rendering as both property and person through the racial logics of slavery. Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (University of Chicago Press, 2015); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2003); Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1981); Katherine M. Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark*, Reprint edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Jasmine Nichole Cobb, *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York: NYU Press, 2015); Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

³ For more discussion on the "double tax" taken on by Black community members during Jim

Given the rank inequity that has persisted in the American education system with regard to Black students, it is time to take seriously the voices of Black educational theorists. Historic African American teachers like Septima Clark, Mary McLeod Bethune, Richard Robert Wright, and Carter G. Woodson crafted effective methods for developing Black students to reach their highest potential as critical thinkers who actively worked for social change. Many of these educators transformed the learning experiences of Black people and succeeded in maximizing the engagement of students, teachers, families and community in the learning process. Black educational theorists have historically developed strategies to confront and challenge the “abductive schooling” that has continued to dispossess Black students as learners.⁴ Placed at the margins in popular discourse on education, despite their transformative scholarship and pedagogy.

I advocate for a fuller engagement with these theorists to address what many refer to as Black student underachievement—what others have identified as an evolving attack on the humanity of Black people.⁵ The intellectual activity of Black educators offers critical theoretical perspectives on schooling and Black life; taken together, Black educational theory present conceptual understandings of learning in relationship to the ontological experiences of Black people and anti-Blackness that mainstream conceptions of learning (i.e. White theorists) fail to attend to. Carter G. Woodson is a central figure in this line of theorists.

Carter G. Woodson as a “Schoolmaster to His Race”

Before beginning my dissertation research I was familiar with Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950) because of his book, *The Miseducation of a Negro*. I had read the text as an undergraduate, but I was shocked to learn that Woodson had also published textbooks, founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (1915), initiated Negro History Week in public schools in 1926, and that he began publishing *The Negro History Bulletin* in 1937, a publication that circulated widely amongst Black teachers and students. To say the least, I was unaware that Black teachers had recognized Woodson as a “Schoolmaster to his race,” as the front page of the *Washington AfroAmerican* read on April 8, 1950, just after Woodson had suddenly passed away.⁶ This newspaper was filled

Crow see Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 183.

⁴ See discussion of abductive schooling in Joyce Elaine King and Thomasyn Lightfoote Wilson, “BEING THE SOUL-FREEING SUBSTANCE: A LEGACY OF HOPE IN AFRO HUMANITY,” *The Journal of Education* 172, no. 2 (1990): 9–27; contrarily find a case study of a thriving Black educational community in Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁵ Michael J. Dumas, “‘Losing an Arm’: Schooling as a Site of Black Suffering,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 17, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 1–29; Michael J. Dumas and Kihana Miraya Ross, “‘Be Real Black for Me’ Imagining BlackCrit in Education,” *Urban Education*, February 23, 2016; Joyce Elaine King, “Diaspora Literacy and Consciousness in the Struggle Against Miseducation in the Black Community,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 61, no. 3 (1992): 317–40; Zeus Leonardo, “Through the Multicultural Glass: Althusser, Ideology and Race Relations in Post-Civil Rights America,” *Policy Futures in Education* 3, no. 4 (2005); Ann Arnette Ferguson, *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*, Reprint edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

⁶ “Schoolmaster to His Race Mourned,” *Washington AfroAmerican*, April 8, 1950.

with personal testimonies of African American educators reflecting on Woodson's impact in Black schools during the Jim Crow period. I started to wonder—what else did I not know about Woodson, but also Black educational history in general? If Woodson was indeed a “schoolmaster to his race” as Black teachers had hailed him to be in 1950, how then could we have come to rely on a narrative that cropped out the work of such an important educational thinker? This question is at the heart of my research on Woodson. How have we reproduced an historical narrative of Black education that has obscured such an important figure in Black educational thought? In pursuing this question, my goal is not only to write Woodson directly into the historical narrative of Black education, but also to present a challenge to the broader framing of Black educational historiography. In highlighting Woodson's radical contributions to Black education during Jim Crow, I expose the need for a more expansive framework for the history of Black education.

Woodson was an educator that made an indelible impact on the learning experiences of Black people that transcended his lifespan. There has been a lack of necessary engagement with the theoretical significance of Woodson's educational thought within the fields of African American history, the history of education, curriculum studies and teacher training, among others. Recent scholarship has worked to reposition Woodson as a curriculum theorist that challenged dominant conception of Blackness in mainstream education, but there has yet to be a work that fully captures how Woodson was deeply integrated into the world of Black teachers and that charts the impact he made on their pedagogy during Jim Crow.⁷ This dissertation takes up that elision by relying on archival material that captures Woodson's iconic legacy as a teacher, educational theorist, and institution builder. The sustained intellectual and cultural currency of Woodson's educational institutions hints at his legitimacy as a pedagogical thinker, and a necessary one to study. For instance, his academic organization, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), recently celebrated its centennial year; the *Journal of Negro History* (1916) continues to be a critical forum in academia. Black History Month, which Woodson founded as Negro History Week in 1926 is now internationally recognized. During his lifetime, all of these institutions positively impacted the learning experiences of Black students and offered a new cultural framework for Black education despite the oppressive regime of Jim Crow.

While the historical scholarship on Black education has been largely silent on Woodson's contributions to the trajectory of Black schooling, he crafted an educational model that was widely recognized amongst Black teachers, and the educated elite. He built upon the communal framework of education within African American cultural life and articulated a precise vision that challenged the cultural politics of White supremacy in a way that Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois' educational campaigns at the dawn of the 20th century failed to engage. Nonetheless, these two thinkers have been the pillars that commonly frame the historical narrative of Black education prior to the 1954

⁷ Carl Grant, Keffrelyn Brown, and Anthony L. Brown, *Black Intellectual Thought in Education: The Missing Traditions of Anna Julia Cooper, Carter G. Woodson, and Alain LeRoy Locke* (New York: Routledge, 2015). LaGarrett J. King, Ryan M. Crowley, and Anthony L. Brown, “The Forgotten Legacy of Carter G. Woodson: Contributions to Multicultural Social Studies and African American History,” *The Social Studies* 101, no. 5 (August 23, 2010): 211–15; Jeffrey Aaron Snyder, “Progressive Education in Black and White: Rereading Carter G. Woodson's Miseducation of the Negro,” *History of Education Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (August 1, 2015): 273–93.

Supreme Court decision of *Brown vs. the Board of Education*. The ideological manipulation of culture and human history in schools was of primary concern for Woodson; he understood it to be the first step in articulating the alleged racial logics of White supremacy—that Black people were irrational, uncultured, sub-human. Any framework of Black educational history that crops out the intellectual contributions of such a profound thinker and educational figure as Woodson, who was squarely at the center of Black teachers’ organizations, must be reconsidered. This latter point speaks to the second objective of this dissertation—to widen the scope of our view on the Black educational trajectory.

To be clear, this dissertation is not a biography of Carter G. Woodson; thus far, two have been written that make sufficient account of his life as a scholar and institution builder.⁸ The charge of this study is to utterly unmask Woodson’s educational theory and practice as a pioneering scholar in Black educational reform by presenting an intellectual history. In doing so, it is also my aim to re-conceptualize the way we popularly recall the history of Black education during the era of Jim Crow—not simply to place Woodson at the table with Du Bois and Washington, but to offer a more expansive interpretation that attends to the complex history of Black education.

Woodson crafted an educational model that entered the classrooms of Black students, but also invigorated African Americans to extend the learning process through all channels of life: school, home, church, clubs, and community. Woodson, often referred to as “The Father of Black History,” dedicated his life to the production, celebration, and circulation of knowledge pertaining to Black life and achievements so that the race would not be “a negligible factor in the thought of the world,” as he often wrote.⁹ He firmly believed in the power of counter-hegemonic education to transform the abject experience of men and women of African descent; Woodson was engaging in what he believed to be a “life-and-death struggle.”¹⁰

African Americans flocked to his educational program during his lifetime and it was widely recognized amongst both the Black masses and the intellectual elite. For instance, the popular organic intellectual Malcolm X mentions Woodson’s scholarship as integral to the development of his political consciousness while imprisoned. He states, “Carter G. Woodson’s *Negro History* opened my eyes about Black empires before the Black slave was brought to the United States, and the early Negro struggles for freedom.”¹¹ Mary McLeod Bethune, the renowned African American educator and political figure, wrote that she simply “believed in Carter Woodson because he stirred the formant pride in the souls of thousands ignorant or unmindful of our glorious heritage.”¹² W.E.B. Du Bois, who had a strained relationship with Woodson, nominated him for the NAACP Spingarn medal, which Woodson received in 1926. Du Bois identified

⁸ Patricia W Romero, “Carter G. Woodson: A Biography” (Ohio State University, 1971); Jacqueline Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History*, Reprint edition (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1997).

⁹ Carter G. Woodson, “Notes,” *Journal of Negro History* vol. 4 no. 4 (October 1917), 474.

¹⁰ Pero Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007): 45.

¹¹ Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Ballantine Books, 1965): 178.

¹² Mary McLeod Bethune, “True Leadership is Timeless,” *Negro History Bulletin* (May 1950): 173.

Woodson's Negro History Week as the "single greatest accomplishment" to emerge from the "Negro Renaissance" period.¹³ Thus, the preeminent thinkers of the early 20th century recognized Woodson to be an important figure, and particularly, for the educational work that he did. Malcolm X referenced his counter-curricula and Bethune underscored the racial pride he instilled in the Black masses through his educational programs such as the Negro History Week celebrations, which Du Bois identified as the crowing jewel of the Black Renaissance period. The testimonials of these giant thinkers elucidate Woodson's significance to the field of African American history, but to Black educational history in particular.

This engagement with Woodson's iconic educational philosophy offers a counterweight against contemporary discourse on "the Black educational crisis" that largely fails to engage the role of power, hegemonic culture, and racial ideology in facilitating what has been termed African American underachievement. In this dissertation, I argue that Woodson inherited and knowingly built upon a counter-ideology for Black education that challenged the cultural politics of White supremacy. Through the institutions he formed, the alternative curricula he developed, and his national engagement with Black educators, he engineered a learning culture that vindicated the humanity of Black people and offered pride in the face of racial oppression.

Because he operated largely outside of the dominant channels of American educational bureaucracy and because he had become estranged from White educational philanthropists before the height of his popularity amongst Black educators, Woodson has fallen out of the metanarrative of Black educational history. Addressing this erasure, I position him as a prominent figure in the broad-based narrative of African American education, and in doing so expose core aspects of Black educational thought. Through Woodson, it is my goal to present a more expansive framework for pondering questions of Black education that account for the agency, socio-historical realities, and spiritual strivings of Black people in their continued quest for a fuller portion of human freedom. Woodson's ideological critique of Black education was one that challenged the misrecognition of Black humanity, a process that hinged on the denial of Black cultural achievement in human history.

Woodson's educational philosophy engages our deepest political, moral and intellectual tasks regarding education today in more important ways than measurements of test scores. His thinking meditates on the ontological experience of Black students and deals with race and learning in ways that cannot be silenced if we truly hope to transform the educational experiences of students in ways that do not reproduce anti-Blackness through schooling structures, ideology or in pedagogical practices. Woodson helps us comprehend why the recognition of Black students humanity is the most important step in the learning process and how we should go about achieving it. His indictment of educational institutions led him to conclude that those who were most "educated" were often the least equipped to deal with the realities of the Black condition, because mainstream education was in fact the main culprit in sustaining the Black condition—ideologically speaking.¹⁴ Woodson theorized how and why the mainstream educational system underdeveloped Black students, mystified their subjectivity, and in extreme cases

¹³ W. E. B Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn an Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940): 203.

¹⁴ Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (ASNLH, 2008).

taught them to despise their racial heritage. Schooling, he argued, was a discrete yet proficient technology of White supremacy.¹⁵

A Closer Look at Woodson's Work

The scholarship on Woodson collectively paints him as a multi-dimensional figure: historian, educator, cultural nationalist, and institution builder. The wide range of Woodson's contributions suggest the importance of reading him, and his educational project, through a lens that centers their intersection.

Carter G. Woodson was born on December 19, 1875, in Virginia to parents who were formerly enslaved. Jacqueline Goggin's biography, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History*, describes how Woodson worked to piece together an education that would afford him the liberties imagined by the recently emancipated men and women surrounding him.¹⁶ His commitment to educating others was grounded in his early upbringing amongst illiterate African American men, consisting of his father and other Civil War veterans, whom he served by reporting back the knowledge he gained from books and newspapers. Goggin also documents his primary education in Virginia and through him becoming the second African American to obtain a PhD in history from Harvard in 1912, after W.E.B. Du Bois. Woodson was the first person born of former slaves to do so. Goggin's presentation of Woodson's life mirrors core themes in the broader history of Black education. Like many former slaves, Woodson's parents forfeited a much-needed income that an additional field hand or child worker could contribute to a struggling household in order to push him forward in his studies. These elements of Woodson's biography are critical to understanding his unyielding commitment to uplifting the Black race through education. He internalized the cultural perspective amongst African Americans that education and freedom were inextricably bound.¹⁷

¹⁵ Jarvis Ray Givens, "A Grammar for Black Education beyond Borders: Exploring Technologies of Schooling in the African Diaspora," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 0, no. 0 (November 5, 2015): 1–16.

¹⁶ Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson*.

¹⁷ This project extends from works that have demonstrated distinct cultural patterns in Black American life. Their shared African ancestry, racialization through their history with chattel slavery and White supremacy, has informed these cultural values and systems. As V.P. Franklin has argued in *Self-Determination: A Cultural History of Black American Resistance*, "It was the common experience of slavery that served as the foundation for the 'cultural value system' that was handed down from the Africans to their American-born offspring, the Afro-Americans" (4). Other scholars have made similar claims in analyzing various aspects of Black life—folk culture, education, religion, etc. Of particular concern for this dissertation, however, is the way in which Black people have culturally valued education as a means to freedom. Scholarship on Black educational thought have explored how Black educators borrowed from mainstream educational discourse, but certainly understood education on their own terms based on their socio-historical positionalities—what V.P. Franklin has referred to as "Black educational configurations." My use of the phrase "Black cultural life" is not to suggest that there is only one Black culture, but moreso refers to a broad ethos in the way that Black American's came to conceptualize education (literacy, schooling, etc) through national, intraracial dialogues about freedom and racial uplift. V. P. Franklin and Mary Frances Berry, *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of African-American Resistance*, 2 Sub edition (Brooklyn, N.Y. : Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992);

Woodson embodied many tenets of Black Nationalism. This is reflected by his adverse relationship to White philanthropists.¹⁸ Pero Dagbovie noted, “A great part of Woodson’s philosophy of Black uplift...was couched in a genuine concern for the Black rural and urban working class, racial solidarity, self-help, expressions of classical Black nationalism, and, perhaps most important, complete autonomy.”¹⁹ Woodson’s refusal to allow the interests of White funders to dictate the direction of his research, and the operations of the ASNLH, eventually vilified him in their eyes. He never received major financial backing by White philanthropists after the early 1930s.

Woodson’s exposure to Black cultural life helped him understand the value of stories and how they provided a more nuanced picture of Black life than what was presented in texts up until that point.²⁰ Dr. Woodson believed that enlightenment about the past and African American’s contributions to society could reverse anti-Black sentiments internalized by both Blacks and the broader society. In centering Black cultural life Woodson sought to honor the humanity of Black people.

Despite his class privilege as a part of the Black educated elite, Woodson was always committed to the Black masses—particularly the rural and urban working class.²¹ Francille Wilson ranks Woodson among the first scholars who worked to create Black labor studies. This is evident in Woodson’s discussion of Black migratory patterns and their primary connection to economic/employment opportunity.²² Additional works of his, such as, *The Negro Wage Earner* reinforced this contribution. Wilson also underscored that through his institutions Woodson was able to mentor other educators and scholars, such as: Charles H. Wesley, Lorenzo Greene, and Rayford W. Logan—anchoring the significance of his mentorship to the legacy of

Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 1978); Thomas L Webber, *Deep like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1865* (New York: Norton, 1978); Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1981); Noel Anderson and Haroon Kharem, *Education as Freedom: African American Educational Thought and Activism* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010); Vincent P. Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia: The Social and Educational History of a Minority Community, 1900-1950* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979).

¹⁸ Anthony Scally et al., “Phelps-Stokes Confidential Memorandum for The Trustees of The Phelps-Stokes Fund Regarding Dr. Carter G. Woodson’s Attacks on Dr. Thomas Jesse Jones,” *The Journal of Negro History* 76, no. 1/4 (1991): 48–60; Darlene Clark Hine, “Carter G. Woodson, White Philanthropy and Negro Historiography,” *The History Teacher* 19, no. 3 (1986): 405–25; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

¹⁹ Pero Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007): 39.

²⁰ Randall K. Burkett, Pellom McDaniels, and Tiffany Gleason, *The Mind of Carter G. Woodson as Reflected in the Books He Owned, Read, & Published: A Catalog of the Library of Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History* (Emory University, 2006): 28.

²¹ Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

²² Carter Godwin Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1918).

Black academics.²³

Woodson built many sustainable institutions that supported his nationalist project of revolutionizing the educational experience of Black people and the scientific study of Black life and culture. The ASNLH, created in 1915, was a professional organization committed to centering and correcting representations of Black people. The Associated Publishers (1921) and *Negro History Bulletin* (1937) offered tangible instructional materials (textbooks, lesson plans, African American literature, Black history kits, etc.) that mainstream publishing companies and curricula would not even conceptualize let alone support. Foremost, the *Journal of Negro History* (1916) was an academic channel that presented opportunities for Black scholars to publish and exchange their research. It is important to note that White scholars were also published in *JNH* when their work met Woodson's high standards. These institutions became a universe of intellectual activity that centered on cultivating a liberatory model of Black education.

To say that Woodson was prolific would be a modest assessment. "Between 1915 and 1947, when the ninth edition of *The Negro in Our History* appeared, he [had] published four monographs, five textbooks, five edited collections of source materials, and 13 articles, as well as five sociological studies that were collaborative efforts."²⁴ Woodson's writing, and scholarship about him, suggest that there were many different elements to him as a person, elements so distinct that they can be isolated and highlighted for their individual significance. This dissertation, however, is primarily concerned with Woodson's educational model, in theory and practice, and using his historical impact on Black education during Jim Crow to widen our scope of Black educational history.

The work on Woodson in relationship to Black education specifically is sparse. Recent scholars have done well to explore the contributions of Woodson as a curriculum theorist and his relevance to the field of social science education; others have evaluated Woodson's thinking through the theoretical tenets of progressive education.²⁵ Yet, Woodson's larger contributions to Black education have been underexplored, there has been no comprehensive study that brings to life Woodson's sophisticated educational

²³ For more discussion on Woodson as a mentor, see the following texts: Lorenzo J. Greene, *Selling Black History for Carter G. Woodson: A Diary, 1930-1933*, ed. Arvarh E. Strickland (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1996); Lorenzo J. Greene, *Working With Carter G. Woodson, the Father of Black History: A Diary, 1928-1930*, ed. Arvarh E. Strickland, First Edition edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene*.

²⁴ Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson*, 187; Mary Anthony Scally, *Carter G. Woodson: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 1985).

²⁵ Grant, Brown, and Brown, *Black Intellectual Thought in Education*; King, Crowley, and Brown, "The Forgotten Legacy of Carter G. Woodson"; Anthony L. Brown, "Counter-Memory and Race: An Examination of African American Scholars' Challenges to Early Twentieth Century K-12 Historical Discourses," *The Journal of Negro Education* 79, no. 1 (2010): 54–65; LaGarrett J. King, Christopher Davis, and Anthony L. Brown, "African American History, Race and Textbooks: An Examination of the Works of Harold O. Rugg and Carter G. Woodson," *Journal of Social Studies Research* 36, no. 4 (January 2012): 359–86; Jeffrey Aaron Snyder, "Progressive Education in Black and White: Rereading Carter G. Woodson's Miseducation of the Negro," *History of Education Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (August 1, 2015): 273–93.

model or that analyzes his impact on Black teachers and students during the Jim Crow era. *Culture, Curriculum, and Consciousness* overturns this silence.

Dissertation Overview

Resting at the intersection of the various roles Woodson occupied, this project reveals how they all combined to generate a cutting edge educational model. I assess various aspects of Woodson's educational program through four key layers. The first posits Woodson as an African American teacher, unflinchingly committed to racial advancement. He viewed the development of Black people to be a shared project and responsibility of all its members, especially Black professionals. Secondly, his training as an historian and as one who benefited from the oral histories of formerly enslaved men and women signals his commitment to exposing the silences in history. He firmly believed that these silences were intentionally manufactured in attempt to obscure the humanity of Black people and erase their contributions to world history. Thirdly, Woodson first-handedly experienced the restrictions imposed on racial advancement when the control and financing of these enterprises came from outside of African American communities. Thus, he sought to build autonomous institutions to support his efforts at reforming the educational experiences of Black students. The fourth layer positions Woodson as a cultural nationalist. He sought to combat mainstream efforts that worked to deny the existence of Black culture or that hailed it as degenerate. Ultimately, Woodson saw the distortion of Black culture in the epistemologies that informed American education as a negation of Black humanity. These four dimensions constitute the multilayered lens through which I interrogate Woodson's philosophy, all of which can be located within his educational program.

The first chapter chronicles Woodson's development as a teacher and his educational background. By centering the voices of Woodson's students and his development as a teacher, we come to recognize this scholar's historical significance as "more than an historian." It charts how Woodson's educational philosophy and institutions were shaped by the tenets of communal literacy that informed his early years as a child, his contact with Black civil war veterans, and his experiences with formal education. More pointedly, it elevates Woodson's legacy as a teacher to contextualize the development of his educational model.

This dissertation presents Woodson as an educational philosopher. Therefore, the second chapter provides an analysis of his writings that explicitly engage education and generates a rich engagement with his educational philosophy. Specifically, I analyze Woodson's argument that the ideological foundations of schools relied on a human history that centered Whiteness and distorted the humanity of Black people through cultural denial. To challenge this position, he advocated for a reshaping of the epistemological foundations of Black schooling that trumped misrecognition, positioned people of African descent as human, and that explicitly attended to issues of race and social inequality. Furthermore, I contend that Woodson's educational philosophy offers a critique of progressive education and anticipated the thinking of many decolonial scholars. Newspaper articles and his most popular text, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, are the primary archive for this chapter.

The following two chapters explore how Woodson's educational philosophy was operationalized within the Black educational community. Chapter three explores the

tradition of Black educators publishing textbooks to confront the racist logic of dominant American schooling curricula. Woodson built on this tradition laid by Black educators dating back to the 19th century. Grounding this inquiry in the notion of “race vindicationism,” I argue that these textbooks offer significant insight into the intellectual world of Black teachers and demonstrate how they worked to develop pedagogies and counter ideologies that centered Black humanity. Textbooks were a major aspect of Woodson’s educational interventions, and they were products of a vindicationist tradition that he inherited from Black thinkers and educators that came before him.

Chapter four interrogates the impact of Woodson’s educational model on Black teachers pedagogy. I forward “abroad mentorship” as a descriptor of his relationship to Black educators as a professional group. Woodson worked to offset the “miseducation” offered to Black students through dominant schooling by developing alternative curricula, Negro History Week, and various means of supplemental training for teachers. Archival materials reveal how Woodson supported teachers in centering Black cultural achievements and developing a Black educational aesthetic that challenged dominant myths of Black sub-humanness. Correspondences between Woodson and individual Black teachers and leaders of Black teacher organizations capture the strong ties he maintained with their professional world.

While the first four chapters chart the influence of Woodson as an educational thinker and the impact of his educational model within a national context, the final chapter uses Woodson as a device to expand the paradigm of Black educational history. It centers Woodson’s absence in the historical narrative of Black education as an opportunity to raise larger theoretical questions around the historiography of Black education. To address the limitation of previous frameworks of this history, the final chapter offers a theoretical analysis of the Black educational trajectory by engaging critical theory and historical scholarship. First, I interrogate the limitations of the current frameworks of Black educational history; I then present what I call *Black Educational Heritage* to offer a more expansive view of educational possibilities. As an analytical framework for studying schooling and Black life, the *Black Educational Heritage* steps outside of the Booker T. Washington-W.E.B. Du Bois binary. It offers a deeper analysis of the kinship between education and freedom by building on Sara Ahmed’s notion of “affective economies,” and it hinges on the counter-discourse of education that has been carried in what scholars name the African American group consciousness.²⁶ This new framework of Black education, which I have developed, offers a method of analysis for Black educational history and makes room for the expansive range of thinking and educational models in the Black educational tradition. While it grows out of my analysis of Woodson’s educational model, it extends to the broader history of Black education.

By engaging Woodson’s iconic educational model this dissertation both writes Woodson directly into the historical narrative of Black education as a “schoolmaster to his race” and simultaneously pushes the boundaries of traditional framings of Black educational history that has previously obscured his significance. Beyond these contributions to the historiography of Black education, Woodson’s philosophy offers a conceptual understanding of the dialectical relationship between schooling and Black life.

²⁶ Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 117–39; Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*; Robert Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History*, 1st edition (Trenton, N.J: Africa World Pr, 1969).

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His thinking offers a language to explore moral and political questions pertaining to education that continue to be relevant in our contemporary moment—namely, the relationship between the epistemological negation of Black cultural achievement, misrecognition of Black humanity in schools, and the continued quest for Black freedom.

CHAPTER I

“Schoolmaster to His Race”

A Teacher Profile of Dr. Carter G. Woodson

“I shall always believe in Carter Woodson. He helped me to maintain faith in myself. He gave me renewed confidence in the capacity of the race for development and in the capacity of my country for justice for her own people and for all peoples. With the power of cumulative fact he moved back the barriers and broadened our vision of the world, and the world’s vision of us.” – Mary McLeod Bethune (1950)

Five students enrolled in Woodson’s first graduate course at Howard University in the 1919-1920 academic year. Among them was Arnett Lindsay, who recounted the “characteristically frank manner” that Woodson “outlined the requirements for completing the work leading to the M.A. degree.” Woodson professed “that any student would be dropped automatically with no opportunity to make up any deficiency unless the minimum grade of [a] B was maintained in every required subject.” In this class Woodson worked to offer his students a “new and acceptable form of history” that took into account social conditions of the periods they studied and attended to the lived experiences of Black people.¹

Lindsay stressed the level of passion Woodson brought to the classroom that complemented his rigid expectations for academic rigor. Woodson’s “retentive memory enabled him to cite sources accurately and quote verbatim from documents, narratives and other historical materials.” His enthusiasm for teaching history had been intensified by the blatant denial of Black achievement throughout his formal training as an historian. At every lecture Woodson provided a discursive attack on the Eurocentric narratives of human history that prevailed in the American educational system. One could only imagine, for example, the stirring lecture Woodson would give on the Boston Massacre and the martyrdom of Crispus Attucks, a narrative that his Harvard professor had spoken of in “the most facetious fashion,” when he was a doctoral student.² Woodson surely taught his students that this event, and the death of Attucks, led to the independence of the United States, despite its distortion and omission in mainstream history courses and textbooks of the time. In this class, one may envision Woodson zealously lecturing about how Crispus Attucks, “having experienced as a slave what oppression means... was among the first who dared to resist [the] soldiers who were brought to Boston to crush in the bosom of the patriots that rapidly developing courage to fight for independence.”³

After a full academic year Lindsay was the only student of the original group to successfully complete the M.A. degree. His thesis had been accepted and he had satisfactorily passed his oral examinations in May of 1920. At the close of Lindsay’s examination Dr. Woodson waited until the other faculty had bid their congratulations

¹ Arnett G. Lindsay, “Dr. Woodson as a Teacher,” *Negro History Bulletin* (May 1950), 183

² Carter G. Woodson, “The George Washington Bicentennial Eliminates March 5th, Crispus Attucks Day,” *New York Age* (Jan. 2, 1932), 9

³ *Ibid*; Lindsay, “Dr. Woodson as a Teacher,” 191; see also Woodson’s treatment of Attucks in *The Negro in Our History* (1922), 58-59.

only to turn to Lindsay and wittily say, “You have more sense than I thought you had.” This was obviously Woodson’s gesture to congratulate Lindsay on his achievement, but this exchange was also a rare expression of how proud he was of the young scholar.

Lindsay effectively captures how Woodson maintained his stern disposition and even hints at what it must have been like to be one of his students. Woodson would continue to nurture young Black intellectuals that pursued graduate degrees throughout his life. His “rugged strength” and unflinching sternness surely intimidated students at first interaction; nonetheless, his passion for teaching and uncovering the truths about Black history superseded his stoic disposition.⁴ Lindsay was the first graduate student that Woodson worked with closely, and they would become great friends in the years to come. In fact, it was Lindsay who found Woodson on the afternoon of April 3, 1950, after he had passed away unexpectedly in his sleep and would subsequently serve as a pallbearer at the funeral. Lindsay would also be the scholar to chair the first executive meeting of the ASNLH after Woodson’s passing to discuss the publication of the *Journal of Negro History* and the *Negro History Bulletin*; a number of Woodson’s past student and mentees were present for this meeting.⁵ Woodson made a lasting impact on the lives of many students, and he maintained intimate ties with more than a few. This is telling of the strong emotional connection he held for his work as an educator and the deep level of care he held for the students he mentored. While most of these relationships were challenged by Woodson’s rigid personality, which often led to fierce disagreements, his students held a great deal of respect for him because of his unselfish love for the cause he championed—constructing a new system of knowledge that recognized the humanity of Black people.

This chapter traces Woodson’s development as a teacher, and ultimately an educational theorist, from his rural upbringing to the time he developed his autonomous educational institutions. Furthermore, it primes the following chapters, which will unmask the various components of Woodson’s educational praxis. The following sections profile Woodson as a teacher using biographical information and student reflections; I then provide a cursory look at the structure of Woodson’s educational program, profiling the different extensions of the ASNLH and their function. I argue that Woodson’s early years as a self-taught, community educator working under the ideals of “communal literacy” informed the logic behind the organizational structure of the institutions he created during the first half of the twentieth century.

Communal Literacy and Woodson’s Early Development as a Teacher

Woodson has largely been remembered as an historian—“the father of Black history” to be exact.⁶ While a fitting description of Woodson, given the major contributions he made to the field of history, this title has cast a shadow over his lifelong commitment to developing a liberatory educational model. Carter G. Woodson was more than an historian. He was, at his core, a master-teacher that aimed to transform the way Black

⁴ Lindsay, “Dr. Woodson as a Teacher,” 191; William M. Cobb, “Carter G. Woodson: The Father of Negro History,” *Journal of the National Medical Association* (September 1970) 62(5): 389

⁵ “Minutes Held at the Y.W.C.A. May 3, 1950” in Woodson Collection at Emory, box 4 folder 8

⁶ Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene*; Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson*; Meier and Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915 1980*.

people understood themselves in relationship to the world around them and human history more broadly. Woodson researched and employed Black history as a pedagogical tool to trump notions of inferiority pertaining to African descendant people saturated in western epistemology—the knowledge system that permeated all aspects of society. His teachings and scholarship recast Black people as thinkers, builders, achievers, and bearers of culture—in short, as blatantly human.

Excavating the archives to preserve the histories of Black people was not Woodson's only priority; he built archives and repositories of information for future scholars to learn and study from. Additionally, he created channels of distribution so that the knowledge he produced and recovered could be accessible to wide audiences—particularly the masses of Black people, who were largely populated throughout the Jim Crow South. Woodson's work to develop curricula (via textbooks, study kits, home classes, Negro History Week, educational competitions, etc.) demonstrates the pedagogical orientation of his scholarship. He produced age appropriate educational materials for various audiences—students from the elementary through collegiate levels.

Woodson was a master-teacher in the sense that he was innovative in his curriculum development, inspired thousands of people to study Black history and join his organization, and most importantly, he had an active and intimate role in the development of other teachers. Woodson was a teacher of teachers. In fact, educators were the largest supporters of his organization, the ASNLH.

Woodson's training as a master-teacher began early in life through the African American practice of communal literacy. As Jacqueline Bacon notes, during the period of enslavement “[l]iteracy education for African Americans was not an isolated or individualistic endeavor, but a communal one...[Black] families viewed literacy as an inheritance that is passed on to strengthen future generations and give them opportunities in a hostile environment.”⁷ Heather Williams further demonstrates the communal aspects of African American literacy through the narratives of Black Civil War troops who taught one another to read in their camps and even in the hospitals.⁸ Woodson, as a young man, was responsible for reading the newspaper to his father on a daily basis, and he served in a similar capacity in Fayette County, West Virginia amongst a community of coal miners. While he would not become a formal educator until after he began studying at Berea College (Kentucky) in 1897, his roots as a teacher lie in these communal educational systems where he played a key role for his family and friends.⁹

Oliver Jones' Tearoom

John Henry Woodson and Ann Eliza (Riddle) Woodson, who were both formerly enslaved, were the parents of Carter G. Woodson, born on December 19, 1875, in New

⁷ Jacqueline Bacon, “Literacy, Rhetoric, and 19th Century Print Culture,” ed. Phyllis M. Belt-Beyan and Shirley Wilson Logan, *The Journal of African American History* 95, no. 3–4 (2010): 422.

⁸ Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁹ Rayford W. Logan, “Carter G. Woodson: Mirror and Molder of His Time, 1875-1950,” *Journal of Negro History* (Jan. 1973) 58(1): 4; Carter G. Woodson, “My Recollections of Veterans of the Civil War,” *Negro History Bulletin* (Feb. 1944).

Canton, Buckingham County, Virginia. He was the youngest boy of nine children. Their family struggled financially and the children had to work and contribute to the household income. It was in New Canton, however, that Woodson began his intellectual development despite the impoverished circumstances of his family. While the educational opportunity for African Americans was severely limited, Woodson was able to become “well grounded in the fundamentals taught in the rural school of [his] native home” by his two uncles, John Morton Riddle and James Buchanan Riddle.¹⁰ Woodson noted that reading for his father, who was illiterate, was a consistent responsibility for him. He primarily read stale newspapers because they did not have the funds to purchase them newly released. This was a charge Woodson upheld even into his twenties.¹¹

Woodson and his eldest brother Robert moved to Nutallburg, in Fayette County, West Virginia to work in the coalmines. It was here that Woodson’s passion for uncovering the truths of Black history developed. It was also here that the employment of communal literacy was a practical use of Woodson’s education. Similar to the responsibility he held for his father, Woodson read for a community of coal miners that frequented the home of Mr. Oliver Jones, a Civil War veteran whom he came to hold in high esteem.¹² Jones also worked in the coalmines. In the evenings his home became a “tearoom” for the local miners because there was no other establishment for Black people in the area to congregate and fellowship at leisure. White business and landowners would not allow it more formal Black establishments, according to Woodson, because it would interfere with their “commissary where they sold the essentials of life at prices sixty to one hundred per cent higher than they were offered elsewhere.” Jones’ house, on the other hand, was particularly known for selling ice cream and a variety of fruit, and upon learning of Woodson’s ability to read he hired him to keep the group informed of what was featured in the daily newspapers. Woodson’s responsibilities eventually expanded to a lay researcher. For example, if a Civil War veteran came out as a candidate for some public office, Woodson would be required to look them up in books and identify what battles they had fought in.¹³

Woodson recalled how Jones’ home was stocked with books and publication about African American people; it was “all but a reading room,” though Jones himself could not read. Some notable texts that Woodson studied and read to the men in Jones’ home were *Black Phalanx* (1888) by Joseph T. Wilson and George Washington Williams’ *Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion* (1887). Both were history texts written by Black veterans; these books documented the participation of Black soldiers on the American battlefield, from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War. Jones also subscribed to a number of Black newspapers, such as *The Pioneer* by Charles Payne, a prominent African American in West Virginia. Woodson noted that he had the opportunity to meet distinguished African Americans such as Payne when they would visit the home of Oliver Jones. These encounters surely had an indelible impact on Woodson’s life trajectory as an educator and scholar. In Jones’ informal reading room

¹⁰ Carter G. Woodson, “My Recollections of Veterans of the Civil War,” *Negro History Bulletin* (Feb. 1944); Goggin, Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History, p. 10-11

¹¹ Woodson, “My Recollections of Veterans of the Civil War,” *Negro History Bulletin* (Feb. 1944)

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ *Ibid*

and parlor “the history of the race was discussed frequently, and [Woodson’s] interest in penetrating the past of [Black people] was deepened and intensified.”¹⁴

Beyond books and publications dealing with Black people, Woodson also read mainstream newspapers. This exposed him and the community of learners that congregated in Jones’ home to a wide range of topics. He read “speeches, lectures and essays dealing with civil service reform, reduction of taxes, tariff for protection, tariff for revenue only and free trade.”¹⁵

Woodson’s time with this group of coalminers ended when he left in 1895 to attend Douglass High School in Huntington, West Virginia. However, this was the beginning of Woodson’s budding role as a community educator and master-teacher. The practice of communal literacy had a powerful impact in African American communities during the time of enslavement and even after, as Woodson’s narrative demonstrates. Furthermore, the communal ideals that governed this practice shaped Woodson’s philosophy of education in the years to come. He understood the project of African American education to be inherently tied to a larger goal of African American group development as opposed to individual achievement. Relatedly, Woodson came to advocate for an educational program that developed the minds of the Black masses as opposed to a select few.

Woodson’s Development as a Professional Teacher

Woodson completed high school within two years and by 1897 he had began his studies at Berea College in Kentucky. Berea was one of the few American colleges to offer admission to both Black and White students during this time—a practice that would be forbidden by future Kentucky state legislation. After about two years at Berea, Woodson began teaching at a rural school in Winona, Fayette County, West Virginia. He later became the principal of Douglass High School (1900-1903). Throughout these years Woodson worked as an educator during the school term and over the summers continued his studies at Berea.¹⁶ Woodson’s promise as an educator is evident in his expedient elevation to principal at his alma mater and his stellar performance on his teacher certification exams. In 1901 Woodson became certified as a high school teacher in West Virginia; he was examined across twenty subjects, which ranged from theory of teaching and drawing to physics and Latin. He scored an average of 91 per cent with no grade under an 82 per cent.¹⁷

After earning his Litt. B degree from Berea in 1903, Woodson took a position as a teacher and eventually supervisor of schools in the Philippines, where he worked for approximately four years through the U.S. War Department. It was during his tenure here that he learned to speak Spanish as a means of better communicating with his students (he also learned to speak French); he took language courses by mail through the University of Chicago, which helped in this process. Woodson noted that he came to

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ “Biographical Sketch” in *Negro History Bulletin* (May 1950) p. 171-173; Rayford W. Logan, “Carter G. Woodson: Mirror and Molder of His Time, 1875-1950,” *Journal of Negro History* (Jan. 1973) 58(1): 4

¹⁷ Ibid; Woodson’s “Teacher’s High School Certificate” reprinted in *Negro History Bulletin*, (May 1950) p. 180

understand the importance of valuing the culture and customs of students in the educational process through his experience in the Philippines.¹⁸

Before returning to the U.S. permanently, Woodson traveled to Egypt and various countries in Europe and Asia, including a semester of study at the Sorbonne in Paris. He then enrolled as a full time student at the University of Chicago in the fall of 1907, taking both undergraduate and graduate courses. The University of Chicago required Woodson to take undergrad courses because his degree from Berea was deemed insufficient. Both his bachelor’s and master’s degree were in History and Romance Language and Literature, which he received in March and August of 1908, respectively. In the fall of 1908 Woodson began his doctoral studies at Harvard and a year later took a job as a teacher in D.C. public schools after completing his coursework.¹⁹

Jacqueline Goggin’s biography of Woodson closely engages with his tenure at Harvard. She notes the blatant dismissal of Black achievement in American History by his professors, and even explores the challenges Woodson faced in getting his committee to approve his dissertation. Interestingly enough, Woodson asked Albert Bushnell Hart to serve as his dissertation advisor, who also served in the same capacity for W.E.B. Du Bois; Woodson felt that Hart may have been less conservative in his racial politics than his original advisor, Edward Channing.²⁰ Throughout the dissertation process Woodson taught in D.C., which allowed him to earn a living and simultaneously conduct research at the Library of Congress. Woodson’s first couple of years in D.C., which began in 1909, was spilt between multiple schools until he began at the M Street School.²¹

Woodson as a Teacher in D.C. Public Schools

Washington D.C.’s M Street School, later named Dunbar High School, offered a premiere education for African Americans. There was a burgeoning Black middle-class in D.C. and a number of prominent Black professionals attended and taught at the school, among them being Nannie Helen Burroughs and Charles R. Drew as students and Anna Julia Cooper and Kelly Miller as educators. Woodson taught here until 1918. As a result of the stellar teaching at this school and the strong support from the local Black community, M Street academically outperformed all the high schools in the area, White or Black.²² Surely Woodson’s commitment to education germinated in this rich academic environment. He taught History, French, Spanish, and English.

Student accounts of Woodson at M Street paint a portrait of him as a stern educator who took his work very seriously. Jessie H. Roy recounted her experiences with Woodson during the years of 1910-1914, at the time Woodson was in his late thirties. She noted that Woodson was very stern, yet there always lingered a “twinkle in his eyes,” and

¹⁸ “Biographical Sketch” in *Negro History Bulletin* (May 1950) p. 171-173; Goggin, J. Carter G. Woodson: *A Life in Black History* (1996) p. 17-18; Carter G. Woodson *The Miseducation of the Negro* (1933).

¹⁹ Romero, “Carter G. Woodson,” 52-81.

²⁰ Jacqueline Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History* (1996) pp. 21-26.

²¹ “Biographical Sketch” in *Negro History Bulletin* (May 1950) p. 171-173; Logan, “Mirror and Molder of His Time,” p. 6.

²² Alison Stewart. *First Class: The Legacy of Dunbar, America's First Black Public High School*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013; Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History* (1996).

the students respected him. Woodson was assigned to watch over the students as they studied in the assembly hall and Roy recalled how he would be seen studiously working (likely on his dissertation) as he oversaw their study sessions and maintained order. Roy's account of Woodson demonstrates the discipline he maintained to complete his doctoral degree while meeting the demands of being a public school teacher. Woodson would continue this balancing act of multi-tasking throughout his life. He wore many hats: a teacher, scholar, author, publisher, and institution builder—and he juggled them all with an invigorated standard of excellence.²³

Rayford W. Logan, who would later earn a Ph.D. in history from Harvard, took Woodson's French Literature class as a high school senior in 1912-1913 and would become one of his closest protégées in later years. Logan recalled that Woodson was a "serious, stern, almost dour disciplinarian" who was meticulous as an instructor. His memory of Woodson "seated erect at his desk" resonates with William M. Cobb's recollections. Cobb was a freshman when he encountered Woodson in 1917 at Dunbar High School (formerly M Street); during passing periods Woodson would stand outside of his door "so posed, the quiet, unsmiling dignity of his figure commanded good order." Cobb described Woodson as having a "reserved, independent demeanor." These student accounts of Woodson as an authoritative educator with a commanding presence coincide with his history as a principal—a role he would again take up at Armstrong Vocational High School in 1918.²⁴

Woodson's studies and independent research continued throughout his time as a schoolteacher; furthermore, during these years he began building the very institutions through which he operationalized his educational program. In 1912 his dissertation, "The Disruption of Virginia," was accepted by Harvard University. In 1915 he founded the ASNLH and the following year marks the beginning of the *Journal of Negro History*, a publication that created an unprecedented opportunity for scholars conducting social science research on Black life and culture.²⁵ Additionally, Woodson's first book, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, was published in 1915. He was balancing an immense amount of responsibilities and they significantly informed one another.

After working in D.C. public schools, Woodson went on to be a college professor. He was hired as Dean of Howard University's School of Liberal Arts and head of its graduate faculty in 1919; he would fill the same position the following academic year (1920) for West Virginia State College, just before retiring completely to serve as the fulltime director of the ASNLH and the editor of its journal. Woodson's decision to join the faculty at West Virginia was only to help his friend, John Davis, reorganize the college's academic program. It was understood that Woodson would only be here a short while because his primary goal was developing the work of the ASNLH.²⁶ While Woodson had become an educator at the collegiate level, it was for a very short period of time—

²³ Jessie H. Roy, "Some Personal Recollections of Dr. Woodson," *Negro History Bulletin* (May 1965) pp. 185, 192

²⁴ Rayford W. Logan, "Carter G. Woodson: Mirror and Molder of His Time, 1875-1950," *Journal of Negro History* (Jan. 1973) 58(1): 8-9; William M. Cobb, "Carter G. Woodson: The Father of Negro History," *Journal of the National Medical Association* (September 1970) 62(5):389; Jacqueline Goggin, *A Life in Black History* (1996), p. 29-30.

²⁵ Meier and Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980*.

²⁶ Patricia W. Romero, "Carter G. Woodson: A Biography" (Ohio State University, 1971), p. 80

approximately two years between Howard and West Virginia. The core of his experience as a teacher was in the public school system in Virginia and D.C. between 1890 and 1919. His affinity for the development of school age children and his acquaintance with the perverted education system in America would significantly inform his pedagogy as a public educational figure. These decades of teaching significantly informed his research agenda and the universe of intellectual activity that formed his educational program.

Woodson’s historical research surely impacted his commitment to the field of education. In 1915 the Assistant Superintendent to Colored Schools, Roscoe C. Bruce, named Woodson’s contributions to the development of Black history in his report to the board of education. As Jacqueline Goggin noted, “Bruce took special pains to point out Woodson’s achievements, noting the publication of his book on Negro education.”²⁷ Though it cannot be completely credited to Woodson, it is worth noting that D.C.’s Black public schools had Black history incorporated at all levels. While the opening of the 1920s would mark Woodson’s physical exit from the classroom, it was also the beginning stages of his construction of an alternative educational universe. Woodson would dedicate his life to transforming the way Black people learned about themselves in relationship to the world around them, both in and outside of the classroom. This included the development of counterhegemonic curricula, cutting edge academic research that repositioned Black life and culture as a worthy area of academic inquiry, and the creation of self-sustaining institutions that supported his communal educational philosophy. The tenants of communal literacy instilled in him as a young boy took on new meaning as he began building his life’s work through the ASNLH.

Schooling the Race: The Development of Woodson’s Educational Universe

In September of 1915 Woodson had been visiting in Chicago while staying at the Y.M.C.A.; it was here that he decided to move forward with the idea of creating an organization devoted to the study of Black history and culture. On September 9th Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) with four other gentlemen: George Cleveland Hall, James E. Stamps, Alexander L. Jackson, and W.B. Hartgrove.

The socio-political terrain of Black America in 1915 was particularly intense; while political disenfranchisement had been growing since the end of Reconstruction, this year marked a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. A notable landmark of this reinvigorated articulation of White supremacy in American popular culture was the release of D.W. Griffith’s (1915) film, *Birth of a Nation*, which depicted the defeat of Reconstruction to be the result of Black leadership in addition to a host of other violent portrayals of Black life. The film portrayed Black men as savage rapists obsessed with White women and presented the Ku Klux Klan as the heroic saviors of America. Led by the NAACP, Black communities protested the showing of this film in theaters and even appealed to government officials. Sadly, the film was not only shown in all major cities but there was even a screening at the White House.²⁸ In the “Opinions” section of a 1915 issue of *The Crisis*, Du Bois presented a thread of critiques of this “Slanderous Film,” demonstrating that this was a time in which critical discourse about Black representation was reaching a

²⁷ Goggin, J. Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History (1996) p. 31

²⁸ Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, First Edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), pp. 11-13

new height.²⁹ As Woodson and his associates sat around the table on September 9th, *Birth of a Nation* provided evidence to justify the need for the ASNLH. James E. Stamps recalled that the film was part of their discussion when founding the association.³⁰ The ASNLH would become incorporated in Washington D.C. on October 2, 1915.³¹

From the onset its mission was clear and pointed. The 1917 ASNLH constitution stated the following: “Its object shall be the collection of sociological and historical documents and the promotion of studies bearing on the Negro.” The publication of the *Journal of Negro History* began a year after the founding of the ASNLH, and this is when Woodson truly began to make his mark. Woodson took a major risk on this publication, using his personal funds for its first issues; it received an overwhelmingly positive response from both Black and White scholars, and philanthropists.³²

Woodson and the co-founders of the ASNLH did not create this organization in a vacuum. Although Woodson may have developed a more entrepreneurial and ambitious vision for the intellectual work of the ASNLH in the broader American public than any other organization of its kind, his knowledge of and previous experience with organized Black literary societies surely influenced his vision for the ASNLH. In particular, Woodson was granted membership into the American Negro Academy (ANA) in 1914 along with Arturo Schomburg.³³ The ANA was a group of elite Black men across a number of different professions, that aimed to develop critical thought pertaining to Black people. The membership of this organization was very controlled, never totaling more than twenty-five and Anna Julia Cooper would be the only woman ever admitted into the ANA.³⁴

The early stage of Woodson’s educational model was critical. While the first wave of scholarship published by the Association was a bit inaccessible to lay readers and grade level students, it was this social science research that would inform the textbooks and school curricula developed in the years that followed. Furthermore, the quality of the work being published secured the credibility of both Woodson as a scholar and the organization he was building. The ASNLH offered an infrastructure for a Black intellectual public like never before. It was a community of people committed to the cause of researching and distributing scholarship regarding Black life throughout history, and ultimately the (re)construction of a Black cultural legacy that negated White supremacy.

Though he physically left the classroom and committed his entire life to the work of the ASNLH, Woodson never took off his hat as a teacher. In fact, after retiring from

²⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Slandorous Film” (December 1915) in *The Crisis*, pp. 76-77

³⁰ Romero, *Carter G. Woodson: A Bibliography*, p. 92

³¹ ASNLH Articles of Incorporation, Woodson Papers, UC Berkeley Microfilm Collection, reel 1.

³² “ASNLH Brochure” (no date) Woodson Collection at Emory, box 1 folder 31; Geneva C. Turner, “A Look at the Association: Past, Present, Future,” *Negro History Bulletin* (May 1965) p. 184; Pero Dagbovie, *Dr. Carter G. Woodson in Washington D.C.*, Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014, p 42; ASNLH Articles of Incorporation, Woodson Papers, UC Berkeley Microfilm Collection, reel 1.

³³ Elinor Des Verney Sinnette, (1989), *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg: Black Bibliophile and Collector*, p. 53

³⁴ Alfred A. Moss Jr, *The American Negro Academy: Voice of the Talented Tenth* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1981).

teaching in schools in 1921, Woodson simply stepped into a much larger arena as an educator through his role as the ASNLH’s Director of Research and editor of its journal. The organizational structure of the ASNLH and its various extensions allowed for Woodson’s communal pedagogy to flourish.

It is important to note that early on the majority of the funding for the ASNLH and its activities were via White philanthropy. While Woodson did his best to secure funds from Black people, this proved to be unsuccessful until the 1930s, after the ASNLH had gained recognition amongst the Black masses. This relationship with White philanthropy would be nursed throughout the 1920s and would prove to be a slippery slope given Woodson’s demands for autonomy over the workings of the ASNLH. Nonetheless, the first sign of support from philanthropists came from Julius Rosenwald in 1917 with a \$100 pledge per quarter for the *JNH*.³⁵ Rosenwald’s contributions would be the largest sum of money donated from a single source to the ASNLH until five years later when the Carnegie Corporation pledged \$25,000 over the course of five years to cover the debt and overhead expenses, and soon thereafter the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial gave \$25,000 to finance five years of research.³⁶ As observed by historians Meier and Rudwick, it was the relationship that developed between Woodson and J. Franklin Jameson, the editor of the *American Historical Review* and Director of the Department of Historical Research at the Carnegie Institution of Washington, which led to this successful fundraising campaign.³⁷

Though Woodson continued to try and sustain these relationships over the years, his resistance and controlling demeanor would lead to their decline by the early 1930s. He became quite explicit in expressing his disdain for the manipulative nature of White paternalism, especially in relationship to philanthropy. In 1932 Woodson would write to Benjamin Brawley regarding his refusal to participate in the Encyclopedia project on Negro History sponsored by the Phelps Stokes Fund, after he was initially excluded from the project. Woodson stated that he was “in no way opposed to interracial cooperation... The program of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, however is conceived of by Negroes; and liberal minded members of the other race assist us in the only natural way of helping us to help ourselves.” Therefore, Woodson was committed to the idea that philanthropist should not dictate the research agenda of Black scholars and their intellectual work—the impact of this work was too consequential.³⁸

Woodson also resisted the demands by his funders to align the ASNLH with any of the Negro colleges, which he found to be lacking in leadership and academic rigor. Woodson attempted to save face amongst White philanthropy by maintaining an executive board that was made up of both Blacks and Whites, similar to the NAACP and the National Urban League, and by making explicit his commitments to interracial

³⁵ Carter G. Woodson, “Ten Years of Collecting and Publishing the Records of the Negro,” *The Journal of Negro History* 10, no. 4 (1925): 602; Meier and Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 20;

³⁶ Woodson, “Ten Years of Collecting and Publishing,” 602-603; Meier and Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 35

³⁷ *Ibid*, 27-35

³⁸ Letter from Carter G. Woodson to Benjamin Brawley, January 7, 1932. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

cooperation. However, this balancing act went out the window in the 1930s once he made a complete split with the White philanthropists and became estranged from many elite Blacks. As Meier and Rudwick keenly point out, “His final rejection of a philanthropy-sponsored connection with a Negro university was symbolized by his recruitment of the presidents of land-grant and lesser collegiate institutions for his council.”³⁹ This included educational leaders like Mary McLeod Bethune of Bethune-Cookman College and H. Councill Trenholm of Alabama State College. It was essentially through these figures that Woodson solidified his connection to Black teachers organizations and therefore developed a vigorous symbiotic relationship between the work of the ASNLH and the work of teachers in the classroom.

The funding of the ASNLH would now come from smaller contributions made by a broader body of dedicated members, and especially Black teachers. Woodson positively reflected on this sustained support from the Black masses in 1940. He noted that while the income of the ASNLH had dropped tremendously during the early years of the Depression, “it has gradually increased until it is now about two-thirds of what it was during the most prosperous years of the undertaking... The success thus achieved is a credit to the Negro race and serves as eloquent evidence of that capacity of the Negro for self help... it is fortunate that the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History is obtaining its income in small amounts from a larger number of people.”⁴⁰ During this time, Woodson would become even more unapologetic and uncensored in his critiques and public opinion. It should come as no surprise that during this time Woodson would pen the most militant piece of scholarship published across his career, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (1933).

A Closer Look at the Academic Infrastructure of the ASNLH

There were five major channels of knowledge under the umbrella of the ASNLH: the *Journal of Negro History* (1916), the *Negro History Bulletin* (1937), Associated Publishers, Inc. (1921), Negro History Week (1926), and the Extensions Division, which was comprised of local branches (1919) and a Home Studies Department (1927). The *Journal* offered a professional public for Black academics; the *Bulletin* became an educational magazine for students and school teachers; the publishing arm produced relevant children’s literature and books on Black life and history that mainstream publishers refused to support; Negro History Week dramatized what students were learning about Black history throughout the year, and became a major attraction for leveraging support for the ASNLH’s mission. Woodson identified Negro History Week as “the greatest stimulus to the educational work of the Association.”⁴¹ Lastly, the Extensions Division offered the opportunity for consistent instructional guidance on Black life and history for those who were no longer students, and even for those who were students but had no access to courses that focused on the experiences and cultures of Black people. More specifically, the Extension Division, consisting of local branches and the home studies department, was established in 1927 “to embrace the imparting of

³⁹ Meier and Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 60

⁴⁰ C. G. Woodson, “An Accounting for Twenty-Five Years,” *The Journal of Negro History* 25, no. 4 (1940): 426

⁴¹ Woodson quoted in L. D. Reddick, “Twenty-Five Negro History Weeks,” *Negro History Bulletin* 13, no. 8 (May 1, 1950): 178–80.

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information by public lectures and the study of Negro life and history by mail.”⁴² Given that very few universities offered courses in Black history, Home Studies Courses aimed to meet the needs of those people who desired to be more anchored in this body of knowledge, and for teachers who sought to reconfigure their curricula but were “handicapped by lack of information.”⁴³

Patricia Romero’s dissertation on Woodson captures this unique institutional organizational structure. She captures how the various moving parts of Woodson’s educational model supported its other features. For instance:

Through his effort to reach the masses of the Black people in the United States, Woodson had worked out a remarkable program within the Association where every program matched something else within the organization. The pictures Woodson obtained for use in the Bulletin were blown up to larger size and sold individually. The articles in the Bulletin were transferred to the encyclopedia file. Negro History Week was advertised in the Bulletin, and during Negro History Week extra issues of the Bulletin were printed for promotional circulation, thus adding new subscribers each year. In the later years young and unpublished scholars were published in the Bulletin before moving up to the now-prestigious Journal. This gave the Bulletin a steady stream of articles and provided the younger historians and writers an opportunity to publish.⁴⁴

Woodson built on the social infrastructure of Black communities to drive forward his vision of a Black educational model that centered Black cultural life. His annual meetings for ASNLH brought together professional scholars and lay community members, which reflected “a genuine interest on the Director’s part in influencing a large Black public, and it presented a way of interesting them in their history.”⁴⁵ This broad public that Woodson aimed to serve was reflected in the programmatic layout of these Annual meetings, where Black churches, schools, and artists were engaged in these spaces. As Romero observed, “The programs of these early meeting deviated from those of the other historical societies. After or preceding each session a musical selection was rendered by a local singer or church group. This was very much in keeping with the tradition within the Negro society of the time and probably was not considered unusual by most of those in attendance.”⁴⁶

Woodson’s humble beginning, as a coal miner, was something he took pride in, and it surely influenced his commitment to the Black poor and working class whom he constantly sought to reach through his educational program. As Mary McLeod Bethune would emphasize, Woodson was “a man of the soil.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, the structure of

⁴² “ASNLH Brochure” (n.d., after 1937), in Woodson Collection at Emory University, box 1 folder 31

⁴³ Brochure, “Home Study Department of the Extension Division,” Box 1 Folder 32, Carter Godwin Woodson collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁴⁴ Romero, “Carter G. Woodson,” 215.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 143.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 120.

⁴⁷ Mary McLeod Bethune, “True Leadership is Timeless,” NHB (May 1950): p. 173.

Woodson's educational model allowed his work to enter the lives of people across class lines and all aspects of community life: school, church, clubs, and the home. Woodson's educational program catered to the masses of Black people, as evident by the fact that the local branches of the ASNLH were organized around neighborhoods and cities, not simply universities and schools. There were also junior societies established for school age children, and these were housed by schools and affiliated with local branches.⁴⁸

Woodson's annual reports capture the work he was doing in the field to garner interest in the ASNLH. He reported, "Wherever there is a call to encourage a school or a club to do more for the study of Negro life and history, the Director generally responds." Woodson's travel to different cities and the stirring talks he gave typically led to the establishment of "local clubs to co-operate with this national organization."⁴⁹ As the ASNLH became more established there were more formal requirements set for creating new branches. Branches of the ASNLH could be organized by at least 10 dues paying members and they were responsible for carrying out the work of the Association on the local level. Branches could organize public lectures, collect information about the history of their local community, and facilitate the integration of Negro History in the local education system. All dues paying members received a copy of the *Journal of Negro History* and the *Negro History Bulletin*. Churches, schools and other youth groups could organize junior societies for the purpose of engaging youth in the study of Negro life and history, an outline for study was distributed from the national office along with reading lists that catered to Black youth.⁵⁰

Through these media, Woodson was able to develop very intimate relationships with people across cities, states, and national boundaries. While Woodson's time was very guarded, no one was too insignificant to receive guidance from him if it related to "the cause." Woodson noted that the ASNLH was like a "free reference bureau." As noted by Pero Dagbovie, "Woodson corresponded with countless people from around the world interested in Black history. He answered their questions, commented on papers and mailed them information."⁵¹

By the end of the 1920s, Woodson's organization had made substantial progress in expanding the reach of his educational program. By 1929, for instance, over one hundred schools, junior high through the collegiate level, were using his textbook.⁵² Furthermore, according to the ASNLH's reported membership data there were over 1600 people that had joined the Association, representing forty states, with approximately 34 international members (see table 1.1).⁵³ On the occasion of the Association's twenty-fifth

⁴⁸ More on Junior Branches of ASNLH in "Notes," *Journal of Negro History* (Jan. 1929) 14(1): pp. 106-107

⁴⁹ "The Annual Report of the Director for the Year 1922-1923," in *The Journal of Negro History* (October 1923) 8, no. 4, p. 467

⁵⁰ "ASNLH Brochure," n.d. (after 1937), Box 1 Folder 31, Carter Godwin Woodson collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁵¹ Pero Dagbovie, *Carter G. Woodson in Washington D.C.: The Father of Black History*, (2014) p. 57

⁵² "The Negro in Our History 4th Edition Advertisement," n.d, Box 1 Folder 1, Carter Godwin Woodson collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁵³ "An Appeal for Members," 1928, Box 1 Folder 31, Carter Godwin Woodson collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

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anniversary, Woodson could proudly note that “the important achievements [had] been the promotion of actual research which has given the public twenty-seven monographs of Negro life and history, the collection of five thousand manuscripts bearing on the Negro, the inauguration of Negro History Week, and the founding of the *Negro History Bulletin*.”⁵⁴

Table 1.1

150+ members		Less than 10 members		Ireland	1
D.C.	183	Colorado	2	Total Intern. Members 34	
New York	181	Deleware	8		
100-149 members		Iowa	6	Total ASNLH Members 1601	
Pennsylvania	129	Maine	5		
Missouri	109	Minnesota	7		
50-99 members		Nebraska	3		
Virginia	98	New Hampsire	1		
West Virginia	94	Nevade	2		
North Carolina	85	New Mexico	2		
Illinois	51	Oregon	2		
Kentucky	54	Rhode Island	2		
Maryland	57	Washington	7		
Ohio	67	Wisconsin	2		
10-49 members		Total U.S. Members 1567			
Alabama	38	International Membership			
Arkansas	10	Haiti	1		
Conneticut	16	British West Indies	3		
California	14	Cuba	2		
Florida	29	Central America	1		
Georgia	46	Africa	5		
Indiana	22	England	7		
Kansas	13	Portugal	1		
Louisiana	12	Canal Zone	1		
Massachusetts	43	Virgin Islands	2		
Michigan	32	Australia	1		
Mississippi	14	China	2		
New Jersey	29	Italy	1		
Oklahoma	16	Switzerland	1		
South Carolina	19	Canada	4		
Tennessee	29	Germany	1		
Texas	28				

Data from membership solicitation letter circulated by ASNLH; Woodson Collection at Emory Box 1 folder 31

"An Appeal for More Members of the ASNLH"

Communal Pedagogy

Woodson was a community educator throughout his life. Just as he took on this role in the home of Oliver Jones, he occupied a similar role for the residents at the Phyllis Wheatley Y.W.C.A., with whom he often dined in the evenings towards the end of his life. In a letter entitled, “An Appreciation of Dr. Carter G. Woodson,” the residents of the Y.W.C.A. wrote the following:

Many evenings when he dropped in for dinner in the Y.W.C.A. dining room, Dr. Woodson would casually linger in the comfortable Lobby late into the evening. Seated there like the great philosopher and teacher that he was, he would engage in stimulating conversations with the young

⁵⁴ “25th Anniversary Meeting Program” (1940), in Woodson Collection at Emory University, box 1 folder 9

women as they passed, tarried and listen to learn from the experiences of his full rich life. He was a fountainhead of knowledge of our history and racial heritage, together with an interesting store of anecdotes of wit and humor. There were also periods of healthy philosophy, wise counsel, and current information. His wide travel experience as teacher, lecturer, instructor, leader and humanitarian made him always welcome as an interesting and entertaining visitor. As a conversationalist he would, when pressed, modestly relate marvelous incidents of his own early life. His optimistic views and worthwhile topics were impelling and contagious...

The sustaining pride and self assurance that he has given us and that he has inoculated in our group as a result of his authentic research is a priceless legacy for all. He often jocundly declared that his work was his hobby. His imposing physique and commanding personality attracted the flowing crowds of both races at the Union Station where he often sat after his meals there. They would draw him into discussions of world problems, economics, and the social dilemma, all of which he handled tactfully and well, not knowing to whom he spoke.⁵⁵

These casual interactions Woodson had with the young women at the Y.W.C.A. and countless others in spaces he frequented, made an indelible impact on the people he came in contact with. Woodson was a community educator; his conviction to develop the race into an educated body of people, particularly as it pertained to their racial and cultural identity, allowed him to exist as such.

After Woodson left the classroom his role as a community educator was once again elevated. He often rendered lectures around the country on the research being conducted by the ASNLH, especially during the celebration of Negro History Week. He not only provided lectures to adult and academic audiences but children were at the heart of his pedagogical agenda. Lorenzo Greene recounted an experience when Woodson was asked to speak to a group of elementary students in Suffolk, Virginia. He was amazed at how Woodson “could hold the attention of children who listened to him in fascination as he spoke.” “[Woodson] held them spellbound as he regaled them with tales of African fables. Both children and teachers were delighted with his presentation.” Greene reported that when Woodson interacted with children “he delighted them with his humor and it seemed that his years fell away, his frozen exterior melted and he became positively human and likeable as he laughed and joked with the children.”⁵⁶ This event echoes a declaration made by Woodson in 1934; he sought to “teach this Negro child that he is...beautifully Black!...I show by the achievement of his forebears that they measured up in their glorious record to the level of the greatest peoples of the world...I would say to the Negro child as does the African, ‘Know thyself better than he who speaks of thee.’”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Letter reprinted in Negro History Bulletin (May 1950) under the title, “The Death of the Founder” pp. 170, 176

⁵⁶ Lorenzo Greens, Speech on Woodson given in 1976, titled “Dr. Woodson as I Knew Him” in box 92, Lorenzo Johnston Greene Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁷ Woodson, “Differentiation in Education with Respect to Races,” The New York Age (Jan. 27, 1934) p. 5.

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Therefore, Woodson found it essential to use the scholarship he was producing to empower Black youth with racial pride and to imagine new possibilities for their lives based on a heritage of excellence and triumph.

Woodson’s educational program, operationalized through the various extensions of the ASNLH, compelled Black individuals across the country to support his vision. The sacrifices Black folks made to support this organization should not be taken lightly. The fact that Woodson’s educational Universe expanded during the 1930s—the years of the Great Depression—speaks volumes to the impact his work had amongst African Americans. Clarke Leo Smith, Jr. was a student at West Virginia State during the 1930s and had heard about Woodson’s work through President John Davis that recruited Woodson as the school’s academic dean in 1921. In a letter to Woodson, Smith wrote, “You do not know me but I have met you many times through your books.” President Davis’ remarks about Woodson had caused the student to be “moved to tears.” Enclosed in his letter was \$2.00 to “aid [Woodson] in a small way to further [his] great work.” This was money that had been sent to Smith by his family for “laundry and miscellaneous articles.” Smith however declared, “If you can give your life for the advancement of Negro History, certainly I can this small sum which is all I have to offer.” Smith’s testimony captures the investment of ordinary Black people in Woodson’s educational project and how word-of-mouth played a powerful role in carrying forward his message through the educational networks he was a part of.⁵⁸

Teacher of Teachers

A newspaper headline in the *The AfroAmerican* memorialized Woodson as a “Schoolmaster of His Race” after he died in 1950. Teachers and educational leaders from across the country filled the columns of the paper with reflections that recognized Woodson’s transformative contributions to the educational landscape.⁵⁹ He was a surrogate teacher for many students, both young and adults. For example, Jessie Roy, who was previously mentioned as a student at M Street, shared how Woodson went above and beyond for scholars interested in studying the race. Years later, Roy would become a teacher herself and write books for school children. She noted that when writing her second book on “Negro Pioneers,” she barely had to go to the Library of Congress to conduct research; she would simply go to Dr. Woodson’s office and “sit for hours, spellbound, while one of the greatest masters of history told us in simple, clear language, facts and dates concerning the characters about whom he wanted us to write.” Roy noted that Woodson would even allow her and her colleague, Geneva C. Turner, to accompany him to dinner at the Y.W.C.A. to continue their studies, or return to his office to study late into the night. According to Roy, “Socrates in his hey-dey never had two more devoted students” than she and Mrs. Turner.⁶⁰ Woodson wrote the “Introduction” to *Pioneers of Long Ago*, and the Associated Publishers, Inc published it. Woodson assured

⁵⁸ Letter from Clarke Leo Smith, Jr. to Woodson (undated), Carter G. Woodson Microfilm Collection, UC Berkeley, reel 2; biography of Smith found on “Happy Father’s Day to my dad, Clarke L. Smith, Jr. (1915-1984)” by Yvonne May (daughter) on <http://www.clarksmithphotography.com/blog> (accessed April 8, 2015).

⁵⁹ “Schoolmaster to His Race Mourned,” *The Washington Afro-American* (April 8, 1950)

⁶⁰ Jessie H. Roy, “Some Personal Recollections of Dr. Woodson,” *Negro History Bulletin* (May 1965) pp. 185, 192

readers that the authors had written the book in a manner that maintained academic integrity and that was “suitable for children on the lower levels in the public schools.”⁶¹ These were facts he could vouch for because he had in fact mentored these two teachers throughout the process.

Woodson’s relationship to Black teachers during his lifetime will be discussed in a later chapter, however, for now it is important to highlight that he had an important instructional role in developing teachers under the auspices of the ASNLH. This was a major function of his educational model—to empower teachers, who were then to go on and shape the minds of the future leaders of the race. He sought to equip them with knowledge regarding their history that had the power to transform their self-perceptions and expand their imagination as it pertained to the possibilities for their future. According to Woodson, “the educational theories developed from the time of Socrates down to the day of Dewey” failed to provide the self assurance for Black youth to feel invigorated to “improve their condition.”⁶² Therefore, he provided an alternative pedagogical framework that explicitly challenged the Jim Crow reality of Black students by offering unconventional narratives of the Black past—a past that had the power to project new possibilities for their future as a race.

Teachers from all over the country corresponded with Woodson regarding educational materials, and especially Negro History Week. He graciously engaged these teachers; sending them Negro History kits, posters for their classrooms, and filling books orders. Woodson was well integrated into the professional network of teachers as evidenced by the fact that he became a life member of the American Teachers Association (ATA) in 1947 even though he had not been employed as an educator for over 25 years. The ATA was the umbrella organization for the state level Black teacher associations across the nation; it was founded in 1906 and previously called the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools.⁶³ Woodson’s communal educational program was couched in the tightly woven web of Black social organizations—Black religious, fraternal, and professional networks were the major channels through which his work traveled, in addition to its wide coverage in the Black press.

Academic Mentor

While Woodson was a teacher of teachers, he was also a hands-on mentor for many emerging scholars pursuing advanced degrees in the social sciences and humanities. The ASNLH even offered financial support for some of these students, beginning with Rayford W. Logan’s fellowship in 1922. Other notable scholars in this group are: Charles H. Wesley, Lorenzo J. Green, Luther Porter Jackson, Alrutheus A. Taylor, Zora Neale Hurston, Lawrence Reddick, Langston Hughes, and Myra Colson Callis.⁶⁴ These

⁶¹ *Pioneers of Long Ago*, by Jessie Roy and Geneva Turner (1951), pp. xi-xii

⁶² Carter G. Woodson, “Comments on Negro Education: Vocational Guidance,” *New York Age* (May 7, 1932) p. 4

⁶³ Woodson’s ATA Life Member certificate reproduced in Willie Miles’ “Dr. Carter G. Woodson as I Recall Him, 1943-1950,” *Journal of Negro History* (1991) 76, no. 4, p. 99; see also Thelma Perry, *History of the American Teachers’ Association* (1975). Washington D.C.: National Education.

⁶⁴ Lorenzo Greene, *Selling Black History for Dr. Woodson*; Francille Wilson, *Segregated Scholars*; Pero Dagbovie, *Carter G. Woodson in Washington D.C.*

fellowship opportunities and grants fell under the ASNLH’s “Department of Research” which was established 1922 by philanthropic funding contributed by the Carnegie Corporation and the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial.⁶⁵

Woodson’s role in helping to usher in the next generation of Black academics is irrefutable. As A.A. Taylor wrote, “[Woodson] aided serious students...to secure funds wherewith to finance advanced study; he has assisted candidates to develop doctoral dissertations; he has given scholars encouragement and support in post-doctoral investigations; he has helped scholars to edit their work; and he has secured for others the use of facilities which were otherwise closed to them.”⁶⁶ Reinforcing this point, Lorenzo Greene offered the following: “Dr. Woodson’s office was a training school for me, like those assistants who preceded me...he gave me invaluable preparation in research.”⁶⁷

The sarcasm and rigidity that were endemic to Woodson’s personality certainly influenced his interaction with these young scholars. He was known for ridiculing the scholars whom he worked closely with. In hinting at the future of the ASNLH, Woodson once mentioned to Greene that Wesley could likely take on Woodson’s position if anything were to ever happen to him, but “Wesley was interested in making money,” suggesting that Wesley’s materialism might not allow him to stay committed to the cause. As an afterthought, Woodson suggested to Greene, “You can do it too.” While this was clearly an affirmation of Greene’s abilities as a scholar, Woodson’s stern disposition often prevented him from being vulnerable with his mentees. Despite this character trait, Greene still offered that Woodson’s was reliable and took on a fatherly attitude toward him. Greene recounted how Woodson would often encourage him to take care of his health, going out of his way to send him medicine while traveling abroad. He even recounted a time when he was arrested after a traffic violation and had to call Woodson in the middle of the night because he couldn’t pay the fine charged against him. “Dr. Woodson immediately called a taxi, came over and bailed me out, remarking that he could not endure thinking of me in a filthy jail.”⁶⁸

Woodson understood the value of supporting emerging scholars that were committed to applying rigorous methodology to studying the conditions and history of Black people. Many of these young academics would be critical to the longevity of the ASNLH after Woodson’s sudden death in 1950. His immediate successors were scholars that he had personally trained, Rayford W. Logan would become his immediate successor and Charles H. Wesley not far behind. Woodson’s support of this younger group of scholars who went on to achieve advanced degrees significantly impacted the trajectory of Black educational history.

⁶⁵ “ASNLH Brochure” (n.d.), in Woodson Collection at Emory University, box 1 folder 31; “The Annual Report of the Director for the Year 1922-1923,” in *The Journal of Negro History* (October 1923) 8, no. 4, pp. 466-471.

⁶⁶ Alrutheus A. Taylor, “Dr. Carter G. Woodson: Inspirer and Benefactor of Young Scholars,” *Negro History Bulletin* (May 1950) p. 186

⁶⁷ “Dr. Woodson As I Knew Him,” 1976, Box 92, Lorenzo Johnston Green Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*

Conclusion

From an early age, Carter G. Woodson took on the identity of a teacher. He used his literacy as a service to others in his community, most of who were formerly enslaved and did not have the option of being formally educated. His time spent in Oliver Jones' "reading room" where his interest in Black history fermented was the period in which he came to realize the power that education had for more than one's own achievement. Through his application of communal literacy, Woodson developed a pedagogy centered on shared responsibility and group development that came to inform his life's work. He went on to build the ASNLH, which functioned as an alternative educational universe. This umbrella organization facilitated the production of knowledge that challenged White supremacist epistemology, packaged this knowledge in formalized academic journals and curricula, and organized sophisticated channels of distribution that reached academicians, the broader Black community, and even international scholars.

While Woodson moved beyond the mainstream educational sphere when he left the public school system, his connections to Black educators, as a professional group, is undeniable. He operated from a counter ideology of history that informed the alternative educational universe he created, a world that most Black educators during the Jim Crow period came in touch with through their professional networks. Woodson developed an iconic education program that instigated resistance to the dominant epistemology and power structure of the broader society—whether it was formally acknowledged by the mainstream educational system or not. Angela Davis (1944-present) recalled how resistance was a learning objective of Woodson Negro History Week when reflecting upon her school age years in Birmingham, Alabama. She offered, "The theme was always, whether explicitly or implicitly, that of resistance to the status quo of racism."⁶⁹

Just as media technology began to take on a more extreme role in further deteriorating the representation of Black people within the America public, as epitomized by *Birth of a Nation*, Woodson developed an organized educational program that sought to set the record straight. He was challenging the racialized ideological state apparatuses by arming Black teachers, and anyone else who would listen, with a counter discourse that vindicated the humanity of Black people. Through his educational program, Woodson invited Black community members to participate in the process of building a new system of knowledge that instilled pride and generated an affect of honor in being Black. He was invested in the ontological work of presenting a new possibility for how Black people existed in the world through self-perceptions that were informed by a more critical conceptual understanding of Blackness, the African Diaspora, and the socio-political and ideological functions of White supremacy.

This chapter has offered a broader understanding of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, as more than an historian, to shed light upon his long tenure as a teacher (both formally and informally), one that stretched from his teen years until his death in 1950. In doing so, the goal has not been to trivialize his title as "the father of Black history." Centering Woodson's legacy as a teacher serves to elevate his yeomen's work at building an alternative educational model that offered a counterhegemonic philosophy, transformative curricula, and new sets of identities for Black learners. His educational

⁶⁹ Keppler Speakers. "Activist Angela Davis Reflects on the Notion of Black History Month". Filmed [n.d.]. YouTube video. Posted [September 22, 2011]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqYyMRCmfvE>

“SCHOOLMASTER TO HIS RACE”

program engaged the lived realities of Black students and made the recognition of Black humanity a first priority. Woodson was an educational theorist working alongside the progressive education movement, yet his work has been placed on the margins. The following chapters pull back the curtains on Woodson’s educational program using his writings, textbooks, and educational institutions as a lens to analyze the key dimensions of his educational praxis.

CHAPTER II

The Missed Education of the Negro:

Woodson's Critique of Black Schooling and Guiding Principles for an Alternative Model

“Only by careful study of the Negro himself and the life which he is forced to lead can we arrive at the proper procedure in this crisis.” – Carter G. Woodson (1933)

Carter G. Woodson has had a lasting impact through his 1933 text, *The Miseducation of the Negro*.¹ The traction that this book maintains in African American educational thought, and the Black radical imaginary more broadly, is undeniable. Black nationalists and critics of public education continuously employ the phrase “miseducation” to indict the legacy of psychological trauma inflicted on the minds of Black people through the ideological apparatuses of the state.² Take for instance, Donald Spivey’s (1986) *The Politics of Miseducation: The Booker T. Washington Institute in Liberia* where he explores how industrial schooling functioned as a technology of the American colonial project in Liberia; or Kmt Shockley’s (2008) *The Miseducation of Black Children* where he explores the corrosion of Black cultural identities in American schools and advocates for an Afrocentric educational model. Arguably, the most popular exemplar of Woodson’s lasting presence is embodied in Lauryn Hill’s award winning album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998). An artist known for her pro-Black, Afro-centric self-identification and soulful merger of R&B and Hip Hop, Hill found a useful tool in the historical memory associated with *The Miseducation*.³

Henry Louis Gates’ literary concept of “signifyin” elucidates how the use of the word miseducation carries a broad repository of racial critiques of mainstream society and especially as it relates to schools.⁴ As a practice of signifyin’, Black scholars and even artists recall Woodson’s critique of dominant racist ideology that informs American society and institutions, and how this onslaught works to the detriment of Black people. While the intellectual militancy of Woodson is largely based on this book, and has been reproduced on many fronts, there has yet to be a close engagement of this text for its theoretical and pedagogical implications. Through this text, Woodson imagined an educational program that centered Black cultural achievement as a pathway to human

¹ The title of the book will subsequently be referred to as *The Miseducation*.

² Charles H. Wesley and Thelma Perry’s Introduction to the 1969 edition of *The Miseducation of the Negro* talks about the relevance of the book and use of the term during the height of the Black Studies movement in the late 60’s; Molefi Asante’s “The Afrocentric Idea in Education” (1991); Gloria Landson-Billings’ “From the Achievement Gap to the Educational Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools,” *Educational Researcher* 2006 35:3.

³ Donald Spivey, *The Politics of Miseducation: The Booker Washington Institute of Liberia, 1929-1984*, First edition (Lexington, Ky: Univ Pr of Kentucky, 1986); Dr Kmt G. Shockley, *The Miseducation of Black Children* (Place of publication not identified: African American Images, 2008); Lauryn Hill, *The Miseducation Of Lauryn Hill*, Audio CD (Sony Legacy, 1998).

⁴ Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Reprint edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

recognition.

Woodson's work as a teacher and his intellectual engagement with Black education spans his lifetime. His first book, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, published in 1915, was an historical study of the evolution of Black Americans access to education during the slavery period, and the methods and motivations of those who assisted them in the process.⁵ Woodson connects literacy and education to notions of freedom and explored how Black education posed a threat to White oppressors. By the 1930s, when *The Miseducation* was published, Woodson had moved beyond slavery and contended that discourse surrounding Black education was unfocused on the larger question of liberation and the full recognition of Black humanity. Woodson argued that Black education leaders and "friends of the race" had "missed the mark."⁶ The larger political project of Black education had surpassed the lingering debate of classical vs. industrial education. For Woodson, the ideological underpinnings of White supremacy had to be challenged. The American educational system sought to colonize Black minds in Woodson's assessment, which prevented a more complete development of the race both socially and economically. In his words, "The chief difficulty with the education of the Negro is that it has been largely imitation resulting in the enslavement of his mind."

According to Woodson, the political objectives of Black education had shifted away from a clear vision of liberation near the turn of the 20th century. He wrote,

With respect to developing the masses, then, the Negro race has lost ground in recent years. In 1880 when the Negroes had begun to make themselves felt in teaching, the attitude of the leaders was different from what it is today. At that time men went off to school to prepare themselves for the uplift of a downtrodden people. In our time too many Negroes go to school to memorize certain facts to pass examinations for jobs. After they obtain these positions they pay little attention to humanity.⁷

After the Civil War African Americans struggled to receive first class citizenship rights. The newly freed men and women were firmly committed to protecting their humanity and their hopes were structured around building an educational system that would train children as future race leaders.⁸ In *The Miseducation* Woodson suggests that this target was "missed," or lost sight of, during the years

⁵ Carter Godwin Woodson, *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 : Putnam, 1915).

⁶ "How We Missed the Mark" is the title of the second chapter in the *The Miseducation*. In this chapter Woodson critiques the binary present in Black educational discourse of the time that focused on classical vs. industrial training. He found it to be limiting and overshadowing of the more important questions that needed to be raised about Black education—namely, how schooling continued to espouse White supremacist ideology.

⁷ Ibid, 32.

⁸ James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 1 edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Ronald E Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010).

between the dawn of the 20th century and the 1930s.

This chapter engages *The Miseducation* and supplementary archival materials, such as personal letters and newspaper articles Woodson published in the Black press, to explore his theoretical views on education and Black life. The following questions will be at the heart of this analysis: What did Woodson identify as the defining features of miseducation? And, given the legacy of miseducation, what did Woodson outline to be the necessary objectives of an educational program that would best serve the needs of African Americans as a group of learners?

While on one hand, *The Miseducation* was written to call attention to the erroneous practices of education imposed upon the minds of Black students (and thus the failures of the Black professional class), on the other, Woodson sought to outline a new program of education. He centers on the fact that Black history was absent in the education of students. Furthermore, Woodson offered that when narratives of Black people did surface in the curricula they largely sustained notions of Black inferiority. School curricula painted a portrait of Black deficiency that stretched back to Africa, the ahistorical “heart of darkness.” Enslaved Blacks were also viewed as docile, and Black Americans as fully formed subjects were largely absent in narratives of U.S. History.⁹ In short, Woodson argued that the ideological foundations of schools relied on a human history of the world that centered Whiteness and distorted the humanity of Black people. This process of schooling brainwashed Black students and ignited a belief that they were inferior, corroded self-pride, and impeded upon their development of a critical perspective regarding the society they lived in. According to Woodson, dominant schooling generated “miseducated” Black people who were strategically underdeveloped to sustain the oppressive regime of White supremacy.

Before directly engaging with *The Miseducation*, I situate the text within Woodson’s larger breadth of work, which will highlight how this text is an academic detour from his traditional historical research. Following this, major themes from *The Miseducation* are explored that expose the different layers to the theoretical argument undergirding his educational philosophy. Woodson argued: 1) that schools were political institutions based on dominant ideology; 2) that dominant schooling underdeveloped the critical consciousness of Black students by teaching a distorted reality; 3) that Black students were a distinct group of learners based on their history and experiences as an oppressed group; and 4) that their education required an explicit rejection of White supremacy, and finally, to have Black liberation as its central goal and metric of success.

Ultimately, I profess that Woodson’s educational philosophy confronted the cultural politics of White colonial commandment. His theoretical argument anticipates the thinking of many decolonial thinkers within the African Diaspora who linked White supremacist systems of education with the colonization of Black cultural life—a discursive and violent negation of Black human subjectivity. This engagement with Woodson presses the boundaries of the traditional framing of African American educational history, which has largely been fenced by the W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T.

⁹ Lawrence D. Reddick, “Racial Attitudes in American History Textbooks of the South,” *The Journal of Negro History* 19, no. 3 (1934): 225–65.

Washington debate. Furthermore, Woodson's theoretical argument forces us to move beyond the early 20th century Progressive Education Movement taking place alongside his career as a teacher, to truly extrapolate his educational philosophy. Woodson offers human recognition as the first step in education, and ultimately Black freedom.

The Miseducation of the Negro as an Academic Detour

The Miseducation provides a theoretical lens to view the broad range of Woodson's academic work, institutions, and legacy as a "schoolmaster to his race."¹⁰ Ironically, this text is both unusual for Woodson's identity as an academic, yet consistent with his larger commitment to educating the masses. Not one footnote or academic citation is found in this historical text—a practice quite incongruent with his training as an historian from Harvard and his larger body of scholarship. After completing his Ph.D. in 1912 Woodson matured into a prolific scholar of historical studies and textbooks. Between 1915 and 1947 Woodson published "four monographs, five textbooks, five edited collections of source materials, and thirteen articles, as well as five sociological studies that were collaborative efforts."¹¹ He was known among his peer group and mentees to be a meticulous scholar. If the scholarship of the Association was to be corrective of the propaganda circulating in the broader intellectual public about Black people, it had to be done with sound and well-researched "truth" that would stand on its own.

Woodson stressed rigorous research because he was aware of how easily scholarship produced by Black intellectuals was dismissed within the larger society, especially if it challenged notions of White supremacy.¹² Thus, he enforced this standard for himself, his mentees, and other scholars of the time.¹³ In many ways Woodson broke away from traditional historical methods in writing *The Miseducation* by shaking loose from what he had instilled in others. *The Miseducation* was a different genre of writing from his more traditional history texts—absent of footnotes, for instance. Clearly, Woodson allowed his heart to inform the intellectual project.

The book is divided into a preface and eighteen chapters where Woodson frames his critique of miseducation from different angles of analysis. The first four chapters engage historical debates amongst educational thinkers to expose how that discourse "missed the mark". Chapters five through eight focus on the lack of economic

¹⁰ Educational community reflects on Woodson's impact on Black education after his death and hail him as a "schoolmaster", see "Schoolmaster to his Race Mourned," *The Washington Afro-American* (April 8, 1950)

¹¹ Jacqueline Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History*, Reprint edition (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1997): 187.

¹² Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, "'Among the Vitalizing Tools of the Radical Intelligentsia, of Course the Most Crucial Was Words': Carter G. Woodson's 'The Case of the Negro' (1921)," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 3, no. 2 (2009): 84; James A. Banks, "African American Scholarship and the Evolution of Multicultural Education," *The Journal of Negro Education* 61, no. 3 (1992): 276.

¹³ Lorenzo J. Greene, *Working With Carter G. Woodson, the Father of Black History: A Diary, 1928-1930*, ed. Arvarh E. Strickland, First Edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); Pero Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson*; Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

sustainability in African American communities due to psychosocial responses to miseducation. Woodson argued that miseducation fostered distrust within Black communities (thus hindering collaboration) and hyper-consumption of material goods to accumulate social status against the perceived deficits of their Blackness.¹⁴ The second half of the book widely critiques Black political leadership and the educated elite for maintaining the status quo in efforts to preserve their elevated status over the Black masses. The spirit of this critique is reflected in the chapter titles, for example “The Need for Service Rather Than Leadership” or “The New Type of Professional Man Required.” The final chapter entitled, “The Study of the Negro,” emphasizes the need to study the history and experiences of Black people as a first step in addressing their liberation. While this final point is an argument streamlined throughout the book, he particularly emphasizes it in the last chapter by holding up the work of the ASNLH as a model.

The Miseducation is largely a critique of the Black intellectual class. What Woodson identifies as their dysfunction is interpreted as a symptom of the miseducation that begins in primary school, and extends into institutions of higher education. To this end, Woodson wrote, “The more ‘education’ the Negro gets the worse off he is... The race looking to this educated class for a solution of its problems does not find any remedy.” He proposed that there was a need to “forget the school room” (or at least in its current ideological form) and rely upon an “awakening of the masses,” because “the average Negro has not been sufficiently mis-educated to become hopeless.”¹⁵ *The Miseducation* was the bare bones of Woodson’s heartfelt, passionate critique of a schooling system that produced “hirelings” instead of “public servants,” as indicated by the title of his twelfth chapter.¹⁶

As a community intellectual, Woodson maintained very active engagement with the Black press—here lies the origins of *The Miseducation*. In form, the text is an edited collection of articles Woodson published in Black newspapers over the two years leading up to its publication.¹⁷ In August of 1931, for example, Woodson authored an essay titled “The Miseducation of the Negro” in the NAACP’s publication, *The Crisis*.¹⁸ Many of the widely cited quotes from *The Miseducation* were featured in previously published newspaper articles. In a column published in the *Chicago Defender* Woodson wrote, “When you control a man’s thinking you don’t have to worry about his actions.”¹⁹ This quote has become a synecdoche for the *The Miseducation* and is often referenced as the quintessential moniker of Woodson’s belief that White supremacy worked through schools and social institutions to colonize the thinking of Black people. In writing *The Miseducation*, he was less concerned with being beholden to a rigorous methodology and more so determined to prick the consciousness of his readers. Black people being his target audience, Woodson sought to expose “how we missed the mark” as it pertained to developing the race through a carefully crafted education model. His data corpus for writing such a text was his 40 years of experience as an educator—thus the text is loosely anecdotal.

¹⁴ See for the chapter in *The Miseducation* entitled “The Failure to Learn to Make a Living”.

¹⁵ Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (ASNLH, 2008): 60-61.

¹⁶ The title of the 12th chapter in *The Miseducation* is “Hirelings in the Places of Public Servants.”

¹⁷ “Notes,” *The Journal of Negro History* 18, no. 2 (1933): 222.

¹⁸ Carter G. Woodson, “The Miseducation of the Negro,” *The Crisis*, August 1931.

¹⁹ Carter G. Woodson, “Is the Educated Negro a Liability,” *Chicago Defender* (May 21, 1932),

The Black press was useful for reaching the massive audience that Woodson sought to instigate. Beginning with the *Freedom's Journal* in 1827, Black newspapers became the primary vehicle for African American activists and thinkers to explore current events and topics relevant to the race. Many of Woodson's articles on miseducation were published in *The Chicago Defender*, which was the most recognized and powerful of all Black newspapers by the 1920s.²⁰ The Black press played a major role in unifying Black people politically across their difference—across class and regions in the U.S. and even diasporically.²¹ Thus, the Black public sphere was centered on this form of media, and Woodson used it as his platform.

Beyond the Black educated elite, Woodson wanted to reach African Americans at the grassroots level with his indictment of miseducation. While many African Americans may have never come across his textbooks, or been familiar with the ASNLH, they likely had some exposure to *The Chicago Defender*. Through these articles, Woodson was able to reach Black people across their fragmented geographies and class lines. The genealogy of *The Miseducation* shifts our understanding of it from simply an academic text to more so a manifesto, a plea even. This text is reminiscent of *David Walker's Appeal*, published in 1829. Walker was an abolitionist who urged Black people to demand their freedom at all costs, even if this required armed and violent resistance. Woodson, like Walker, represents a legacy of radical thinkers in the Black intellectual tradition who relied on Black print culture in their efforts to challenge White supremacy.²²

Woodson's personal and professional experiences fueled the extreme frustration and urgency that readers find vividly draped throughout the text. The failures of the education system in addition to the challenges he faced from White philanthropists to sustain and expand his educational institutions prompted him to write *The Miseducation*. Beyond the financial challenges of the Great Depression, the fact that Thomas Jesse Jones, a major leader in the White philanthropic world, personally worked to thwart the ASNLH's fundraising efforts exacerbated Woodson's financial troubles.²³ According to Woodson, "Thomas Jesse Jones, supported by the Anson Phelps Stokes, secretly circulated in 1923 a most scurrilous attack on the work of the Association among all persons who were known to contribute to its support."²⁴ Furthermore, Jones, who Du Bois referred to as "the evil genius of the Negro race," maintained a substantial amount of influence on Black education, both in the South and on the continent of Africa.²⁵ Du

²⁰ Stanley Nelson, *The Black Press: Soldiers without Swords*, Black Studies in Video (San Francisco, CA, 1998); Mary E. Stovall, "The 'Chicago Defender' in the Progressive Era," *Illinois Historical Journal* 83, no. 3 (1990): 159–72.

²¹ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003).

²² For more on Woodson as a radical Black intellectual see Pero Dagbovie (2009). "Among the vitalizing tools of the radical intelligentsia, of course the most crucial was words': Carter G. Woodson's 'The Case of the Negro' (1921)." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 3:2, pp. 81-112

²³ Darlene Clark Hine, "Carter G. Woodson, White Philanthropy and Negro Historiography," *The History Teacher* 19, no. 3 (1986): 405–25; "Notes," *Journal of Negro History* (January 1932).

²⁴ Woodson, Carter Godwin, 1875-1950. Letter from Carter G. Woodson to Benjamin Brawley, January 7, 1932. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

²⁵ William Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001); Thomas Jesse Jones, *Education in Africa*

Bois' characterization nods at the peculiarity of Jones' public notoriety as a White sympathizer of Black oppression, yet Jones manipulative actions continued to subvert Black humanity and undermine Black leadership. Jones symbolically represented the system of miseducation that Woodson and his institutions raised ideological warfare against. Woodson contended that Jones and White philanthropists, as "self appointed leaders" of Black education, had "set back the wheels of progress... for almost a generation."²⁶ Thus, the time period when *The Miseducation* emerged was one in which Woodson's work through the ASNLH was expanding, yet simultaneously attracting more suppression from those in control of Black education institutionally.

This adverse relationship with Jones also lends insight into Woodson's frustration with many of his peers in the Black intelligentsia. In 1932 the Phelps Stokes Fund commissioned a team of academics to produce an encyclopedia on the history of the Negro, and intentionally excluded Woodson and Du Bois.²⁷ After concerns were raised about their exclusion, invitations were extended to both of these scholars; however, Woodson declined the offer. He appealed to his peers to do the same, but Du Bois accepted the post as editor-in-chief of the project. In Woodson's view the initial exclusion of Du Bois and himself was indicative of Jones and the Phelps Stokes Funds' desire to control the project and carry it out in alignment with their own interests. He contended that, "Proposals like these coming from without from those who have already done the race much harm should be looked upon as gifts brought by the Greek."²⁸ Referencing the deceitful gift presented by the Greeks during their battle with Troy, Woodson gestures toward his suspicion of the intentions of White philanthropists. This episode surely had a bearing on Woodson's critique of Black intellectuals found in *The Miseducation*. Woodson advocacy for Black intellectual autonomy is evident in a comment he would make in 1948, he shared, "I could get aid from several White persons and foundations, but once I accepted their money they would tell me how to dot an 'eye' or cross a 'tee.' And I don't want that."²⁹

In the year of 1933 *The Miseducation of the Negro* materialized through the publishing arm of the ASNLH, The Associate Publishers, Inc., which Woodson founded in 1921. Challenging the dominant educational experiences of Black students, he was working to imagine a new process of learning that would recognize their full human capacity. He outlined an educational model that honored the lived experiences of African American people by centering them in his program. Pedagogically, Woodson offered insight on what was necessary for Black learners to develop as thinkers (in terms of process), which complimented his curricular interventions of *what* (content-wise) they needed to learn (via his textbooks). In other words, Woodson offered reforms for both the educational process and curricula that countered their abject experiences as a racially oppressed people.

(Phelps-Stokes Fund, 1922).

²⁶ Woodson to Brawley, 1932

²⁷ Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene*; Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson*.

²⁸ Woodson to Brawley, 1932

²⁹ Al Sweeny Interview with Carter G. Woodson, "Dr. Carter G. Woodson, 72, Has Written 19 Books, Published 64 Others," *The Afro Magazine* (1948) in Claude A. Barnett papers (Chicago History Museum), box 370, folder 1.

The Miseducation was heavily critiqued by some of Woodson's contemporaries. Horace Mann Bond, for example, stated that the book "runs the whole gamut of violent criticism of Negro achievements in seventy years of freedom."³⁰ Bond pointed out that Woodson's text was filled with contradictions and broad generalizations. For instance, Woodson argued that higher education forced Black intellectuals to lose the common touch with the Black masses; yet, he himself was a Doctor of Philosophy. Furthermore, Bond points out that Woodson "chides the Negro school teacher for not including in the curriculum a study of literary classics from the pens of Negroes, and a few pages further on states that 'Comparatively few American Negroes have produced creditable literature.'" Some suggested that while Woodson offered such a scathing critique of Black education, his proposed solutions were vague.³¹

To be clear, there were Black intellectuals who supported Woodson's critiques. Kelly Miller, for example, endearingly referred to him as a "New Marcus Garvey." Miller suggested that, if Woodson could, he "would tear down the whole super-structure which White philanthropy has built up during the past sixty years and build anew on the basis of racial self-respecting manhood."³² While Miller's review was written prior to the release of the book itself, he surely had read Woodson's commentary in the Black press and was in anticipation of the text "with the significant title—"The Mis-education of the Negro." Miller offered, "Carter G. Woodson is indeed refreshing" given the fact that "so-called radical agencies are satisfied to persuade the jailer to lessen his severity while keeping the race within prescribed limits." While it appears that Miller had good intentions in making the comparison between Woodson and Garvey, Woodson took offense to it and chastised Miller in the press. He wrote, "I am not surprised to learn that Kelly Miller is thus trying to discredit me and my work. The people of our day have long ceased to take his comments seriously, for after reading his so-called analysis of things we cannot actually understand what he is trying to say."³³ Woodson's reservations about the Garvey comparison were likely due to his resistance to being labeled a "radical" which had implications for funding and his rapport within the philanthropic community. To be clear, I am not suggesting that Woodson did not have a favorable opinion of Garvey, but more so that his decision not to be publicly likened to Garvey may have been purely pragmatic.³⁴ Once the *The Miseducation* was actually released Miller's endorsement of the

³⁰ "Dr. Woodson Goes Wool-Gathering," review of *The Miseducation of the Negro* in *The Journal of Negro Education* by Horace Mann Bond, April 1933, 210-213

³¹ Ibid; Holland Thompson, Review of *The Miseducation*, *The Journal of Southern History* 1, no. 1: 105-106

³² "Carter Woodson is Termed New Marcus Garvey," by Kelly Miller in *The Afro American* (Week of February 11, 1933) p. 24

³³ Carter G. Woodson, "Woodson Launches an Attack on Kelly Miller and G. David Houston," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, February 25, 1933, p. 7

³⁴ Carter G. Woodson, "Marcus Garvey," *The Journal of Negro History* 25, no. 4 (1940): 590-92; Lorenzo Greene, "Dr. Woodson As I Knew Him," *Green Papers* p. 22; Evidence suggests that Woodson was a silent supporter of Garvey; he wrote a glowing obituary of him in the *Journal of Negro History* and Lorenzo Johnston Greene recalled that Woodson was "more kindly disposed" to the UNIA than most other Black organizations. "Although Negroes in the main rejected Garvey's back-to-Africa movement, Woodson declared that Garvey had achieved what no one else had been able to do, namely to make the Negro proud of his Blackness, in other words, of his race. He laughed heartily when in 1929 Garvey, then jailed by the British Government, threatened

text seemed to have faltered.

In an undated essay entitled “The Miseducation of the Negro,” Miller references Woodson’s book and suggests that Bond had made an “adequate” review of it. He would then propose his own reading of the controversy surrounding “miseducation.” Miller chose to “discuss the subject as if the book had not been written.” Ultimately he argued, “The great difficulty today with Negro education is that the race has no ideology. We still await the genius, the philosopher or the statesmen to tell whither before we may expect and the requisite pedagogy to tell us how.” Miller’s reflections after the publication of *The Miseducation* do not veer to far from Woodson’s central concerns, but perhaps Woodson’s rigidity in his critiques proved to be offensive and too hard to digest even by those that shared many of his declarations.³⁵

Bond’s critique regarding Woodson’s repetitiveness in the book was valid, and at times, Woodson’s generalizations about the failures of Black intellectuals are reductionist and even contradictory. However, Woodson offered a timely critical analysis of the connection between educational institutions, White supremacist ideology, and the suppression of Black culture that cannot be undermined, even by these flaws within the text. Decolonial and post-colonial scholars would echo this conjectural perspective in the years to come. It is this central theoretical argument, lying at the heart of *The Miseducation* that continues to sustain its currency.

Education is Political: Woodson’s Conceptualization of Schooling and Ideology

In *The Miseducation* Woodson drew attention to a fact that often hides in plain site. He explained that education was a political project undergirded by ideology. This assessment was informed by his experiences as a teacher and as a Black academic. While a student at Harvard University, White professors blatantly challenged Woodson on Black contributions to American history.³⁶ This juxtaposed with the knowledge he had acquired as a young man who had read various texts by Black scholars in the 19th century on the history of the race was revealing. It helped Woodson to recognize the dominant society’s investment in the distortion of Black history and culture. White supremacy was reliant upon the sustained misrecognition of Black humanity.

Woodson’s understanding of the political implications of education can be found in an early quote from *The Miseducation* where he conceptualized racial violence as a product of the anti-Black ideology that informed school curricula. He wrote,

To handicap a student by teaching him that his Black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching. It kills one's aspirations and dooms him to vagabondage and crime. It is strange, then, that the friends of truth and the promoters of freedom have not risen up against the present propaganda in the schools and crushed it. This crusade is much more important than the anti-

that he would be a flea in His Majesty’s Collar.”

³⁵ “The Miseducation of the Negro” by Kelly Miller, Kelly Miller Family Papers at Emory University, Manuscript collection No. 1050, series 2.1, Box. 19, file 7

³⁶ Carter G. Woodson, “The George Washington Bicentennial Eliminates March 5th, Crispus Attucks Day,” *New York Age* (Jan. 2, 1932) p. 9, in this article Woodson describes one his professors dismissal of the Boston Massacre and Attucks significance in the American Revolution. Also, Pero Dagbovie’s *The Early Black History Movement* (2009), p. 100.

lynching movement, because there would be no lynching if it did not start in the schoolroom.³⁷

Woodson suggested that the ideology taught in schools was one grounded in anti-Black sentiments that deteriorated the self-perception of Black students, justified racial violence, and sustained their abject experience. Williams Watkins (2001) offers a conceptual understanding of schools and ideology that reflect Woodson's thinking. He wrote, "Socially and politically, those who hold power attempt to forge a society ideologically accepting of their economic and cultural agenda, which is often inimical to the vast majority who remain propertyless. Public education becomes a useful ideological tool in creating social consensus."³⁸ The relationship between schools and ideology, as illustrated in Woodson's quote and supported by Watkins, becomes especially clear when one looks at the history of compulsory education in America, even beyond the Black experience.

The Common School Movement and Black Education in the 19th Century

Beginning in the late 18th into the early 19th centuries, the Common School Movement set out to create an educational system that would generate a common experience and set of ideals for children across the nation, despite class or ethnic difference. This of course did not apply to African Americans, who were largely enslaved or forced into separate schools. In *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (1915) Woodson notes that during the time that the Common School Movement expanded, educational opportunities for Black Americans were diminishing with the proliferation of anti-literacy laws.³⁹ He wrote, "The majority of the people in the South had by this time come to the conclusion that, as intellectual elevation unfits men for servitude and renders it impossible to retain them in this condition, it should be interdicted."⁴⁰ The goal of the Common School Movement was to Americanize all White students, which meant to indoctrinate them along the lines of a unified White American identity rooted in Protestant values. Many tensions arose in response to the movement, particularly resistance on the part of Irish immigrants for the emphasis on Protestant as opposed to Catholic values and the demand by some ethnic groups for schools to teach their traditional language.

David Tyack contends that the common school movement was conceived, in many ways, as a solution to the U.S. urban crisis, as it transitioned into an urban-industrial nation. As cities developed and became more densely populated it became necessary to institutionalize social agencies to maintain social order. These institutions (i.e. schools, police force, insane asylums, etc.) were built on values and ideals that reflected the interests of the dominant group. Compulsory education developed out of the desire by urban-industrial leaders to exert social control. This required that students develop into civil citizens willing to work within the ideological parameters of society as opposed to disrupting it. Thus, dominant ideology predetermined the political ethics of

³⁷ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 4.

³⁸ Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education*, 11.

³⁹ Carter Godwin Woodson, *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 : Putnam, 1915), 85-99.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

educational institutions. A similar strategy was applied to the education of Blacks during the years immediately following emancipation; however, the goal here was to secure Black consent to the re-articulations of racial hierarchies in post-slavery America.⁴¹

Black education is, and has been, a political issue. The question of what to do with African American people post emancipation became the concern of not only White Southerners, but also Northern industrialists, missionaries and politicians. More importantly, education was at the top of priorities for the freed men and women as they prepared to engage equally in the American social order as first-class citizens.⁴² These groups had contrasting ideologies and political intentions for Black education to say the least. After the Civil War, Black efforts to create educational systems were co-opted by those whom historian Williams Watkins refers to as “the White architects of Black education.”⁴³ The Freedmen’s Bureau and other missionary groups, many with genuine empathetic intentions, absorbed the educational efforts the freedmen had been developing on their own, even prior to emancipation.⁴⁴ Thus, Black education emerged as a political project, one that had the ability to either liberate and humanize or oppress.

Woodson contended that the education of Black people had historically been engineered to sustain oppression, particularly through distorting historical truth and demonizing Black cultural heritage. Even in referencing progressive White missionaries who supported abolition, Woodson states, “The freedmen who were to be enlightened were given little thought, for the best friends of the race, ill-taught themselves, followed traditional curricula of the times which did not take the Negro into consideration except to condemn or pity him.”⁴⁵ Woodson recognized that curriculums reflected the interests of the dominant group and served the purpose of maintaining a social order built on an ideology of Black inferiority and White supremacy. Heather Williams explores the content of textbooks provided for freedmen’s schools after the Civil War, which substantiates Woodson’s claim; in particular, she highlights their emphasis on casting Blacks as indebted to White patriots for their freedom. Northern Whites were positioned as “paternalistic caretakers” and Blacks as a “benighted people” in need of advice.⁴⁶ No mention is made of the colored soldiers who enlisted and fought for the union and their freedom, only representations of Northern Whites as heroic saviors that gave their life for Black emancipation. The narratives in these texts reflected the dominant White American ideology as it pertained to Black people, and the majority of the institutions created in this moment and thereafter were products of such thinking.

In 1868 General Samuel Armstrong built Hampton Institute as an educational model that would significantly impact the trajectory of Black education.⁴⁷ Influenced by

⁴¹ David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974); Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

⁴² Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*; Williams, *Self-Taught*.

⁴³ Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education*.

⁴⁴ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*; Williams, *Self-Taught*; Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education*; Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876*.

⁴⁵ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 17.

⁴⁶ Williams, *Self-Taught*, 136.

⁴⁷ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

his parents, who were both colonial missionaries in Hawaii, he championed an educational model that sought to train Blacks to be docile agricultural and domestic service workers in the South. Armstrong's model was taken up by northern industrial philanthropist, moderate White southern leaders, and some conservative Blacks as a means of reconciling the race problem of the South.⁴⁸ The wealth of these "White architects" and the abject poverty of Black southerners (especially after reconstruction) made Black education extremely susceptible to the control of these philanthropists. In co-opting the educational project of Black people these "White architects" constructed a system that was consistent with their ideals, which reflected industrial capitalism and White supremacy. Conceptualized as a solution to the Negro problem, "Black education thus became the central political weapon by which Blacks would be introduced and inducted into America's social organization."⁴⁹ The system and curriculums alike were crafted as a means of engineering Black consent to the social order of the society of which they were formerly enslaved.⁵⁰ In this way "miseducation and conquest are inextricably linked," thus demonstrating the historical role education has played in the narrative of political disenfranchisement experienced by Black people.⁵¹

American education developed through the common school movement, which sought to Americanize all Whites, despite ethnic difference, into sharing a common national identity while simultaneously excluding Blacks. The creation of the physical institutions themselves, and especially the curriculums, developed from an investment in the othering of Black people as evidenced by their exclusion. Even as educational opportunities became more available to African Americans, the epistemology reflected in the curriculums of the schools were bound by the dominant ideology. Thus, the forming of educational institutions, even those by and for Black Americans, were framed in a manner that sustained their abject state according to Woodson. His assertion that curriculum has political implications anticipates Michael Apple's more recent assessments that "[Curriculum] is always part of a selective tradition, someone's selection, some group's vision of legitimate knowledge...[T]he decision to define some groups knowledge as the most legitimate, as official knowledge, while other groups knowledge hardly sees the light of day, says something extremely important about who has power in society."⁵²

Woodson contended that education continued to reflect White supremacist ideology. To this point he asserts, "No systemic effort toward change has been possible, for, taught the same economics, history, philosophy, literature and religion which have established the present code of morals, the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor." American education "stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile," yet simultaneously "depresses and crushes...the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his

⁴⁸ Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education*.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 181.

⁵⁰ Ibid.; Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*; Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South*, Reprint edition (Princeton, NJ u.a.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁵¹ Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education*, 119.

⁵² Michael W. Apple, "The Politics of Official Knowledge: Does a National Curriculum Make Sense?," *Teachers College Record* 95, no. 2 (January 1993): 222.

race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples.”⁵³ Woodson named schooling as an ideological apparatus of the overarching political system; education was a technology of White supremacy and relied on the distortion of Black culture and history to maintain domination. *The Miseducation* traced the functionality of this ideology through American educational systems and explored how cultural denial featured in the logic of White supremacy.

“Taught From Books of the Same Bias”: White Supremacy, Imitation, and the Illegibility of the Black Condition

Woodson was concerned with the miseducation of Black people, not that they were uneducated. Put another way, his critique was less about access to education in general and more about exposure to hegemonic curricula. Woodson indicted a system of education that functioned to stabilize White supremacy, one that necessitated the miseducation of Black people and the maintenance of their subjugation. While access to schooling was still a major issue for African American people during the 1930s, his concern was the epistemological underpinnings of the education provided to those that made it past those barriers and obtained higher education—the “talented tenth” in particular.⁵⁴ These men and women, who were perceived to be the leaders of the race by virtue of their educational training, were miseducated by Woodson’s standards.

American education presented a deficit-oriented perspective of Black culture that was presented as a factual narrative. To accomplish this “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.”⁵⁵ While the U.S. formal education system inspired White students by telling them that their race was responsible for all notable progress of human kind, Woodson assessed that it diminished the aspirations of Black students and failed to inspire or train them on how to rise above their current state of oppression. He professed, “The oppressor...teaches the Negro that he has no worth-while past, that his race has done nothing significant since the beginning of time, and that there is no evidence that he will ever achieve anything great.”⁵⁶ As demonstrated in this quote, Woodson grounded his critique of miseducation by exposing the racialized gaps in the “official knowledge” of schools, which in turn positioned Black people as outside of history.⁵⁷ These curricula relied on a narrative of a global Black deficiency that was consistent through time and space, even before their enslavement.

Further contextualizing the stronghold that White supremacy had on Black education, Woodson offered the following:

Starting out after the Civil War, the opponents of freedom and social justice decided to work out a program which would enslave the Negroes' mind inasmuch as the freedom of body had to be conceded. It was well

⁵³ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, xiii.

⁵⁴ See “The Talented Tenth” in W.E.B. Du Bois’ (1903) *The Negro Problem*. Du Bois popularized the idea of “the talented tenth” at the turn of the 20th century. He believed that ten percent of the race had the potential to be a leadership class through educational and intellectual development and he urged them to wield their influence towards racial uplift.

⁵⁵ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 106.

⁵⁷ Apple, “The Politics of Official Knowledge.”

understood that if by the teaching of history the White man could be further assured of his superiority and the Negro could be made to feel that he had always been a failure and that the subjection of his will to some other race is necessary the freedman, then, would still be a slave.⁵⁸

Referencing curriculum content directly, Woodson posited that it was constructed in propagandist fashion that represented a history of triumph and honor for Whites while painting a Black past of backwardness and cultural deficiency. Beyond this narrative of Black failure and lack of achievement, the implicit message that African American people were incapable of thinking for themselves justified the necessary paternalism of White sympathizers. Put another way, miseducation sought to ensure Black submission to White control because, as history revealed, their past demonstrated the race's inability to be self-determined or contribute to the development of human society.

Woodson argued that as long as the control of Black education was in the hands of those that oppressed them it would continue to facilitate miseducation. He wrote,

Negroes have no control over their education and have little voice in their other affairs pertaining thereto. In a few cases Negroes have been chosen as members of public boards of education, and some have been appointed members of private boards, but these Negroes are always such a small minority that they do not figure in the final working out of the educational program. The education of the Negroes, then, the most important thing in the uplift of the Negroes, is almost entirely in the hands of those who have enslaved them and now segregate them.⁵⁹

In Woodson's view, liberation could not be achieved through an education constructed and controlled by the very class of people that were privileged by Black oppression. He offered that only from within their group could a liberatory education for Black people be achieved, unlike the one of miseducation that was imposed upon them.

To be clear, Woodson did not advocate that any form of Black controlled education would be liberatory. Based on his assessment, many African American teachers were miseducated and sustained White supremacy themselves. Addressing this point, Woodson wrote "Taught from books of the same bias, trained by Caucasians of the same prejudices or by Negroes of enslaved minds, one generation of Negro teachers after another have served for no higher purpose than to do what they are told to do. In other words, a Negro teacher instructing Negro children is in many respects a White teacher thus engaged, for the program in each case is about the same"⁶⁰

Imitation and mimicking are terms consistently used throughout Woodson's text. Writing to this point, he explained that the education given to Black students was an imitation of the dominant educational model that taught them to revere the history and achievements of the White race and that White is what they should aim to be.

⁵⁸ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 47.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

When a Negro has finished his education in our schools, then, he has been equipped to begin the life of an Americanized or Europeanized White man, but before he steps from the threshold of his alma mater he is told by his teachers that he must go back to his own people from whom he has been estranged by a vision of ideals which in his disillusionment he will realize that he cannot attain.⁶¹

In this way, Black students are taught to negate their own cultural and racialized identities—despite the fact that they would never be interpreted as White by the larger society. Woodson’s attentiveness to the way in which miseducation distorts the realities of Black subjects forestalls the work of Frantz Fanon (1952) in *Black Skin, White Masks*.⁶² Through psychoanalyses and historical notations, Fanon similarly explores how colonization forces the oppressed to adopt the culture of their oppressors and strive to imitate them; like Woodson, Fanon also demonstrates how this is particularly wide spread amongst educated Blacks.

Woodson argued that, “The education of any people should begin with the people themselves, but Negroes thus trained have been dreaming about the ancients of Europe and about those who have tried to imitate them.”⁶³ In this way, miseducation cripples Black students by sedating them through a Eurocentric epistemology that facilitates aspirations to be White, and fails to help them recognize their true subjectivity as an oppressed group who’s history has been distorted.

As a result of being educated by a system decontextualized of Black culture and experiences, Woodson taught that African American students became estranged from the masses of their race. Woodson asserts that White institutions are not prepared to equip Black people with the knowledge and skills necessary to develop their race because they have not studied the Black condition. He offered that,

The leading facts of the history of the world should be studied by all, but of what advantage is it to the Negro student of history to devote all of his time to courses bearing on such despots as Alexander the Great, Caesar, and Napoleon, or to the record of those nations whose outstanding achievement has been rapine, plunder, and murder for world power?...Why not take up economics as reflected by the Negroes of today and work out some remedy for their lack of capital, the absence of cooperative enterprise, and the short life of their establishments. Institutions like Harvard, Yale and Columbia are not going to do these things, and educators influenced by them to the extent that they become blind to the Negro will never serve the race efficiently.⁶⁴

Here, Woodson challenges an education system that failed to critically engage the oppression faced by African American people and that underprepared them for the work

⁶¹ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 5.

⁶² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox, Revised edition (New York : Berkeley, Calif.: Grove Press, 1952).

⁶³ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 19.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 83.

required to transform their second-class status. To the contrary, it forced them to become “blind to the Negro,” or in other words rendered themselves and their oppression illegible.

A Call for Racial Literacy in Black Education

According to Woodson a major goal of Black education must be to teach African American’s to think critically about their experiences. This required a truthful engagement with their realities, one that developed racial literacy amongst students. In doing so, Woodson believed that Black people would come to recognize both that they were oppressed, how that oppression was maintained, and by whom. In addressing this idea, he wrote the following: “Several mis-educated Negroes themselves contend that the study of the Negro by children would bring before them the race problem prematurely and, therefore, urge that the study of the race be deferred until they reach advanced work in the college or university.”⁶⁵ Woodson challenged the idea that questions of race, and the racial history of Black people was developmentally inappropriate for Black youth. He goes on to write, “These misguided teachers ignore the fact that the race question is being brought before Black and White children daily in their homes, in the streets, through the press and on the rostrum. How, then, can the school ignore the duty of teaching the truth while these other agencies are playing up falsehood?”⁶⁶ In Woodson’s view, “the race problem” significantly impacted the lived experiences of children and in the absence of “the history of the race,” distorted narratives about African American history would continue to shape the reality of Black students. Choosing not to directly engage the realities of race was in turn denying the lived experiences of Black students in the classroom.

Not addressing race in schools helped to mask White supremacy, thereby sustaining Black oppression. Woodson cautioned those that wished to forget the racial history of America or those who contended, “The Negro should cease to remember that he was once held a slave, that he has been oppressed, and even that he is a Negro.” He beckons that despite this naiveté, “The traducer, however, keeps before the public such aspects of this history as will justify the present oppression of the race.”⁶⁷ Recognizing how failing to address race veiled the functions of White supremacy, Woodson argued for an education that explicitly named oppression and countered anti-Blackness, which was part and parcel of the dominant hegemonic culture.

Speaking more to how the muting of racial oppression in classrooms maintains White supremacy, Woodson likens this dissemblance to the policing of knowledge amongst slaves by their overseers and masters. He writes, “This was accomplished during the days of slavery by restricting the assembly of Negroes to certain times and places and compelling them to meet in the presence of a stipulated number of the ‘wisest and discreetest men of the community.’ These supervisors of the conduct of Negroes would prevent them from learning the truth which might make them ‘unruly’ or ambitious to become free.”⁶⁸ Black education was a political project, and Woodson urged those responsible for it to be pedagogically intentional if they sought to achieve the full

⁶⁵ Ibid, 75

⁶⁶ Ibid, 75.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 107.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 64.

liberation of Black people. In order to develop the race to recognize their shared oppression, the functionality of those systems that sustained their oppression had to be exposed.

Miseducation muted the operations of White supremacy, therefore failing to offer Black students a critical analysis of their systematic oppression. Furthermore, Woodson argued that imitating the educational systems of the dominant society would not equip Black students with the necessary tools to transcend their domination. Ultimately, it rendered Black ontology illegible and impeded upon the development of a critical consciousness amongst Black students.

“A Program of His Own”:

Conceptualizing Black Students as a Group of Learners

Within his assessment of African American education Woodson exposes a failure to recognize Black students as a group of learners. A major line of argument in *The Miseducation* is that, “The education of any people should begin with the people themselves.”⁶⁹ Perhaps a more clear and explicitly written iteration of this statement may be found in the *Chicago Defender* in 1932, where he wrote, “The Negro should carry out a program of his own... We must consider his past and approach him through his environment. If these happen to be different from those of others, the method of attack must be different.”⁷⁰ For example, he argued that the history of enslavement and oppression should have a bearing on the education received by African American students, in addition to an attentiveness to Black cultural life. Woodson offered that in order to educate African American students for their full development as a group of learners, it was necessary to approach them through their experiences as opposed to overlooking their past. In a very explicit fashion he pushed that African American students needed to be educated *as African American students*—thus rendering Black ontology legible in the ideological parameters of their education. Targeting his critique at the Black elite more pointedly, he wrote, “The thought of basing the education of the Negro primarily upon his own culture, upon his own history and status, is so distasteful to the majority of our colleges and universities that they wish that Carter G. Woodson were dead and his work buried with him.”⁷¹

Woodson chose not to shy away from a target-based approach to educating Black students. In his eyes American education was presented as a blanket system for all students, but it clearly served the interest of White Americans in that it was “worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed.”⁷² While he advocated for race to be treated in the education of Black students, Woodson was clear that he was not advocating for an essentialized Black education, for this would obscure the varied experiences of students from one place to another. He offered that he had “no special brand for the solution of the race problem except to learn to think. No general

⁶⁹ Ibid, 32.

⁷⁰ Carter G. Woodson, “Observations: The Trend of Current thought and Discussion Is the Educated Negro A Liability,” *Chicago Defender* (May 21, 1932), 2.

⁷¹ Carter G. Woodson, “Race Leaders Barred from History Conference—Ablest Scholars Have Been Poor Thinkers Seventy-Five Per Cent of Colleges Should Be Closed,” (dated July, 22, 1935) in Claude A. Barnett papers (Chicago History Museum), box 370, folder 1.

⁷² Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, xviii.

program of uplift for the Negroes in all parts of the world will be any more successful than such a procedure would be in the case of members of other races under different circumstances.”⁷³ Nonetheless, he offered ideas around larger educational objectives that were worked out to confront the broad-based experience of racialized Black oppression.

Woodson acknowledged that there were tensions, even within the African American community, in regards to centering the idea of race in education. He states, “These ‘educated’ people, however, decry any such thing as race consciousness; and in some respects they are right. They do not like to hear such expressions as “‘Negro Literature,’ ‘Negro poetry,’ ‘African Art,’ or ‘thinking Black’.”⁷⁴ Here, Woodson draws upon a popular debate during the Harlem Renaissance where some Black artists and writers questioned the limitations of ascribing race as a descriptor of art. George Schuyler’s 1926 essay, “The Negro Art Hokum,” was a primary example of this thinking. He argued that Black people were just as diverse as Whites, and to expect the presentation of art produced by Black people to be unified in some way was just as troubling as the stereotypes set against them.⁷⁵ Langston Hughes worked for Woodson in the mid-1920s and similarly challenged the perspective of those African Americans who sought to disassociate race from their art in his 1926 essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.”⁷⁶ The larger question that this debate engages is whether self identifying as Black may reemphasize rigid notions of racial difference that were used to justify White supremacy and segregation.

Woodson wrestled further with this debate head on in *The Miseducation*:

“The ‘highly educated’ contend, moreover, that when the Negro emphasizes these things he invites racial discrimination by recognizing such differentness of the races...however, [they] fail to see that it is not the Negro who takes this position. The White man forces him to it, and to extricate himself therefrom the Negro leader must so deal with the situation as to develop in the segregated group the power with which they can elevate themselves.”⁷⁷

Here Woodson engages a conversation around racial ideology and its implications for African American education. Woodson understood the logic of this argument posed by some “educated” people (as he refers to them in quotations); however, choosing not to acknowledge race in explicit ways only failed to meet Black students through their lived reality. While he acknowledged that racial difference does not exist in biological terms, or “is no evidence of superiority or of inferiority,” he still recognized its impact on the lived experiences of Black people.⁷⁸

⁷³ Ibid, 108.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 7.

⁷⁵ George S Schuyler, “The Negro Art Hokum,” *Nation*, June 16, 1926.

⁷⁶ Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” *Nation*, June 23, 1926; Langston Hughes, “When I Worked for Dr. Woodson,” *Negro History Bulletin* 13, no. 8 (May 1, 1950): 188.

⁷⁷ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 7.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 8.

Woodson offered that the environment of Black students' must be taken up as "the index to his activities." This was a multilayered environment consisting of the cultural, socio-political, economic, and spiritual—all of these factors should inform the educational program for Black learners. Recognizing the inescapable oppression that impacted Black life, Woodson wrote, "I would not try to hide these things from him. I would inform him accordingly just as soon as he developed the power to see and observe things for himself." Woodson also suggested that it was not only the teacher's responsibility to aid the student in naming their oppression, but also to "stimulate in him the ambition to do something concrete to correct the evils which surround him."⁷⁹

Years after Woodson, James Baldwin would echo these sentiments, demonstrating the longevity of the critique Woodson raised within Black educational thought across time. In his "A Talk to Teacher," Baldwin offered the following:

If I were a teacher...dealing with Negro children...children who have an apprehension of their future which with every hour grows grimmer and darker... I would try to make them know – that those streets, those houses, those dangers, those agonies by which they are surrounded, are criminal. I would try to make each child know that these things are the result of a criminal conspiracy to destroy him.⁸⁰

Similarly, Woodson advocated that Black students needed to be taught how and why "these conditions have resulted from unsound policies and unwise methods." Understanding that education was political, Woodson felt that any education for Black children must have a clear indictment of the political system that sanctioned their oppression. He goes on to state, "I would deliberately teach the Negro child the falsity of the doctrines which have prevented clear thinking." Thus, Woodson firmly believed that Black children needed to be studiously taught about the structures and policies of the society they lived in which served to oppress and dehumanize.⁸¹

As a group of learners, African American students were different in the eyes of Woodson. It was not a question of "superiority or of inferiority" but conditional and circumstantial difference. Woodson argued that African Americans should not allow their anxiety of potential discrimination to prevent them from seeing the value of different curriculum content as a group of learners. He urged Black people not to shy away from racially targeted educational strategies out of fear that they may appear to be self-imposing segregation. In fact, their position as a racially oppressed group necessitated such an educational program in order to "extricate [them] therefrom." Woodson exposes the limitations of equality as it relates to education. He asserted that the educational program offered to African American students could be equal in terms of content and methods of instruction to the education offered to White students yet still be grossly inadequate for meeting their needs as a group of learners. The history of race in America impacted the psychological and political-economic development of African American

⁷⁹ Carter G. Woodson, "Differentiation in Education with Respect to Races," *The New York Age* (Sat. January 27, 1934), 5.

⁸⁰ James Baldwin. "A Talk to Teacher." Delivered October 16, 1963, as "The Negro Child – His Self-Image"; originally published in *The Saturday Review*, (December 21, 1963).

⁸¹ Woodson, "Differentiation in Education with Respect to Races"

people and must be deeply considered to truly assess students' needs.

Dominant schooling dehumanized Black students in its denial of Black cultural achievement. In the official knowledge Black people were “pictured as a human being of the lower order, unable to subject his passion to reason, and therefore useful only when made the hewer of wood and the drawer of water for others.”⁸² This negation in dominant epistemology of the culture and history of African descendant people offered distorted narratives of Blackness. Not only did dominant curricula obstruct Black people’s ability to confront their oppression, but it also deterred their recognition of a heritage that had the potential to inspire them and instill racial pride as a counterweight against White supremacy. Woodson presented Black culture and history as a tale of trial and triumph. He believed that history was “the great stimulus in the present and monitor to the future.”⁸³

Woodson believed that history had the power to inspire; furthermore, he believed that the cultural genius and resilience of Black people, despite their historic oppression, offered an epic tale. His pivot towards Black cultural achievement was based on his belief in its liberatory capacity—it offered alternative narratives of Black life beyond White domination. The centering of Black cultural achievement honored the human existence of Black people. Woodson sought to instill racial pride in students because they lived in a world, a context, which suggested their Blackness was “a mark of inferiority.” Woodson contended, “The achievements of his forebears...measured up in their glorious record to the level of the greatest peoples of the world.” Teachers of Black children must “teach the Negro child that he is Black,” not as a badge of shame, but that they are “Black and beautiful, and even beautifully Black!”⁸⁴ The first step in constructing a liberatory education required recognition of Black humanity; thus, trumping the cultural politics of White colonial commandment and making legible before Black students a deeper engagement with their realities and subjectivity.

New Metrics for Black Educational Success

In moving the conversation surrounding Black education beyond one grounded in numerical metrics of individual achievement, Woodson was more concerned with creating a community of critical thinkers committed to racial uplift. One of his primary critiques of miseducation was that “for the arduous task of serving a race thus handicapped...the Negro graduate has had little or no training at all.”⁸⁵ In presenting his objectives for Black education, Woodson wrote,

In thus estimating the results obtained from the so-called education of the Negro the author does not go to the census figures to show the progress of the race. It may be of no importance to the race to be able to boast today of many times as many "educated" members as it had in 1865. If they are of the wrong kind the increase in numbers will be a disadvantage rather than an advantage. The only question which concerns us here is whether these "educated" persons are actually equipped to face the ordeal before them or

⁸² Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 21.

⁸³ Woodson, “Differentiation in Education with Respect to Races”

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 5.

unconsciously contribute to their own undoing by perpetuating the regime of the oppressor.⁸⁶

Woodson's point illustrates that he prioritizes freedom and empowerment of the entire race over individual cases of achievement. He was less concerned with quantifying the number of newly graduated doctors and lawyers that can be credited to the race; instead, his larger priority was the ability of these men and women to have a political commitment to a new social order that transcended domination. This reorients the meaning of Black educational success. He was more concerned with the ideological aptitude of Black scholars. Thus, Woodson was challenging the discursive elements of American education and the implications they had for humanity in general. In this way, different educational objectives required evaluating Black educational progress by new standards.

Woodson's guiding principles for an alternative educational model also advocated for an awakening of the masses. He offered an educational philosophy that aimed to cultivate a commitment to cooperative commonwealth amongst Black people. He wrote, "By forgetting the schoolroom for the time being and relying upon an awakening of the masses through adult education we can do much to give the Negro a new point of view with respect to economic enterprise and group cooperation."⁸⁷

The objectives of Woodson's alternative educational program strongly mirrored his position as someone caught between his beliefs in integrationist principles, yet who operated as a nationalist (often times for pragmatic reasons). This is deeply embodied by his urging of African American people to "use segregation to kill segregation."⁸⁸ His conviction as a "race man" is something he strongly felt should be shared and cultivated in the minds and hearts of all young Black people through education. Lastly, at the heart of his educational model was a reconfiguration of history that vindicated Black life and culture, placing Black achievement in its proper place in the larger narrative of human history. Woodson identified African American's inability to eradicate their oppression, or even recognize its function in their lives, as the achieved goal of miseducation. Given that dominant educational curricula were built on White supremacist myths, Woodson saw no other option but the construction of alternative models. His educational philosophy and practice posed a direct challenge to those crafted by the dominant educational theorists and educational practitioners.

Didactic Pedagogy and a Critique of Progressive Education

Woodson's educational project occurred alongside, and offers critiques of, the more recognized progressive education movement. While some have noted that tenets of progressive education can be mapped on to Woodson's educational philosophy, I contend that framing Woodson as a progressive educator fails to capture the full range of his thinking on American education, and arguably dilutes the most salient elements of his educational philosophy.⁸⁹ While placing Woodson's thinking under the label of

⁸⁶ Ibid, xii.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 60-61.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 61.

⁸⁹ Jeffrey Aaron Snyder, "Progressive Education in Black and White: Rereading Carter G. Woodson's Miseducation of the Negro," *History of Education Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (August 1,

“progressive education” may legitimize him in some circles, it depoliticizes his larger critiques of dominant schooling for its maintenance of White supremacy through the reproduction of dominant culture. Snyder offers that Woodson was consistent with tenets of the progressive education movement, in that he called for an education derived from students’ specific positionality, that it be community based, and develop them to push for reform in society. To be sure, these ideals are consistent with some of the general objectives that Woodson advocated for; however, they silence the heart of the challenge Woodson presented to those responsible for the education of Black children.

At the heart of *Miseducation*, Woodson argued that the public education system is intentional in its colonization of Black students minds. He advocated for a program that directly challenged dominant hegemony and explicitly connected educational instruction to socio-political action against White supremacy. While the tenets of the progressive education movement map on to certain elements of Woodson’s educational program, these critical components of his educational thought are not captured. Conceptualizing African Americans as a racially oppressed group of learners, and his understanding of how the ideological underpinnings of “official knowledge” sustained miseducation, led him to develop an educational model that placed him at the outer most margins of the progressive education movement, if not beyond it all together.

The progressive education movement, beginning in the 1880s, marks significant shifts in American educational thought as it pertains to both pedagogy and school administration.⁹⁰ As the country became more industrialized, schools became more bureaucratic and aimed to develop students to filter into predetermined labor roles in society based on the new industrial order. In the pedagogical faction of the progressive movement, this was articulated through notions of learning by doing, student-centered learning, and education for social change. Inequality however became even more engrained in the infrastructure of America’s educational system.⁹¹ The type of education made accessible to students became overdetermined by their race, class, and gender. For African American’s in the Southern region of the United States, for example, industrial/practical education became the dominant model of education encouraged by White philanthropists and Southern educational leaders.⁹² In the post-bellum South, the White-Black dichotomy became rearticulated through the legal policies and social edicts of Jim Crow, and schools were a major site of this tug-of-war. No longer slaves, the education imposed upon the Freedmen and women was one that aimed to develop them to be content as a servant class of people, thus sustaining a social infrastructure reminiscent of the old South.

In short, racial inequalities were widely reproduced during the progressive education movement; cognizant of this fact, many African American educators developed alternative thinking and philosophies on education. Derrick Aldrige (2007) has

2015): 273–93.

⁹⁰ John Rury, *Education and Social Change: Themes in the History of American Schooling*, 1 edition (Mahwah, N.J: Routledge, 2002); Tyack, *The One Best System*.

⁹¹ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*; Rury, *Education and Social Change*; Tyack, *The One Best System*; Thomas Fallace, *Race and the Origins of Progressive Education, 1880-1929* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2015).

⁹² Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*; Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education*.

highlighted how W.E.B. Du Bois and Anna Julia Cooper, similar to many other Black educators, “navigated an inherently problematic intellectual terrain to construct educational ideas aimed at addressing the problems and challenges of Black people.”⁹³ Similarly, Woodson developed a philosophy of education that challenged the dominant discourse of the time. This philosophy was grounded in his lived experiences as an educator born to former slaves in West Virginia and the second African American to receive a Ph.D. in history from Harvard, an academic discipline that studiously denied Black cultural achievements and African History.

Many scholars have attended to the limitations of progressive education to bring about social change in society. Daniel Perlstein has examined George Counts’ 1932 challenge to progressive educators for failing to articulate a critique of the social order, which he believed “prevented students from confronting the misery and injustice of Depression-era America.”⁹⁴ Furthermore, scholars have noted Black educators’ critique of progressive education for failing to offer any critical social analysis of the dominant society, or take into account how Black children’s positionality impacts their ability to employ democratic engagement in a similar fashion as White students.⁹⁵ At times, Black educational thinkers even advocated for a retreat of open-ended question based learning, for more didactic instruction, as to ensure that Black students were aware of the functionality of White domination and committed to dismantling it. In these cases, “A focus on self-discovery and self-expression among the voiceless was replaced by a desire to articulate a critique of society to the oppressed.”⁹⁶

In centering the needs of Black children, Woodson found didactic education as a necessity to help them build a repository of knowledge that informed them of the systems that maintain Black oppression. Therefore, instead of simply relying on contextual learning, Woodson wanted to provide students with a critical social analysis of their lived experiences as a means of empowering them to change it. In this way his relied on banking style education for Black children to be inspired by narratives of Black resistance and triumph.

Pedagogically, Woodson’s emphasis on Negro history sought to offer alternative identities, and the study of the African past presented more expansive notions of Blackness than those confined within Jim Crow society. Therefore, while Alfred Young used Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to analytically read Woodson’s educational model, Woodson’s strategic use of banking style educational tactics as part of his

⁹³ Derrick P. Alridge, “Of Victorianism, Civilizationism, and Progressivism: The Educational Ideas of Anna Julia Cooper and W.E.B. Du Bois, 1892–1940,” *History of Education Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (November 1, 2007): 446.

⁹⁴ Daniel Perlstein, “‘There Is No Escape...from the Ogre of Indoctrination’: George Counts and the Civil Dilemmas of Democratic Educators,” in *Reconstructing the Common Good In Education: Coping with Intractable American Dilemmas*. L. Cuban and D. Shipp (Eds.) (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000): 51.

⁹⁵ Lisa D. Delpit, “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children,” *Harvard Educational Review* 58, no. 3 (January 1988): 280–98; Daniel Perlstein, “Minds Stayed on Freedom: Politics and Pedagogy in the African-American Freedom Struggle,” *American Educational Research Journal* 39, no. 2 (2002): 249–77.

⁹⁶ Perlstein, “Minds Stayed on Freedom,” 257.

program poses some contradictions between the two.⁹⁷ The idea that reflective critical pedagogy would help students learn to question the status quo is found in Woodson's philosophy, but he also presented didactic instruction as a means of helping students imagine new possibilities for who they were and whom they could be. Students' contexts and knowledge, in many ways, were constructed by racist ideology and therefore could be limiting. Woodson pressed for students to learn about African history and biography of Black leaders to press beyond Jim Crow teachings.

Woodson's intellectual work in producing corrective accounts of Negro History and using it to educate African American students was a means of destabilizing White supremacy's stronghold. "If you teach the Negro that he has accomplished as much good as any other race he will aspire to equality and justice without regard to race. Such an effort would upset the program of the oppressor in Africa and America... The Negro can be made proud of his past only by approaching it scientifically himself and giving his own story to the world."⁹⁸ These narratives accounted for an imaginative component to Woodson's pedagogy that required students to think beyond the confines of White supremacy and even their context to envision new possibilities for themselves as Black people. For Woodson, simply relying on student knowledge was not enough, the racialized gaps in epistemology had to be addressed.

Michael Dumas' concept of the Black educational imaginary lends itself to elucidate the liberatory capacity of Woodson's educational model.⁹⁹ Building on Robin Kelley's idea of the Black radical imaginary, Dumas demonstrates how it has functioned within the realm of education as a liberatory praxis for Black students. Consistent with many Black educators of the past, Woodson aimed to teach Black students to envision a world that existed beyond the scope of their reality. This imaginative component of African American pedagogy is similarly demonstrated by how citizenship education surfaced in Black schools in the Jim Crow South. While it may have seemed impractical because of the limitations imposed on Black civic engagement during this period, many Black educators continued to teach their students from the premise that they were first class citizens, and in doing so, prepared them for a world that was beyond their reality. Educational historian Vanessa Siddle Walker has demonstrated how Black educators led this charge through specific strategies cultivated through their professional networks.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Alfred Young, *The Educational Philosophies of Booker T. Washington and Carter G. Woodson a Liberating Praxis* (Syracuse University, 1971). Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

⁹⁸ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 106-107.

⁹⁹ Michael J. Dumas, "Sitting next to White Children: School Desegregation in the Black Educational Imagination" (CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, 2007).

¹⁰⁰ Vanessa Siddle Walker, "Second-Class Integration: A Historical Perspective for a Contemporary Agenda," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 2 (2009): 269-84, doi:10.17763/haer.79.2.b1637p4u4093484m; Vanessa Siddle Walker and Ulysses Byas, *Hello Professor a Black Principal and Professional Leadership in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10343541>; Vanessa Siddle Walker, "Original Intent: Black Educators in an Elusive Quest for Justice" (AERA 2012 Brown Lecture, October 25, 2012), <http://mp125118.cdn.mediaplatform.com/125118/wc/mp/4000/5592/5599/20007/Lobby/default.htm>.

Woodson's educational scholarship demonstrated that his philosophy had political and pedagogical implications that both embraced and deviated from the progressive movement. He offered a strong critique of American society and schooling; furthermore, he offered a model that valued didactic instruction in addition to critical thinking. For Woodson, Black students needed to be offered an inventory of knowledge regarding Black history and taught about the "unsound policies and unwise methods" that had been used to maintain Black oppression. Woodson's vision for Black education, in these ways, offered a critique of the progressive education movement.

A Decolonial Reading of *The Miseducation*

Woodson's critique of dominant schooling anticipates much of the scholarship on coloniality and education by scholars within the African Diaspora.¹⁰¹ Like these scholars, Woodson challenged the cultural politics of White colonial commandment and saw dehumanization as the primary assault against Black students.¹⁰² He was explicitly committed to vindicating the humanity of Black people. Woodson's educational praxis aimed to challenge the cultural denial imposed upon Black students and to cultivate in them an unobstructed view of their oppression and an indelible commitment to Black liberation globally.

Though the history of race and slavery in the U.S. has made for a distinct experience of Black oppression for African Americans, there are many parallels between their experiences and those of others across the African Diaspora. Scholars who have studied these experiences of domination in tandem offer the term internal colonialism to conceptualize the racialized oppression of Blacks in the U.S., and its relationship to that of other groups within the African Diaspora.¹⁰³ In this respect, Woodson was a forerunner in naming African Americans as a colonized group via White supremacy and furthermore offered an understanding of Black suffering in the U.S. as closely tied to Black oppression globally. Departing from this point, I offer Woodson's analytic as a forerunner in naming Black Americans as a colonized group. Woodson's notion of "miseducation" attends to the coloniality of power, particularly as it relates to the repression of culture and dehumanization of the colonized.

¹⁰¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London; Portsmouth, N.H.: J. Currey ; Heinemann, 1986); Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1955); Sylvia Wynter, "No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues," *Forum N.H.I. Knowledge for the 21st Century* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 42–73.

¹⁰² For more theoretical discussion on the denial of Black humanity in the context of schools see Zeus Leonardo, "Through the Multicultural Glass: Althusser, Ideology and Race Relations in Post-Civil Rights America," *Policy Futures in Education* 3, no. 4 (2005); Michael J. Dumas, "Against the Dark: AntiBlackness in Education Policy and Discourse," *Theory Into Practice* (December 7, 2015): 1–10.; Michael J. Dumas and kihana miraya ross, "Be Real Black for Me' Imagining BlackCrit in Education," *Urban Education*, February 23, 2016.

¹⁰³ Robert Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History*, 1st Edition edition (Trenton, N.J: Africa World Pr, 1969); Robert L. Allen, "REASSESSING THE INTERNAL (NEO) COLONIALISM THEORY," *The Black Scholar* 35, no. 1 (2005): 2–11; Stokely Carmichael and Charles V Hamilton, *Black Power; the Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967).

Woodson's Vigilance of Coloniality at Home and Abroad

Coloniality is an appropriate lens to situate Woodson's *The Miseducation* because of his own attention to the globality of White colonial commandment, which is largely revealed through his heavy critique of the educational programs being administered by White philanthropists transnationally. For example, Woodson observed that most Blacks considered Thomas Jesse Jones to be "an evil in the life of the Negro; but he was nevertheless, catapulted into fame among the capitalists and government officials supporting the education of Negroes. They made Jones the almoner of the despised race with the title of Educational Director of the Phelps Stokes Fund [1913-1946]."¹⁰⁴ Woodson further pointed out that the relationships between the benefactors of Black oppression in the U.S. and those administering the colonial education in Africa. He offered, "Jones transferred his operations to Africa. He easily ingratiated himself into the favor of the few European agencies working for the enlightenment of the natives within the locus prescribed by economic imperialists."¹⁰⁵ Woodson contended that Black people, both in Africa and in the U.S. were being educated in a manner that facilitated their submission to the political system of their oppressors. In *Miseducation* he wrote, "The Negro, both in Africa and America, is being turned first here and there experimentally by so-called friends who in the final analysis assist the Negro merely in remaining in the dark."¹⁰⁶

Woodson's critique of dominant schooling was couched within his broader analysis of White supremacy as a global political system. He wrote, "Much of Africa has been conquered and subjugated to save souls. How expensive has been the Negro's salvation! One of the strong arguments for slavery was that it brought the Negro into the light of salvation. And yet the Negro today is all but lost."¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Woodson's engagement with activists such as Max Yergan and Paul Robeson, who were actively working to challenge imperialism on the African continent further nuances the anti-imperialist and de-colonial tone of *Miseducation*. Woodson exposed Thomas Jesse Jones' involvement in blocking Yergan's ability to travel to South Africa in 1924 and actively supported the work of Yergan and Robeson with their International Committee on African Affairs. At the ASNLH's annual meeting in 1938 Woodson provided feature sessions for them to present, and in 1945 he wrote a supportive review of Yergan and Robeson's *For a New Africa*. Woodson endorsed their efforts "of keeping before the modern world the urgent need for the redemption of Africa from the economic imperialists and the Christians cooperating with them."¹⁰⁸ Therefore, Woodson's critique of White supremacy was generated through a diasporic consciousness; he was attentive to

¹⁰⁴ Carter G. Woodson, "Thomas Jesse Jones," *Journal of Negro History*, January 1950, 107-109.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 108.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Anthony Scally et al., "Phelps-Stokes Confidential Memorandum for The Trustees of The Phelps-Stokes Fund Regarding Dr. Carter G. Woodson's Attacks on Dr. Thomas Jesse Jones," *The Journal of Negro History* 76, no. 1/4 (1991): 48-60; C. G. Woodson, review of *Review of For a New Africa*, by Max Yergan and Paul Robeson, *The Journal of Negro History* 30, no. 3 (1945): 346-48; C.G. Woodson, "Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History Held in New York City November 11, 12, and 13, 1938," *The Journal of Negro History* 24, no. 1 (1939): 1-8..

the globality of anti-Blackness as a mandate of the prevailing political system and the ideology that sustained it.¹⁰⁹

Epistemological (Re)Productions of the Black Sub-Human

Decolonial theorist Sylvia Wynter has engaged Woodson's notion of miseducation head on in her own observations of the exorcising of Black humanity from the historical constructions of the human.¹¹⁰ In thinking through notions of humanity, Wynter highlights Woodson's indictment of cultural suppression within the larger project of White supremacy. In her explicit engagement with Woodson's *Miseducation*, Wynter contends that there has been "systemic cognitive distortions with respect to North America, as well as the human past and present," in the cultural productions of the White-European imaginary—including systems of education and the knowledge base that informed them.¹¹¹ Contextualizing her perspective on these cognitive distortions as it relates to narratives about humanity in America, she asserts, "Black Americans are the only population group of the post-1492 Americas who had been legitimately owned, i.e. enslaved, over several centuries."¹¹² Their "owned and enslaved status" determined and articulated their position as the furthest from man/human/Whiteness in "the classificatory logic of the earlier episteme" of 1933, when Woodson wrote *The Miseducation*, and continues to persist according to Wynter. The narratives produced about humanity, from one episteme to the next, have served to ensure the "stable replication of the invariant relation of dominance/subordination" between White and Black.¹¹³ The philosopher Charles Mills contends that these cognitive distortions have designated Whites as persons and non-Whites as "sub-persons" through the racial contract, which continues to uphold White supremacy as a global political system.¹¹⁴

For Woodson, one of the major shortcomings of public education was its failure to take seriously these cognitive distortions of Black humanity and cultural achievements in school curricula. Challenging these distortions, Woodson asserted that, "The Negro is as human as the other members of the family of mankind... With the domestication of animals, the discovery of iron, the development of stringed instruments, an advancement in fine art, and the inauguration of trial by jury to his credit, the Negro stands just as high as others in contributing to the progress of the world." In conceptualizing how the denial of Black humanity was tethered to the distortion of their historical past, Woodson wrote, "The oppressor, however, raises his voice to the contrary. He teaches the Negro that he

¹⁰⁹ Jarvis Ray Givens, "A Grammar for Black Education beyond Borders: Exploring Technologies of Schooling in the African Diaspora," *Race Ethnicity and Education* (November 5, 2015): 1–16.

¹¹⁰ Wynter, "No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues"; Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," *Boundary 2* 12/13 (1984): 19–70; Greg Thomas, "PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter," *ProudFlesh: New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics and Consciousness* 0, no. 4 (2006), <http://www.africaknowledgeproject.org/index.php/proudflesh/article/view/202>.

¹¹¹ Wynter, "No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues," 58.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 62.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹⁴ Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 1st New edition (Cornell University Press, 1999).

has no worth-while past.”¹¹⁵ Woodson argued that miseducation operated to keep Blacks as the “conceptual other” and thus in their systemic place.¹¹⁶ What Woodson phrased as miseducation functioned off of these “cognitive distortions” in school curricula and made White supremacy “an autopoetic or self organizing living system.”¹¹⁷

“The Cultural Bomb” and Curricular Death of the Black Human

As Raymond Williams has previously argued, “Culture is ordinary.” It is an ordinary aspect of every human society.¹¹⁸ Woodson’s fervent work to research, teach, and celebrate Black culture reflected his understanding that the denial of Black cultural achievements had been a primary articulation of why they were outside of humanity all together, as engrained in dominant epistemologies.

In projecting Black people to be a group devoid of culture and civilization, the hegemonic culture deemed them subhuman, irrational—unable “to think and develop something for themselves.”¹¹⁹ Thus, the legacy of cultural repression was a marker of the symbolic (and physical) assaults against Black humanity. Woodson argued that in conditioning Black students to “admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and the Teuton” while at the same time denying the existence of Black diasporic achievement, educators “lead the Negro to detest the man of African blood—to hate himself.”¹²⁰ In charting the weapons of colonialism Kenyan writer, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o offered that the biggest was the “cultural bomb.” Its effect is “to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages...in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities, and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of nonachievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland.”¹²¹ It is for this reason that Woodson explained, “These institutions [speaking of Black educational institutions] should abandon a large portion of the traditional courses which have been retained throughout the years because they are supposedly cultural, and they should offer instead training in things which are also cultural and at the same time have a bearing on the life of the people thus taught.”¹²² In other words, he sought to uproot the processes of Black cultural denial in the education of African American students.

Woodson’s perspective on the role of culture in the process of “miseducation” was surely influenced by a sweeping debate taking place during the 1930s amongst scholars on whether or not African American culture existed. He believed that scholars, such as E. Franklin Frazier, were “misled by the contention of Robert E. Park,” of the University of Chicago, who “fearlessly upheld the mischievous, unsupported statement that the American Negro retained little which he brought from Africa except his tropical temperament.”¹²³ While Black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier argued that African

¹¹⁵ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 106-108.

¹¹⁶ Wynter, “No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues,” 59.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 58.

¹¹⁸ Raymond Williams, “Culture Is Ordinary,” in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), 3–14.

¹¹⁹ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 88.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 106.

¹²¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 3.

¹²² Woodson, “The Miseducation of the Negro,” 267.

¹²³ Woodson’s review of *The Myth of the Negro Past* by Melville Herkovits, *JNH*, January 1942,

American people had retained no culture from their African past because it was strangled out through the process of enslavement, others such as Melville Herskovits, a Jewish anthropologist, argued that African American people, and others throughout the Diaspora, had maintained certain Africanisms or African retentions.¹²⁴ While Franklin suggested that Black American culture was invented while in America, Herskovits suggested that the enslaved adapted aspects of their culture which they carried from their African past.

Woodson largely supported the claims made by Herskovits and critiqued the views of Frazier, stating, “Negroes themselves accept as a compliment the theory of a complete break with Africa, for above all things they do not care to be known as resembling in any way those ‘terrible Africans’.”¹²⁵ Woodson further endorsed the academic work of scholars such as Lorenzo Turner and Zora Neale Hurston who studied cultural patterns (particularly linguistic and religious) in specific Black communities in the U.S. In 1927 Woodson reported that the ASNLH had been supporting Hurston to do research on Negro folklore in Florida and Alabama.¹²⁶ Woodson saw the appreciation of Black history and culture as a move towards the recognition of Black humanity and as a critical step is challenging the ideological underpinnings of White supremacy.

This distortion of African American culture has been a consistent fixture of Black oppression in the U.S., and similarly for Black men and women throughout the African Diaspora.¹²⁷ Aime Cesaire explored this as a dialectical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, where he equated the process of colonization to what he terms “thingification.” He offered, “The colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal.”¹²⁸ The disfiguring of Black history and culture is a critical step in the process of subjugation; it maintains a narrative of Black inhumanity whereby racial oppression is justified. Further explaining this phenomenon, Anibal Quijano (2007) offered that colonial repression “fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectivized expression, intellectual or visual.”¹²⁹ Quijano’s theorization of coloniality is descriptive of how discursive myths of the Black sub-human are woven into the western systems of knowledge, the very epistemologies that inform the educational systems. The theoretical

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¹²⁴ Edward Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago*, University of Chicago Sociological Series. (Chicago, Ill., The University of Chicago press, 1932); Herskovits Melville, *The Myth Of The Negro Past* (Harper And Brothers Publishers, 1941).

¹²⁵ Woodson’s Review of *Life in a Haitian Valley* by Melville Herskovits, *Journal of Negro History*, July 1937, 366-369.

¹²⁶ ASNLH Director’s Report 1927, *Journal of Negro History*, 570-571

¹²⁷ Asa G. Hilliard, “The State of African Education” (American Educational Research Association Plenary Presentation, Commission on Research in Black Education, New Orleans, LA, 2000); John Henrik Clarke, “Education for a New Reality in the African World” (Annual Meeting of the National Alliance of Black Educators, New York, NY, November 14, 1985).

¹²⁸ Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 41.

¹²⁹ Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (March 1, 2007): 169.

arguments offered by these decolonial scholars echo Woodson's critiques of dominant education as a sites where Black cultural distortion proliferates.

Cultural domination "thingifies" the colonized, to borrow from Césaire, and the systems of miseducation worked to make it perpetual. Allegorically building on this relationship between colonialism and education, Ngũgĩ offers, "The night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the Blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom."¹³⁰ Further expanding on the dialectic between coloniality and education, Césaire wrote, "For wherever there are colonizers and colonized face to face, I see...in a parody of education, the hasty manufacture of a few thousand subordinate functionaries, 'boys,' artisans, clerks, and interpreters necessary for the smooth operation of business."¹³¹ Conversely, these colonial theorists suggest that the education provided by the colonizer was crafted to inhibit the oppressed from thinking critically about their experiences and that of others who share their oppression. Woodson illustrates this notion of the colonized Black mind in the following quote:

When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.¹³²

It is for these reasons that Woodson conceptualized an educational program that was explicitly political. Black students were blinded to the oppression they faced and in turn taught to be complicit in the colonial project of White supremacy itself. As an educator and institution builder, Woodson challenged the political ideology that informed the systems of miseducation.

Woodson's educational model was premised on presenting Black people as equal contributors to the development of human society and reclaiming a cultural legacy that honored Black humanity and achievement. While students' immediate realities may not have represented these ideas and even directly challenged them, the historical inventory of his textbooks and institutions offered a counter reality—a repaired racial narrative that offered new Black identities for students to take up.

While this lens of coloniality lends itself to unpack Woodson's educational philosophy it also exposes a significant paradox in his personal narrative as an advocate of liberatory education. Woodson's treatment of the role of cultural suppression in the project of White colonialism must be put in conversation with his time as a teacher in the Philippines (1903-1906). Instead of critically engaging the connections between the systems of miseducation enacted on Black Americans and similar systems of miseducation inflicted upon the natives of the Philippines through cultural imperialism, Woodson ironically is largely silent on this topic in *The Miseducation* and in his larger

¹³⁰ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 9.

¹³¹ Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 42.

¹³² Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, xiii.

body of work.¹³³ This particular silence in Woodson's personal history is similar to many other instances that will be marked throughout this dissertation.

This instance provides an opportunity only to imagine what Woodson's thinking was surrounding this dilemma based on his character and larger political objectives as evidenced in his biography and scholarship. While he contrasts the ineffective teachers in the Philippines, who omitted the history of the natives, with those that "taught them about their own hero, José Rizal, who gave his life as a martyr for the freedom of his country," he does not indict the larger imperialist project of the American government.¹³⁴ Woodson's silence on the topic could be interpreted as his own shame in participating in the project; or perhaps, his failure to understand the subjugation of Black people in relation to that of other oppressed groups based on the rigid White-Black racial politics of Jim Crow.

Despite this conflict in Woodson's biographical narrative, Filipino scholar Renato Constantino found a useful tool in the Woodson's nationalist critique of dominant schooling. In Constantino's essay, "The Miseducation of the Filipino," originally published in 1966, he provides a critical history of U.S. colonial education in the Philippines whereby instruction was taught in English and students were taught to see Americans as saviors while forgetting their national heroes. Constantino also explores how this schooling served to quell native resistance to U.S. imperialist policy in the Philippines.¹³⁵

Exploring the Tensions in Woodson's Critique of Black Teachers

Woodson's critique of Black teachers in *The Miseducation* poses an additional tension. Black educators were Woodson's largest following; therefore, it seems ironic that they were the very group he chastised in the text. Woodson's decree that "One generation of Negro teachers after another have served for no higher purpose than to do what they are told to do" was surely inflated.¹³⁶ Given their commitment to Woodson's organization as dues paying members, it is clear that many Black teachers had a commitment to challenging the ideological underpinnings of White supremacist education. Even if their textbooks and instructional materials consisted of those provided by the mainstream public educational system, certainly some Black educators maintained a consistent critique of the controlling narratives of race. The private spaces of Black teachers classroom have to be taken into account as potential spaces of closeted protest.

Zoë Burkholder demonstrates how Black teachers taught about race in a radically progressive way that may not have been reflected in their hard curriculums, but in their ideological frameworks.¹³⁷ She explores the racial discourse presented by Black teachers through the publications of their state teacher organizations and other archival material during the decades leading up to the Brown decision. Furthermore, Vanessa Siddle

¹³³ Anne Paulet, "To Change the World: The Use of American Indian Education in the Philippines," *History of Education Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (May 1, 2007): 173–202.

¹³⁴ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 85.

¹³⁵ Renato Constantino, "The Miseducation of the Filipino," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 1, no. 1 (1970).

¹³⁶ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 35.

¹³⁷ Zoë Burkholder, *Color in the Classroom: How American Schools Taught Race, 1900-1954* (England; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Walker's portrayal of Black teachers as the silent partners in the fight for school desegregation demonstrates that despite their opaque position as it pertains to critiquing the American education system publicly, they were in fact firmly committed to a pedagogy that reflected his anti-White supremacist position.¹³⁸

But in many ways Woodson's harsh criticisms of those that supported his vision the most is not out of character. Lorenzo Greene, a student of whom Woodson closely mentored critiqued him for this very thing. He stated that Woodson "sees only the Black, unpleasant side of the other fellows labor."¹³⁹ Woodson was known to be a sharp critic by those who he mentored and trusted the most.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, his criticism of Black teachers as a professional group seems to be consistent with this personality trend.

To be clear, this paradox is not being presented to suggest simply that Woodson had a character flaw of being hypercritical of his supporters but more so to expose an inherent dilemma in his intellectual project. Woodson was indeed a Black nationalist working to enact reform in the American public educational system, and even though he was able to make a sizeable impact, he was never able to fully supplant the stronghold that White hegemony had on American education. Woodson's grand expectations of a new educational program for Black students grounded in ideas of cooperative economics, racial solidarity, self-help, cultural pride and racially controlled community institutions made the progress he had accomplished appear minimal in comparison to his larger vision.

In some regards it appears that Black teachers bore the brunt of Woodson's frustration, based on the commentary provided in *The Miseducation*, as opposed to those that benefitted the most from White supremacy. However, Woodson's critique of Black teachers likely stemmed from the fact that he had more faith that they could enact positive change in the educational experiences of Black students than Whites in power who benefitted directly from Black oppression. Woodson explained that the educational system by and large suited the needs of White Americans; it was Black Americans that were violated via miseducation. Thus, his expectation for Black teachers was for them to be willing to sacrifice personal privileges for the larger goals of Black liberation.

Woodson modeled this level of self-sacrifice in his own life. For example, in an article Woodson published in *The Chicago Defender* entitled, "The Vow of Poverty," he wrote about the sacrifices he and other members working for the ASNLH had to make in order to expose "the true story of the Race to this unwilling world."¹⁴¹ Not only did he live on 12 or 15 dollars a week, but he also chose not to marry because he felt he would be an absent spouse due to the energy it took for him to keep the association functional and productive.¹⁴² Woodson believed that without making personal gains secondary to

¹³⁸ Vanessa Siddle Walker, "African American Teaching in the South: 1940–1960," *American Educational Research Journal* 38, no. 4 (December 21, 2001): 751–79, doi:10.3102/00028312038004751; Siddle Walker, "Original Intent: Black Educators in an Elusive Quest for Justice."

¹³⁹ Lorenzo J. Greene, *Selling Black History for Carter G. Woodson: A Diary, 1930-1933*, ed. Arvarh E. Strickland (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1996).

¹⁴⁰ Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars*; Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene*.

¹⁴¹ Carter G. Woodson, "The Vow of Poverty," *The Chicago Defender*, January 7, 1933.

¹⁴² Ibid

the larger cause, no significant impact could be made. Therefore, Woodson's criticisms of educated Blacks seem to reflect his desire to see a massive mobilization of African Americans to tackle this issue with great urgency—selflessness being an essential part of the process. Woodson conceptualized this work as “a life-and-death struggle.”

The tensions inherent in Woodson's intellectual project caused him to never reach a level of contentment. With the lofty goal of eradicating Black oppression, coupled with his fierce sense of urgency in addressing this political project, it is arguable that Woodson would never find solace in the success that his reform efforts had. Woodson sought to eradicate White supremacist ideology within public education; therefore, while commendable, the marginal reform efforts he was able to initiate with the help of Black teachers would never allow him to reach a resolve. This in many ways presents Woodson as a tragic figure in the trajectory of African American educational history. As someone who advocated for a revolutionized educational system, Woodson could never find solace in marginal reforms. The educational system he imagined was one premised on the undoing of Black oppression ideologically and materially. To this end, Woodson was unflinching in his resistance to an educational system that upheld White supremacy.

Conclusion

The *Miseducation of the Negro* was the product of Woodson's frustration with the manipulation of Black self-determination by White industrial capitalists, the cognitive distortions that continued to proliferate in curricula about Black culture, and a commitment he made to ensure that the Negro did not “become a negligible factor in the thought of the world.”¹⁴³ In retrospect, scholars of today should understand *The Miseducation* as Woodson's effort to indict American schooling as a technology of White supremacy as a world system. He identified Black cultural suppression as a distinct feature of the larger colonial project, both on the continent of Africa and amongst Blacks in the U.S; and furthermore, it distinctly informed curriculum content and sustained distorted images of Black humanity. To counter this, Woodson worked to create an educational experience that informed Black students of this systemic oppression, and simultaneously held up narratives of Black achievement to inspire them to appreciate their own worth as equal partners in human society.

Woodson placed a major emphasis on correcting historical narratives by including the history of Black life and culture from antiquity until his contemporary moment. Very often he focused on Black participation in the “official” story as well; for example, Crispus Attucks being one of the first to sacrifice his life for American independence, as a means of destabilizing the epistemological constructions of White heroism.¹⁴⁴

While Woodson worked tirelessly to produce an alternative body of scholarship for students to learn from, his larger project was about liberation and the development of the race. Some have provided critique of the centrality of culture in Woodson's educational model. Adam Fairclough, for example, has written that, “Woodson assumed the existence of an autonomous “Negro” culture that was basically African. This supposition not only minimized the extent to which European culture had already influenced Blacks under slavery but also wrongly implied that African American culture

¹⁴³ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 105.

¹⁴⁴ Carter G. Woodson, “The George Washington Bicentennial Eliminates March 5th, Crispus Attucks Day,” *New York Age* (Jan. 2, 1932), 9.

was a sufficient basis for Black advancement.”¹⁴⁵ Woodson was not blindly reliant on Black culture to address the entirety of oppression. Woodson’s biography reveals his political engagement and tireless efforts to build economically sustainable Black institutions. This demonstrates that he had a multidimensional program that was not only about correcting epistemologies.

Challenging the cultural politics of White supremacist education was of the first order; however, it was a means of raising the consciousness of Black people, it did not exclude the interest of politics and economic development. As Woodson made clear in *The Miseducation*, the colonization of Black people is not only in the mind, it has material ramifications. He contended that “the present farce of racial manipulation in which the Negro is a figurehead” was largely proscribed by “the White man’s exploitation of the Negro through economic restriction and segregation.”¹⁴⁶ Relatedly, Woodson’s *The Rural Negro* offered a social scientific study of Black life in the rural south from the Civil War into the post-WWI era. Building on a broad based collection of data through surveys and field workers, Woodson addressed the social and economic climate faced by the masses in the rural south, paying particular attention to peonage and exploitation of Black workers. His educational program relied on didactic instruction to aid students in developing a critical perspective on Black oppression, to cultivate Black cultural pride, and to inspire in them an unyielding commitment to the undoing of White supremacy in its material and ideological form. This was the learning identity Woodson sought to make available to students and it required the toppling of miseducation.

Woodson’s educational philosophy represents an important undercurrent in Black educational thought, a turn to culture in efforts to re-center Black humanity in the learning process. This philosophical approach to learning surely preceded Woodson, yet he championed it with an unparalleled vigor. Woodson’s wide reaching influence amongst Black educators during his contemporary moment, and the intellectual traction his legacy continues to have amongst critical studies on Black education forces us to rethink the traditional framing of Black education, one that has allowed his transformative educational praxis to fall through the crevices and largely be reduced to a passing footnote, and at best, a mention as the man who pushed for the celebration of Black history. Woodson offered a radical critique of schooling as a function of White supremacy. Beyond this he developed an educational model that took hold in the Black community despite the refusal by White philanthropist to support him once he proved to be uncompromising in his objectives. African American people financially supported Woodson’s educational initiatives throughout the great depression period, not because this was a time of abundant prosperity, but because it offered more hope of liberation than any of the alternatives.

This chapter has offered a close engagement with Woodson philosophy on Black education and presented his objectives for a liberatory education model. The following chapters explore how Woodson institutionalized his ideas by engineering instructional materials, founding educational institutions, creating alternative spaces for teacher training, and overall, imagining an unconventional community model of education.

¹⁴⁵ Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South*, annotated edition (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2007), 20.

¹⁴⁶ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 14.

CHAPTER III

Inheriting an Intellectual Tradition:

Race Vindicationism and Black Teachers' Textbooks, 1890-1935

“Negroes must know the history of the Negro race in America, and this they will seldom get in White institutions. Their children ought to study textbooks like Brawley's "Short History," the first edition of Woodson's "Negro in Our History," They ought to study intelligently and from their own point of view, the slave trade, slavery, emancipation, Reconstruction and present economic development.” – W.E.B. Du Bois (1935)¹

Textbooks published by African American teachers are underexplored material artifacts of Black educational thought. They offer amazing insight into Black teachers' pedagogy as a professional class and nuanced portraits of the ideologies that undergirded the work of Black educators. In this chapter, I explore textbooks published by Dr. Carter G. Woodson and other Black teachers before him, as the materiality of the Black counterpublic sphere.² These textbooks tangibly reflect the thinking of Black educators, who imagined a world for their students that surpassed the limitations of Jim Crow America.

Noel Anderson and Haroon Kharem have argued that Black educational thought “emerged from diverse Black civic, political, and religious communities and organization and [was] informed by the complexity of the Black experience in America.” They further contend that Black educational thought should not be understood as simply ideas “parroted from White thinkers and educators or passively borrowed from European models of schooling.”³ Black educational thought, in its resistive nature and reliance on notions of Black collectivity, is an ideological extension of the Black counterpublic sphere.⁴

The counterpublic sphere encapsulates Black rebellion (in its various iterations) to oppressive structures and institutions. It “emerged in response to the exclusion of Black folks from the [ideal] public sphere. White supremacist ideology marked Black people as intellectually and morally inferior, and state-sanctioned racial order reinforced social stratification with regard to citizenship and property rights, employment and legal standing.”⁵ However, this space of resistance, the Black counterpublic sphere, must also

¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (1935): 328–35.

² Michael Dawson, “A Black Counterpublic?: Economic Earthquakes, Racial Agenda(s), and Black Politics,” *Public Culture* 7 (1994): 195–223; Michael J. Dumas, “Sitting next to White Children: School Desegregation in the Black Educational Imagination” (CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, 2007).

³ Noel Anderson and Haroon Kharem, *Education as Freedom: African American Educational Thought and Activism* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010), xv.

⁴ Dawson, “A Black Counterpublic?: Economic Earthquakes, Racial Agenda(s), and Black Politics.”

⁵ Dumas, “Sitting next to White Children,” 39.

be read as more than a response to America's anti-Blackness. The agency of Black people who made a "choice to sustain these spaces for Black cultural production and political solidarity," is a testament to their passionate desire for empowerment.⁶ This alternative public was constructed simultaneously as White supremacy became the overarching political system of the U.S., and arguably the world.⁷

The irony of segregated schooling was that it both accommodated Jim Crow, yet offered space for the cultivation of an historic example of the Black counterpublic. While segregated schools were created primarily as a result of Black exclusion, the work done in these spaces often times challenged that very exclusion as documented by the scholarship on Black teachers in the segregated South.⁸ Thus, what Michael Dumas refers to as the Black educational imagination, "discursive processes through which Black people 'work out' amongst themselves an understanding of the dialectic between Blackness, education and the shifting material and ideological faces of racism," should also be understood as a Black counterpublic.⁹

While created as a result of Black exile, Black educators and leaders took up segregated schooling as a training ground for the larger Black freedom struggle.¹⁰ In this way, the Black educational imagination was the combination of educational projects that Black people collaboratively engaged in to overcome, move past, and transcend barriers that sought to maintain their subjugation. How education has been wielded as a vehicle towards Black liberation and how Black teachers, students, and communities have imagined its role during the pre-Brown era gets at new possibilities for Black life through educational spaces. The textbooks analyzed in this chapter materially reflect this imaginative work done by Black educators and anchors a critical practice in the pedagogy of Black teachers historically.

Textbooks as a Discursive Site of Black Resistance

While the 19th century was ushered in by an industrial revolution in the United States, the growth of print culture proliferated and Black people employed this technology to nurse their liberatory dreams.¹¹ As Black publications and various other forms of Black print culture emerged, textbooks became a mechanism of institutionalizing Black resistance to

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 1st New edition edition (Cornell University Press, 1999).

⁸ Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South*, 1st edition, paperback issue, edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Vanessa Siddle Walker, "African American Teaching in the South: 1940–1960," *American Educational Research Journal* 38, no. 4 (December 21, 2001): 751–79; Zoë Burkholder, "'Education for Citizenship in a Bi-Racial Civilization': Black Teachers and the Social Construction of Race, 1929–1954," *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 2 (2012): 335–63; Du Bois, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?"

⁹ Dumas, "Sitting next to White Children," 47.

¹⁰ Vanessa Siddle Walker and Ulysses Byas, *Hello Professor a Black Principal and Professional Leadership in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

¹¹ Jacqueline Bacon, "The History of Freedom's Journal: A Study in Empowerment and Community," *The Journal of African American History* 88, no. 1 (2003): 1–20; Jacqueline Bacon, "LITERACY, RHETORIC, AND 19TH-CENTURY BLACK PRINT CULTURE," ed. Phyllis M. Belt-Beyan and Shirley Wilson Logan, *The Journal of African American History* 95, no. 3–4 (2010): 417–23.

White supremacist ideology. Woodson was a veteran teacher by the time he published the first edition of *The Negro in Our History* in 1922, yet he was not the first Black educator to publish a textbook.¹² Edward A. Johnson's (1890) *A School History of the Negro Race in America: From 1619-1890 With a Short Introduction as to the Origin of the Race* is likely the first successful effort of this kind—a textbook written by a Black teacher aiming to transform the educational experience of Black pupils.¹³ Leila Amos Pendleton, a public school teacher in Washington D.C., also modeled this pedagogical tradition with the publication of her textbook, *A Narrative of the Negro* (1912).¹⁴ Taken together these works by African American teachers demonstrate a commitment to liberating the race on a discursive level, but they also reflect the work to construct new realities, or more expansive possibilities, for their students.

Through an analysis of textbooks published by Black teachers, I offer “race vindicationism” as a consistent feature of Black educational thought, which shaped the pedagogical orientation of Black teachers historically. Textbooks by Black teachers constructed a new thread in Black educational thought that would eventually be taken up by Carter G. Woodson. As was the case with all vindicationist scholarship, these Black teachers’ engagement with print culture was an effort to demand their recognition as human beings. As an intellectual project, race vindicationism not only had a profound impact on the way that Black scholars took up the “race problem” in the Black press, but it significantly informed the pedagogy of many Black teachers.¹⁵

These textbooks used in the classrooms of Black teachers served as both the discursive and physical manifestations of the Black counterpublic sphere, whereby teachers sought to tug closer “toward a collective Black Freedom.”¹⁶ In this chapter I argue that race vindication has been a core objective of Black teachers’ pedagogy and textbooks reflect this mission. Resisting the American educational system, which has historically operated under a White supremacist framework,¹⁷ was a way teachers

¹² Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Negro in Our History* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1922). This chapter focuses on textbooks published by Black teachers who created their texts intentionally for classroom instruction and school age children. There were Black historians that wrote vindicationist histories before those mentioned in this chapter, such as James W.C. Pennington's (1841) *A Text Book of the Origin and History of the Colored Race*, Robert B. Lewis (1843), and William Wells Brown (1863). These 19th century authors wrote racial histories that destabilized conventional understanding of universal history during their time (Hughes-Warrington, 2009, p. 108). For this study I have chosen to begin with Edward A. Johnson's (1891) textbook because it was intentionally written for classroom instruction, whereas those before were written to a more general audience.

¹³ E. A. Johnson, *A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1890: With a Short Introduction as to the Origin of the Race: Also a Short Sketch of Liberia* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, Printers, 1890).

¹⁴ Leila Amos Pendleton, *A Narrative of the Negro* (Washington, D.C.: Press of R.L. Pendleton, 1912).

¹⁵ June O. Patton, “‘And the Truth Shall Make You Free’: Richard Robert Wright, Sr., Black Intellectual and Iconoclast, 1877-1897,” *The Journal of Negro History* 81, no. 1/4 (1996): 17–30.

¹⁶ Dumas, “Sitting next to White Children.”

¹⁷ Zeus Leonardo, “Through the Multicultural Glass: Althusser, Ideology and Race Relations in Post-Civil Rights America,” *Policy Futures in Education* 3, no. 4 (2005); Mills, *The Racial Contract*.

envisioned academically empowering Black pupils. Black educators saw it as their obligation to challenge myths about Black inferiority, which manifested in school curricula and the larger public sphere. Thus, the manifestation of race vindication in the pedagogical orientation of Black teachers demonstrated a professional and social commitment to supporting positive, mutually-affirming Black identities and engagement in the “polyvocal cultural processes” of constructing new possibilities for their collective futures.¹⁸ Woodson inherited this tradition by those Black educational thinkers that came before him and sought to operationalize it through the work of his educational institutions and resources for Black teachers and learners. The goal of this chapter is to examine Woodson’s textbooks as an articulation of his broader educational praxis. It is broken up into two major sections. The first section frames this area of inquiry by exploring “race vindicationism” as an intellectual tradition. In the second section I apply this analytical lens to the textbooks published by Edward A. Johnson, Leila Amos Pendleton and Carter G. Woodson before opening it up to a broader discussion of Woodson’s expansion of this intellectual tradition he inherited.

In exploring these textbooks in conversation with one another, there are a few central questions that guide my analysis: How do these Black teachers employ race vindicationism through these textbooks? What ideas are imagined for Black life and education through them? What are the areas of consistency and disjointedness across the textbooks? And how did Woodson use the infrastructure of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) to expand this tradition? This analysis centers Woodson in a lineage of Black teachers who were committed to vindicating the race by discursively trumping White supremacy through their alternative curriculums; these educators conceived of race vindication as a professional obligation and institutionalized it through the textbooks they published.

‘The Background for Our Future’:

Race Vindication and Imaginings for a New Black Reality

Race vindicationism, as an intellectual practice, has been explicitly confrontational in challenging Black subjugation. In practice, it was an effort to reclaim the honor of Black humanity, often relying on the historical achievements of great men and women of African ancestry to disrupt White supremacist logic. It surpassed efforts of moral suasion, whereby Black scholars sought to appeal to the morality of White Americans to recognize them as equal citizens. Black intellectuals writing under the auspice of vindicationism backhandedly dismissed White supremacist notions of Black inferiority as audacious and ludicrous.

While the dominant episteme is grounded in White supremacist ideology, race vindicationism emerged from Black thinkers as a counter ideology. Their scholarship represents the fullness of the Black intellectual tradition as outlined by the late Manning Marable. The three main points, Marable argued, demand the scholar to be *descriptive* of the lived experiences of Black people from their subjective truths, to be *corrective* of the theories and epistemologies that anchor notions of Black inferiority, and to be *prescriptive* in providing a “practical connection between scholarship and struggle.”¹⁹ All

¹⁸ Dumas, “Sitting next to White Children.”

¹⁹ Manning Marable, “Black Studies and the Racial Mountain,” *Souls* 2, no. 3 (January 2000): 17–36.

points converge under race vindicationism as an ideological engine of the liberatory project of Black studies, which in its most progressive form is “a critical body of scholarship [seeking] to dismantle powerful racist intellectual categories and White supremacy itself.”²⁰ Thus, I have collapsed Marable’s three-prong characterization of the Black intellectual tradition to describe the discursive work of race vindicationism in its efforts to supplant distortions of Black humanity.

Race Vindicationism: The Birth of a Black Intellectual Tradition

In 1857 the Caribbean born Edward W. Blyden published *A Vindication of the African Race*. This is one of the first instances where the phrase “vindication” is offered to describe the mission of scholars working to prove the case for the Black race.²¹ In this text, Blyden confronted a wide range of explanations used to justify notions of White supremacy. He debunked a number of alleged markers of Negro inferiority, from biblical justifications that projected Black people to be the cursed descendants of Ham to physiological arguments, where inferior traits and characteristics were attached to Black physical characteristics.²² Through Blyden, “vindicationism” emerged as an effort to reclaim the honor of the Black race by discrediting the false religious, physiological, and cultural arguments used to justify Black oppression. The historian William Wells Brown took up a similar charge in writing *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (1863), which he had hoped would “aid in vindicating the Negro’s character, and show that he is endowed with those intellectual and amiable qualities which adorn and dignify human nature.”²³

The American Negro Academy (ANA) was founded in 1896 by a group of leading Black scholars, including Du Bois, Alexander Crummell, and Paul Lawrence Dunbar. This organization embodied the intellectual project of race vindication at its core. Article four, section d, of its constitution stated the following: “The Academy shall endeavor with care and diligence... To aid, by publications, the dissemination of the truth and the vindication of the Negro race from vicious assaults.”²⁴ The ANA and the expansion of Black print culture during the late 19th century capture how “race

²⁰ Ibid, 19.

²¹ On March 7, 1829, John Russwurm published a column in the *Freedom’s Journal* entitled, “Our Vindication,” but it mainly focuses on his newfound support of colonization. Blyden’s use of the term is much more in alignment with the way it’s framed as an intellectual project; though Russwurm’s work as editor of the journal is consistent with the tradition as well. Another early usage of the term is by the Black emigrationist James Theodore Holly. He delivered a lecture at the Emigration Convention in 1856 entitled “A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race for Self-Government, and Civilized Progress” which was published the following year. He used the history of Haiti as a demonstration of the “capacity” of the race to be self-determined and advocated for Black Americans to emigrate to “Hayti”.

²² Edward Wilmot Blyden, *A Vindication of the African Race: Being a Brief Examination of the Arguments in Favor of African Inferiority* (Monrovia: Printed by G. Killian, 1857).

²³ William Wells Brown, *The Black Man : His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (New York : Thomas Hamilton ; Boston : R.F. Wallcut, 1863), 6.

²⁴ “Constitution of the American Negro Academy, 1897 | The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed,” accessed March 7, 2016, <http://www.Blackpast.org/primary/constitution-american-negro-academy-1897>; Alfred A. Moss Jr, *The American Negro Academy: Voice of the Talented Tenth* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1981).

vindication” was institutionalized by Black scholars via academic networks and the printing press; race vindication was an explicit objective of their intellectual mission.

St. Clair Drake (1990) described the intellectual practice of “race vindication” in his description of W.E.B. Du Bois and the ANA. He wrote, “Members [of the ANA] considered themselves to be the inheritors of the ‘vindicationist’ tradition, within which most educated Black men and women had spoken and written during the previous two centuries against apologists for slavery who attempted to justify the peculiar institution with the argument that negroes were an inferior animal-like breed of mankind unfit to be treated as equals by other people.” He also emphasized the role of restoring historical narratives of Black history, particularly the “role of Egypt as an advanced civilization,” thus discrediting notions of inherent Black irrationality and lack of civility.²⁵ Drake underscored how Black intellectuals forwarded historical narratives as evidence to discredit claims of Black inhumanity and thus a means of restoring honor and integrity to the race in the larger narrative of human history.

V.P. Franklin and Bettye Collier-Thomas have argued that “African American preachers, professors, publishers, and other highly educated professionals put their intellect and training in service to ‘the race’ to deconstruct the discursive structures erected in science, medicine, the law, and historical discourse to uphold the mental and cultural inferiority of African peoples.”²⁶ Franklin’s book *Living Our Lives, Telling Our Stories* details how race vindicationism manifests as an intellectual tradition in the genre of Black autobiography.²⁷ Through autobiography Black scholars have “used their life writings to tell the truth about themselves and their people, and expose the lies about the nature of European and American cultures and societies being spread internationally by White supremacists.”²⁸

Black intellectuals, since the 19th century, have developed and refined race vindicationism as a discursive political tactic through the Black counterpublic sphere. As an intellectual practice it can be traced throughout the Negro Conventions of the mid-19th century and the Black press.²⁹ Evidence suggests, however, that during the 20th century race vindicationism becomes more sophisticated in practice as African Americans gain greater access to education, learn more knowledge of African history, and utilize Black institutions, such as the ASNLH. Black teachers, in particular, found a more pointed use of race vindicationism through alternative curricula taught in their classrooms.

Black Teachers and Race Vindicationism

Richard Robert Wright, one of the founding members of the ANA, articulated his view on the role of race vindicationism in the professional responsibilities of Negro educators.

²⁵ St Clair Drake, *Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology, Vol. 2* (Los Angeles: Univ of California Center for Afro, 1991), xvii-xviii.

²⁶ V. P. Franklin and Bettye Collier-Thomas, “Biography, Race Vindication, and African American Intellectuals,” *The Journal of African American History* 87 (2002): 160.

²⁷ V. P. Franklin, *Living Our Stories, Telling Our Truths: Autobiography and the Making of the African-American Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²⁸ Franklin and Collier-Thomas, “Biography, Race Vindication, and African American Intellectuals,” 160.

²⁹ William M. Banks, *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996).

In 1894 (two years before ANA's founding) Wright penned an article titled "The Possibilities of the Negro Teacher," in which he urged Black teachers to begin doing research on the history of the race, creating new methods of instruction and publishing textbooks. He expressed gratitude for the efforts put forth by Northern Whites and missionaries up until that point, but argued that moving forward the leadership of Black education should "be under Negro teachers and by Negro methods and not without text books written by Negroes."³⁰

As an educator in the state of Georgia, Wright had long embodied the vindicationist tradition as a public intellectual. He forced himself to become familiar with much of the pseudo scientific research published in the 19th century that sought to rationalize "Black inferiority" and refuted it through essays and various intellectual projects.³¹ Wright was aware of the anxiety many Whites had regarding the progress made by African Americans during the years after slavery and how this "Negrophobia" was informing much of the published social science research. This was surely reflected in educational textbooks; therefore, Wright saw the need to create counter curricula through textbooks uncontaminated by White supremacist ideology. This leaning in the vindicationist tradition had less to do with being publicly confrontational on behalf of the race and more to do with safeguarding the minds of Black students against distorted representations of their race, equipping them with knowledge that challenged their subjugation in American society overall. Thus, while moral suasion and the politics of respectability sought to prove Black humanity in the eyes of Whites, race vindicationism was an intraracial practice focused on instilling honor and pride amongst Black people. It was an assertion of Black humanity through narratives that captured the fullness of human potential through the cultural achievements and experiences of Black people.

Adalaine Holten argued that Arturo Schomburg was a bibliophile and builder of Afrodiasporic archives, which demonstrates how the vindicationist tradition has functioned to do more than disprove notions of Black inferiority. Through these archives, and the larger body of Schomburg's research on "micro-narratives of Diasporic history," he worked to offer students an "outernational imaginary."³² Pushing beyond the controlling narrative of Blackness, Schomburg offered opportunities to conceive and construct liberatory epistemologies. His collection of histories rejected White supremacist claims that Blacks were inferior and outside of modernity.

In 1913 Schomburg penned an essay, "Racial Integrity: A Plea for the Establishment of a Chair of Negro History in Our Schools and Colleges, etc.," which called for educators to provide the "background for our future."³³ He aimed to allow Black students to conceptualize the historical achievements and experiences of oppression by Black people across the Diaspora as "the inspirational and intellectual foundation to liberate themselves from the continuing forces of White supremacy."³⁴ In

³⁰ Patton, "And the Truth Shall Make You Free."

³¹ Ibid, 24-25.

³² Adalaine Holton, "Decolonizing History: Arthur Schomburg's Afrodiasporic Archive," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (2007): 236.

³³ Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, *Racial Integrity: A Plea for the Establishment of a Chair of Negro History in Our Schools and Colleges, Etc.*, Negro Society for Historical Research [Yonkers, N.Y.] Occasional Paper ;no. 3 (New York: A. V. Bernier, 1913).

³⁴ Holton, "Decolonizing History," 222.

regards to education, Schomburg dismissively negated White supremacist recollections of history and sought to build new bodies of knowledge for Black students to learn from, knowledge that assumed Black humanity and centered their history. His employment of race vindicationism highlights how Disapora served as a useful tool in reclaiming the honor of Black humanity; this “outernational imaginary” featured similarly in the textbooks published by Black teachers.

Black schooling emerged as a counterpublic space, where Black educators and their students could imagine new possibilities for their futures that challenged their Jim Crow realities. Within this counterpublic sphere race vindication was an active pedagogical strategy used to provide Black students with an epistemological framework that centered Black cultural achievement and humanity. Textbooks published by Black teachers offer material evidence of the Black educational imagination and furthermore an opportunity to explore how race vindication operated.

‘The Many Creditable Deeds of the Negro’: Vindicationist Textbooks by Black Teachers (1891-1922)

Before analyzing the textbooks used for this study I have provided a brief sketch of two teachers that pre-date Woodson in publishing textbooks. Like Woodson, Edward Johnson and Leila Pendleton were all public school teachers who produced textbooks to challenge dominant curricula. Taken together, their texts represent an underexplored practice in the Black educational tradition.

Edward A. Johnson (1860-1944)

Edward A. Johnson has largely been remembered for his long career as a lawyer and politician in New York, where he died in 1944; however, prior to this he was an educator. Johnson was born in slavery in Raleigh, North Carolina on November 23, 1860. A free Black woman provided his early education and he eventually attended Washington High School. After graduating from Washington, Johnson went on to attend Atlanta University. It was in Atlanta that he began his career as an educator and eventually the principal at Mitchell Street School in 1883. After returning to his native city in 1885, Johnson became the principal of the Washington School and it was during his tenure here that he published his textbook. Johnson’s background as an educator of African American students motivated him to write *A School History of the Negro Race in America* in 1890. Black schools in North Carolina and Virginia formally adopted this textbook. According to Woodson’s reflections on the text in the *Journal of Negro History* after Johnson’s passing, “Although brief and elementary, this book had a wide circulation and did much good in inculcating an appreciation of the Negro.”³⁵

A School History is a textbook written in narrative form Black people in America. The thirty-five chapters in the text cover topics related to “the origins” of the race, the establishment of slavery in the new world, Black resistance to racialized oppression, Black participation in the various wars, and their political, social, and economic progress. Many of the themes explored in the text are supported by biographical information of various Black figures.

³⁵ Carter G. Woodson, “Edward Austin Johnson,” *The Journal of Negro History* 29, no. 4 (1944): 506.

In the preface to *A School History* Johnson wrote that his textbook was created for “the many thousand colored teachers in our country.” Based on his experience as a teacher, Johnson was sympathetic to the fact that Black educators and students had access to only mainstream curricula that negated the experiences of Black people. To this sentiment he wrote the following:

During my experience of eleven years as a teacher, I have often felt that the children of the race ought to study some work that would give them a little information on the many brave deeds and noble characters of their own race. I have often observed the sin of omission and commission on the part of White authors, most of whom seem to have written exclusively for White children, and studiously left out the many creditable deeds of the Negro...It must, indeed, be a stimulus to any people to be able to refer to their ancestors as distinguished in deeds of valor, and peculiarly so to the colored people.

As demonstrated by this passage, Johnson was keenly aware of how White supremacist ideals had shaped mainstream textbooks, and he offered his as an alternative—one that would vindicate the history and human achievements of the Black race so that the youth could see “their ancestors,” and by extension themselves, “as distinguished in deeds of valor.”

Leila Amos Pendleton (1860-?)

Leila Amos Pendleton was born and educated in Washington D.C. where she eventually went on to become a public school teacher. Her work as a community leader extended beyond the classroom; she served in numerous leadership positions in various women’s race organizations, and was the founder of the Alpha Charity Club of Anacostia and the Social Purity Club of Washington D.C. In 1912 the publishing house of Robert Lewis Pendleton, whom she had married in 1893, published her textbook, *A Narrative of the Negro*.³⁶ Pendleton wrote to Woodson in 1916, after the first issue of the *Journal of Negro History*, expressing her “supreme satisfaction” with both the journal and the ASNLH. In this same letter she enclosed a check, becoming one of the earliest life members of Woodson’s organization.³⁷

Pendleton’s two hundred and seventeen page textbook covers the span of Black history from ancient African civilizations through the period of enslavement in the U.S. and finally to the early 20th century. She even explores the experiences of Black people

³⁶ Frank Lincoln Mather, *Who’s Who of the Colored Race: A General Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of African Descent* (publisher not identified, 1915); Laurie Maffly-Kipp and Kathryn Lofton, *Women’s Work: An Anthology of African-American Women’s Historical Writings from Antebellum America to the Harlem Renaissance*, 1 edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, “Black Women Historians from the Late 19th Century to the Dawning of the Civil Rights Movement,” *The Journal of African American History* 89, no. 3 (2004): 241–61, doi:10.2307/4134077.

³⁷ Pendleton’s letter is reprinted in “How the Public Received the Journal of Negro History” in *JNH* 1, no. 2 (1916): 225-226

on an international level by interrogating colonialism in Africa. Pendleton's textbook appears on *The Crisis* magazine's recommended reading list for 10 years.³⁸

Similar to Johnson, Pendleton also made her political sentiments explicit in her writing. For example, in the first chapter of her textbook, Pendleton addresses her student audience with the following appeal, "There are some of us who feel that, pitifully small though it be, we have given the very best and done the very most it is possible for us to give and to do for the race, and we are looking to you, dear children, to perform the things which we, in our youth had hoped and planned. We beg that you will not fail us."³⁹ As an educator, Pendleton was committed to pressing towards a more just reality for African Americans and sought to inspire students through the historical narratives of Black achievement and culture to fight for social change. Therefore, in the orientation of these textbooks, as found in their preface and early chapters—these Black teachers exposed their professional commitments to vindicating the race. Both Johnson and Pendleton demonstrated this pedagogical objective.

Woodson's Deviations and Interventions

Woodson both reiterates and builds on the groundwork laid by the Black educators that published textbooks before him. His commitment to vindicationism is more discrete than Johnson and Pendleton, which is likely due to his academic training as a Harvard historian. In this regard, Woodson is in alignment with a larger cohort of scholars committed to writing for Black liberation through social science research. As Francille Rusan Wilson demonstrates in her study of early Black social scientists, Woodson was a part of a cadre of early 20th century scholars who used their research to uplift Black people socially and to challenge scientific racism.⁴⁰ Therefore while he had an explicit political agenda, he sought to craft his research and textbooks in a manner that met the standards of objectivity. Pero Dagbovie offers insight regarding this tension: "Woodson attempted to balance two, at times, conflicting ideologies: one, an openly radical worldview that critiqued White racism and African Americans faults and deficiencies, and two, the approach of an objective, at times conservative in terms of research methodologies and writing style, scholar and historian searching for 'the truth' about African American history."⁴¹ Nonetheless, vindicationism inevitably comes through in his tone and analysis of various historical events and presentation of biographies on various Black figures.

One of Woodson's mentees, Lorenzo Greene, referenced how the scholar "lacked objectivity" in his writing. According to Greene, Woodson believed that "history was a

³⁸ Jessie Fauset's review of Pendleton's book in "What To Read" section of *The Crisis* Aug. 1912; "A Selected List of Books" *The Crisis* Aug. 1914; "A Selected List of Books" *The Crisis* April 1922. Further discussion of Pendleton's textbooks can be found in Pero Dagbovie (2004), "Black Women Historians from the Later 19th Century to the Dawning of the Civil Rights Movement". *The Journal of African American History* 89(3): 249.

³⁹ Pendleton, *A Narrative of the Negro*, 6.

⁴⁰ Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

⁴¹ Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, "'Among the Vitalizing Tools of the Radical Intelligentsia, of Course the Most Crucial Was Words': Carter G. Woodson's 'The Case of the Negro' (1921)," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 3, no. 2 (2009): 88.

device to make the Negro proud of his origin... In other words, history was to give his people a cultural foundation on which to stand, to stimulate them to strive for a better future and ultimately to gain for the Negro equality of citizenship." Green offered that Woodson was not just concerned with presenting the facts, he had to "disseminate them in such a way, both by the oral and written words, so that they might win popular acceptance." In writing about Woodson's textbook in particular, *The Negro in Our History*, Green suggested to him that his tone came across as that of a preacher. Woodson simply replied, "My aim is to get my message across to the people."⁴²

Therefore, while the earlier texts by Johnson and Pendleton are much more frank in their political intentions, Woodson makes an obvious attempt to remain "objective." Furthermore, the content in his book is much more exhaustive and rigorously researched. This can be read as a result of both Woodson's academic training and a much wider availability of scholarship on African history as a result of a reinvigorated interest in the topic amongst Pan-Africanists. Another distinction in Woodson's textbook, when compared to those that precede it, is that he had a much more nuanced understanding of race and class which complicated a monolithic understanding of Blackness.

Major Themes In Black Teachers' Textbooks

The textbooks written by Johnson, Pendleton, and Woodson in the years of 1891, 1912, and 1922 respectively, demonstrate their commitment to speaking against the dominant narrative found in school curricula. As a professional class, these educators sought to vindicate the race by publishing textbooks that presented an historical inventory of Black life and culture that toppled White supremacist projections of Black sub-personhood.⁴³ In doing so these Black teachers labored to instigate the future strivings of their students to accept nothing less than the recognition of their full citizenship rights as human beings.

Race vindicationism manifested in multiple forms across these three textbooks, with the following themes most reoccurring: "Explicit Engagement with The Dominant Narrative," "Self-Determination," "Diasporic Citations," "Black Resilience," "Black Rationality," "Black Resistance," and "African Americans' Entitlement to U.S. Citizenship." While these themes can be analyzed separately for the ways these educators used them to vindicate the Negro race in the minds of their students, it is important to note that they often surfaced in relationship to one another. For example, during the coding process there were many instances where passages could be coded for both "self-determination" and "Black resistance" or "Citizenship" and "Black Rationality."

Explicit Engagement with the Dominant Narrative

Scholars who have worked to uncover the work of Black educational thinkers of the past have demonstrated how these scholars have resisted the dominant narratives of mainstream education.⁴⁴ Alana Murray has suggested that early African American

⁴² "Dr. Woodson As I Knew Him," 1976, Box 92, Lorenzo Johnston Green Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁴³ Mills, *The Racial Contract*.

⁴⁴ Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South*, Reprint edition (Princeton, NJ u.a.: Princeton University Press, 2010); LaGarrett J. King, Ryan M. Crowley, and Anthony L. Brown, "The Forgotten Legacy of Carter G. Woodson: Contributions to Multicultural Social Studies and African American

educators “challenged the dominant Eurocentric historical narrative with a different narrative, an alternative Black curriculum.”⁴⁵ While this is clearly the case with all three of these educators and their textbooks, their engagement with the master narrative is so vivid at times that it mimics the image of an audience member speaking back to the screen at a theater. Thus, I would like to underscore how these educators employed historical narratives in a way that directly objected to mainstream curricular portrayals of Black people to vindicate the race.

An explicit acknowledgment of the dominant narrative emerges across these texts when discussing the continent of Africa. Pendleton notes how the continent of Africa is often left out of the history of the world. However, after discussing the history of a number of ancient African civilizations (i.e. Egypt and Ethiopia) she notes, “Yet we learn from their story how important a part Africa played in the ancient times.”⁴⁶ Similarly, in challenging the idea of Black people coming from a history of barbarism, Johnson states, “The native African had then, and he has now, much respect for what we call law and justice. This fact is substantiated by the numerous large tribes existing, individuals of which grow to be very old, a thing that could not happen were there the wholesale brutalism which we are sometimes told exists.”⁴⁷ His acknowledgement of the narratives that “we are sometimes told” regarding the African continent was surely referencing the controlling narratives of Africa as “the dark continent” proliferated by Eurocentric history.

A major example of Woodson explicitly taking on the dominant narrative as an employment of vindicationism is his firm revisionist perspective on the period of Reconstruction. The portrayal of African Americans during the period of Reconstruction in the South was a major source of controversy in American history as evidenced by the contrasting portrayals in the 1915 film *Birth of a Nation* and Dubois’ *Black Reconstruction*.⁴⁸ Consistent with the popular American narrative that Reconstruction was a failure as a result of poorly qualified Black politicians, mainstream textbooks (especially those in the south) vilified Blacks as incapable of leadership. Harold O. Rugg, who was considered to be a progressive White historian, published a textbook in 1931, entitled *A History of American Government and Culture*, where he commented that emancipated Blacks were like “bewildered children” as they attempted to engage in politics—thus mocking their citizenship and intellectual capabilities.⁴⁹ He further uses a narrative of poorly qualified Black politicians as a means of balancing the story of the Ku Klux Klan:

History,” *The Social Studies* 101, no. 5 (August 23, 2010): 211–15; Carl Grant, Keffrelyn Brown, and Anthony L. Brown, *Black Intellectual Thought in Education: The Missing Traditions of Anna Julia Cooper, Carter G. Woodson, and Alain LeRoy Locke* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁴⁵ Alana D. Murray, “Countering the Master Narrative: The Development of the Alternative Black Curriculum in Social Studies, 1890-1940” (University of Maryland, 2012), 1.

⁴⁶ Pendleton, *A Narrative of the Negro*, 19.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ D. W. Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation*, Drama, History, War, (1915); W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (Simon and Schuster, 1935).

⁴⁹ LaGarrett J. King, Christopher Davis, and Anthony L. Brown, “African American History, Race and Textbooks: An Examination of the Works of Harold O. Rugg and Carter G. Woodson,” *Journal of Social Studies Research* 36, no. 4 (January 2012): 359–86.

The Force used by the Klan was sometimes brutal and wrong, but so were the things the carpetbaggers were doing. The latter were often corrupt, and their Negro tools were, with a few exceptions, illiterate and incapable of governing. Thus the White planters, deprived of other means of protection, attempted through secret organization to “fight fire with fire.”⁵⁰

Explicitly engaging these racist narratives about Black leadership Woodson wrote:

The charge that all Negro officers were illiterates, ignorant of the science of government, cannot be sustained. Some of them had undergone considerable training and had experienced sufficient mental development to be able to discharge their duties with honor... Whether or not the Negro was capable, whether he was honest, however, had little to do with the southern White man’s attitude toward the Negro office holders. To produce evidence that the Negroes lacked these essentials, the Whites well knew, would help them to justify themselves to the world for using such harsh measures to overthrow the new regime. But the Negro was unacceptable merely because he was Black, because he had not enjoyed the distinction of wringing his bread from the sweat of another’s brow.⁵¹

Thus, Woodson discredited the distorted narratives of Black people by informing his student-readers of the racial bias that underscored the unpopular opinion of Black elected politicians during the period of reconstruction.

These educators challenged the flattened narratives about Black people in the United States, even prior to enslavement. Narratives that painted Black life as simple, primitive, and uncultured supported a larger notion of Black sub-humanness. Johnson, Pendleton and Woodson employed biography, historical narratives, illustrations, and even statistical data to vindicate the Black race as important contributors to a larger legacy of human civilization. Take for instance the chart (Illustration 3.1) where Woodson complicated the image of Black people in American prior to 1861 because “few people” realized “the extent to which the free Negro figured in the population of this country prior to the Civil War.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Harold Ordway Rugg, *A History of American Government and Culture: America’s March toward Democracy* (Ginn and Company, 1931), 367-368.

⁵¹ Woodson, *The Negro in Our History*, 251-254.

⁵² *Ibid*, 124.

126 The Negro In Our History

Negro Population, 1790 to 1860

Census Year	Total	Free		Slave	Decennial Increase			
		Number	Per cent		Free	Slave	Free	Slave
1860....	4,441,830	488,070	11.0	3,953,760	53,575	749,447	12.3	23.4
1850....	3,638,808	434,495	11.9	3,204,313	48,202	716,958	12.5	28.8
1840....	2,873,648	386,293	13.4	2,487,355	66,694	478,312	20.9	23.8
1830....	2,328,642	319,599	13.7	2,009,043	85,965	471,021	36.8	30.6
1820....	1,771,656	233,634	13.2	1,538,022	47,188	346,660	25.3	29.1
1810....	1,377,808	186,446	13.5	1,191,362	78,011	297,760	71.9	33.3
1800....	1,002,037	108,435	10.8	893,602	48,908	195,921	82.2	28.1
1790....	1,757,181	59,557	7.9	697,624

Woodson complicates the narrative of free Black people even more when he states, “These free Negroes were not all on the same plane... There were freedmen in possession of a considerable amount of property, others who formed a lower class of mechanics and artisans, and finally those living with difficulty above pecuniary embarrassment.”⁵³ These educators were well aware of the presentations of Black life in the dominant narrative and they intentionally supplanted them with revisionist histories that attempted to provide more nuanced and wholistic portrayals of Black people. Furthermore, they identified areas of silence and/or studious omissions of Black people and offered their students more complete narratives about their history and culture.

Self-Determination

The theme of “Self Determination” emerged across the textbooks as a reoccurring articulation of race vindicationism—speaking back to a historical narrative that called into question African Americans’ ability to govern their own lives. As argued by V.P. Franklin, Black self-determination has been a cultural value at the core of racial consciousness for African Americans. He also points out how the objective of Black self-determination maintains a dialectical relationship with White supremacy. Ultimately, Black self-determination translates into “Black control over Black life” and has been sought after through strategic forms of resistance, of which education has been a central avenue.⁵⁴ These teachers presented other rich examples of Black people exerting self-determination, even when it was violently infringed upon by enslavement and racial oppression.

In *A School History*, Edward Johnson offered students the narrative of Bounts Fort as an heroic example of Black people’s desire to own their lives.

Negro refugees from Georgia fled into the everglades of Florida as a hiding-place during the war of the Revolution. In these swamps they remained for forty years successfully baffling all attempts to re-enslave them. Many of those who planned the escape at first were now dead, and their children had grown up to hate the lash and love liberty.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid, 127.

⁵⁴ V. P. Franklin and Mary Frances Berry, *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of African-American Resistance*, 2 Sub edition (Brooklyn, N.Y. : Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992), 6.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1890*, 48.

Johnson presented Bounts Fort as an example of Black people refusing to accept their position as slaves within the American social order. By fleeing to the everglades, these men and women were seeking to have self-autonomy. Echoing Franklin's contention that self-determination was a cultural value in the core of Black racial consciousness, Johnson emphasizes that these former slaves taught their children "that to die in the swamps with liberty was better than to feast as a bondman and a slave."⁵⁶

Woodson's *The Negro In Our History* also presents reflections on the history of maroon societies—which are explored at length in his textbook and are also cited by Pendleton. Woodson presents the maroon society of Palmares in Brazil as a vivid illustration of how self-determination manifested in the life and work of Black people despite violent attempts to suppress it. He writes:

The greatest enterprise of the Maroons, however, was exhibited not by any particular individual but rather by that of the little Negro Republic in Brazil, called Palmares... Because of the bad treatment of the Portuguese slaves, many of those imported from Guinea escaped to the forests, where they established villages called quilombos, the type to which Palmares... belonged. At one time it was reported to have a population of twenty thousand, with ten thousand fighting men. Palmares, the name also of the capital of the republic, was surrounded by wooden walls made of the tree trunks and entered by huge gates provided with facilities for wide surveillance... Palmares [eventually] developed into a sort of nation, uniting the desirable features of the republican and monarchial form of government, presided over by a chief executive called the Zombe, who ruled with absolute authority during his life.⁵⁷

In this passage Woodson presents Palmares as an example of Black self-determination. While his textbooks were meant to inspire students that lived during the time of Jim Crow segregation and disenfranchisement, Woodson offered these historical narratives as alternatives for Black life.

In *A Narrative of the Negro*, Leila Pendleton presented the history of Mound Bayou in Mississippi as evidence of Black people's ability to be self-determined and economically and socially organized as a collective. In her presentation of this history she intentionally destabilizes a dominant narrative that projected Black people to be ill equipped for leadership. She wrote:

In 1888 a handful of colored people under the leadership of Mr. Isaiah T. Montgomery, settled in the Yazoo Delta, Mississippi, and beginning to clear and cultivate the ground, started what has become known as the town of Mound Bayou. A Negro town, in the heart of the South, where the mayor, the council, and all the citizens are colored. Mound Bayou and similar settlements offer proof of the Negro's ability to govern himself.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Woodson, *The Negro in Our History*, 31.

⁵⁸ Pendleton, *A Narrative of the Negro*, 181.

White supremacist ideology deemed Black people to be a race outside of rational thinking and moral grounding, and therefore in need of direction and rule by a more capable class of people, White people. Based on the official knowledge systems of America the White race proved to have built the greatest civilizations, to possess superior moral and intellectual fiber and were entitled, obligated even, to rule over the Negro race.⁵⁹ In vindicationist fashion, Johnson, Pendleton, and Woodson offered various historical examples of Black people's ability to be self determined, which both filled in historical absences and dismissed stereotypical representations of their inability to lead and rule over their own lives and demonstrate prudent leadership.

Diasporic Citations to Vindicate the Race

It is important to note that while all three of these educators (Johnson, Pendleton, and Woodson) were teachers in American public schools and working to educate African American youth, the narratives they rely upon to vindicate the race are beyond national in scope. The orientation of these textbooks catered to African American students; however, they used Diasporic citations of Black life and achievements to inspire and construct new possibilities for Black student identities. This "outernational imaginary" presented through these textbooks supported Black students in conceptualizing the historical achievements and experiences of oppression by Black people across the African Diaspora as "the inspirational and intellectual foundation to liberate themselves from the continuing forces of White supremacy."⁶⁰

In constructing racial histories that transcended a national identity, African American students were offered a more expansive Black imaginary that would press the boundaries of their immediate realities. These educators dismissed White supremacist recollections of history and sought to build new bodies of knowledge for Black students to learn from, knowledge that assumed Black humanity and presented them as a self-determined people. The previous example of the Brazilian maroon community of Palmares is one example of many. All three of these teachers used the historical achievements of Blacks throughout the Diaspora to vindicate the race. Here achievement can be understood as both tangible and nontangible examples of Black intellect and ability to reason and create. These citations of Black creation and reasoning, offered proof that they could be self-determined human beings that could enhance the quality of life on their own terms.

Resilience

In speaking back to a dominant narrative of Black deficit that loomed in the popular American culture and supported by history textbooks that overlooked Black achievement, vindicationist textbooks presented a narrative of resilience. All three of these educators stressed Black people's ability to persevere despite subjugation. They presented extraordinary examples of Black people accomplishing things and overcoming challenges that seemed insurmountable. By showcasing the resiliency of Black people globally,

⁵⁹ Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (ASNLH, 2008); Lawrence D. Reddick, "Racial Attitudes in American History Textbooks of the South," *The Journal of Negro History* 19, no. 3 (1934): 225–65; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*.

⁶⁰ Holton, "Decolonizing History," 222.

these teachers endeavored to highlight to their students the immense possibilities of what they could achieve despite the odds set against them in society. These narratives vindicated the race by shattering the single story of Black failure in official curricula that presented Africa as outside of history and African Americans as perpetually failing and unworthy of mention.

According to Johnson, while the Negro was stolen from his home of origin and forced into “strait circumstances as slaves in America,”⁶¹ they adapted to the conditions and sought opportunities to better themselves and never gave up. He states, “Every sort of hindrance has been thrown in his way, but he is overcoming them all.”⁶² Speaking specifically to the Jim Crow laws, and Black codes of the late 19th century, Johnson writes, “By the rigid laws of custom, he has continuously lost golden opportunities to forge his fortune; yet he has prospered in spite of this, and it bespeaks for him a superior manhood.”⁶³ Thus, Johnson weaves a narrative of Black people defeating the odds as a consistent trend in their history and details that this speaks to the strong character of their race.

Throughout the textbooks these educators provide historical accounts that demonstrate a legacy of resilience. Pendleton’s recounting of the Haitian Revolution and Woodson’s discussion of enslaved men and women learning to read and write in secrecy echoes resiliency. Writing about Haiti Pendleton offers, “On this island Europeans built the first city and erected the first Christian church in the New World; here Negro slaves struck the first blow for freedom and here was founded the first Negro Republic.”⁶⁴ In presenting Haiti as the first successful slave insurrection, on the very land where European contact with the West was first established, she positions it as a challenge to European/White supremacy. The storyline of former slaves rebelling and establishing their own republic offers a vindicating narrative, but Pendleton’s presentation of this historical event also emphasizes its extraordinary nature. A 1912 book review of *A Narrative* by Jessie Fauset in *The Crisis* magazine points to Pendleton’s portrayal of Black resilience. She states, “When one thinks of the fearful odds in slavery times against the Black man who dared to try to lift his head, and then remembers that these people dared—there is nothing finer in all history. And these people are ours, not the borrowed types of a hostile race whose members hold us persistently aloof”⁶⁵

Consistent with Johnson and Pendleton, Woodson presents the narrative of Black resilience through the stories of Black men and women learning to read and write despite major barriers set against them. This section is titled, “Stealing Learning.” He writes, “How some of these slaves learned in spite of opposition makes a beautiful story. Knowing the value of learning as a means of escape and having longing for it, too, because it was forbidden, many slaves continued their education under adverse circumstances.”⁶⁶ These educators collectively demonstrated a commitment to

⁶¹ Johnson, *A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1890*, 142.

⁶² *Ibid*, 196.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 145.

⁶⁴ Pendleton, *A Narrative of the Negro*, 54.

⁶⁵ Jessie Fauset’s review of Pendleton’s book in “What To Read” section of *The Crisis* (Aug. 1912): 183.

⁶⁶ Woodson, *The Negro in Our History*, 108.

supplanting the dominant narrative of Black failure with one that presented Black achievement in the face of extreme adversity.

Black Rationality

The intelligence of Black people has been questioned historically, and is intimately tied to the construction of White supremacy overall. Furthermore, the eugenics movement in the United States starting in the 1880s, which paralleled the Progressive Era, had gained traction when these Black educators were publishing their textbooks. Educational scholars have demonstrated how the racist constructions of Blackness produced from this pseudo scientific research directly influenced White educational leaders, particularly those that developed curricula.⁶⁷ Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Johnson, Pendleton, and Woodson all vindicated the Black race by showing the capacity to reason on equal terms as any other group.

All three of these educators use biography as a means of demonstrating the mental capacity of Black people. The narratives of Phillis Wheatley and Benjamin Banneker (among others) are used across all three texts as evidence of Black people’s intellectual capabilities. To underscore African Americans intelligence and contributions to this country in one year alone, Pendleton writes, “In 1770, the year in which Phillis Wheatley’s poems were first published and Benjamin Banneker was making his clock, the Negro race gave to the cause of American freedom the first martyr—Crispus Attucks.”⁶⁸ Johnson reflected on Frederick Douglass, another historical figure used across the texts, as “a conspicuous representative of the talents and capabilities possessed by the colored race.”⁶⁹ In this way, they offered the biographies and extraordinary achievements of men like Douglass and Banneker, and women like Wheatley as “a living, breathing, convincing argument against the claim that the Negro’s intellectual capacities fit him only for slavery.”⁷⁰

Beyond biography, Woodson also offered scientific inventions and the cultural productions of the race as vindicating evidence of their intellectual abilities and representations of sound reason. This is surely the case with his treatment of African proverbs in a chapter entitled, “The Negro in Africa.” Woodson presented the following:

In art and architecture they had advanced far beyond the primitive stage, in literature their achievements attained the rank of the world’s best classics in the *Tarik e Soudan*, and in religion and morals most of them kept abreast with the times...The African mind exhibited during these years evidences of a philosophy not to be despised...The African realized that “the lack of knowledge is darker than night,” that “an ignorant man is a slave,” and that...Adhering to a high standard of morals, the African taught the youth that "there is no medicine for hate" and that "he who

⁶⁷ William Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001); King, Davis, and Brown, “African American History, Race and Textbooks.”

⁶⁸ Pendleton, *A Narrative of the Negro*, 98.

⁶⁹ Johnson, *A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1890*, 84.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

bears malice is a heathen; he who injures another brings injury to himself."
 ... To teach politeness he asserted that "bowing to a dwarf will not prevent
 your standing erect again." ... The proverbs "When the fox dies, fowls do
 not mourn," and "He who goes with a wolf will learn to howl," exhibit
 more than ordinary mental development.⁷¹

Through the presentation of various cultural achievements of Black people on the continent of Africa, Woodson offers his student-readers an opportunity to explore a historical narrative of Black achievements that challenges the myth of "The Dark Continent." To represent Black people as rational thinkers he gave an historical inventory of African proverbial wisdom; thus, demonstrating, as Woodson put it, "more than ordinary mental development."

Black Resistance

The portrayal of slavery in American textbooks during the period of Jim Crow relied upon imagery of Black people as happy slaves who were better off working for their White masters because they came from a savage homeland.⁷² In analyzing the illustrations of Black people during slavery found across textbooks adopted in the American South, Lawrence Reddick (1934) concluded the following: "The picture of slavery which the average pupil in these sixteen States receives approximates that of docile Negroes with strong backs imported from Africa....The life of the slave was simple and course but was not hard, for the Negroes were good natured and sang songs during and after their work."⁷³ Johnson, Pendleton and Woodson recognized the narrow portrayal of Black life during slavery in the dominant narrative. Taking up this elision, they offered a strong legacy of Black resistance and painted a portrait of consistent rebellion. This is evidenced in all of their treatments of the Haitian Revolution, but also by depictions of maroonage, slave insurrections, runs-aways, and the Underground Railroad.

In referencing Black life in the early 18th century, which is often written about a time when slavery was in its "milder form," both Johnson and Woodson present "The Riot of 1712." Johnson states, "The Riot of 1712 shows the feeling between the master and servant at the time. The Negro population being excluded from schools, not allowed to own land, even when free, and forbidden to 'strike a Christian or a Jew' in self-defense, and their testimony excluded from the courts, arose in arms and with the torch; houses were burned, and many Whites killed, before the militia suppressed them."⁷⁴ In a chapter of *The Negro in Our History*, "Slavery in its Mild Form," Woodson has a section on "Early Negro Insurrections" where he documents a consistent thread of revolts by Blacks in the United States throughout the 18th century.

In presenting the stories of slaves that led insurrections, these educators exposed courageous heroes justified in their actions. For Johnson, Nat Turner was someone that "devoted himself to the study of the scriptures and the condition of his people." He was a

⁷¹ Woodson, *The Negro in Our History*, 12-14.

⁷² Reddick, "Racial Attitudes in American History Textbooks of the South"; King, Davis, and Brown, "African American History, Race and Textbooks."

⁷³ Reddick, "Racial Attitudes in American History Textbooks of the South," 237.

⁷⁴ Johnson, *A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1890*, 24.

hero that “struck for freedom” and “the day of [his] execution, strange to say, as Nat had prophesied, was one of stormy and gloomy aspect, with terrible thunder, rain and lightning. Nat kept up his courage to the last, and his neck in the noose, not a muscle quivered or a groan was uttered. He was undoubtedly a wonderful character.”⁷⁵ These authors also underscore how rebellions were communal efforts and organized. Take for example Johnson’s presentation of the maroon societies off the coastal plain region of Virginia: “The Dismal Swamp colony continued from generation to generation, defying and outwitting the slave-owners right in the midst of one of the strongest slave-holding communities in the South.”⁷⁶

Similar to Johnson’s portrayal of Nat Turner, for Pendleton, Toussaint L’Ouverture, leader of the Haitian Revolution, was “a true patriot.”⁷⁷ Further relying on diasporic citations of Black resistance to vindicate the race’s commitment to freedom she also recalls the Surinamese maroon communities in the 18th century who rebelled against their Dutch oppressors. She wrote, “In 1773 troops were brought over from Holland but were unable to subdue the Negros, who added to their dauntless courage a perfect knowledge of the country, and finally the colonists gave up the contest. The Maroons formed an independent republic with laws and customs of their own.”⁷⁸

Building on the tradition presented by Johnson and Pendleton, Woodson read slave insurrections in the diaspora as intertwined. Similar to contemporary scholarship that has analyzed the influence of Haitian refugees on slave rebellions in the United States, Woodson writes the following: “Negroes endeavored to secure relief by refreshing the tree of liberty with the blood of their oppressors. The chief source of these uprisings came from refugees brought to this country from Santo Domingo in 1793 and from certain free Negroes encouraged to extend a helping hand to their enslaved brethren.”⁷⁹

In directly challenging the dominant portrayals of enslaved Black people as docile in textbooks used across the South, these Black teachers gave a vindicating narrative of men and women who stood up for themselves and directly challenged their oppressors. These narratives were not apologetic in presenting violent uprisings which speaks to the ways Black scholars have had to develop alternative standards and analysis compared to mainstream scholarship. Charles H. Wesley argued that the way in which Black radical leaders came to be remembered as heroes by Black historical scholars was heavily influenced by the intellectual traditions budding during the Negro convention movements of the 19th century. Wesley writes, “These addresses [at negro conventions, etc.] were evidences of the beginnings of the creation of an heroic tradition for Negro Americans. These heroes of freedom had been denounced by most White Americans as demented and deluded, but now they were to be, by new standards, bold Negro Americans, who were heroes of history.”⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Ibid, 90-92.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 95.

⁷⁷ Pendleton, *A Narrative of the Negro*, 63.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 65.

⁷⁹ Julius Sherrard Scott, *The Common Winds: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution* (Univ. Microfilms International, 1986); Woodson, *The Negro in Our History*, 92.

⁸⁰ Charles H. Wesley, “Creating and Maintaining an Historical Tradition,” *The Journal of Negro History* 49, no. 1 (1964): 21.

In their textbooks, these educators are intentional not to present the narrative of Black rebellion as sparse, but one that can be seen as a consistent thread in Black life during enslavement. Furthermore, resistance was not isolated to Black people in one particular place or region. These educators cite examples of rebellion from the Northern and Southern regions of the United States as well as a transnational phenomenon.

African Americans' Entitlement to U.S. Citizenship

The practice of publishing textbooks emerges at a time when Black people were wrestling not only with the vestiges of slavery, but also the immediate backlash of the Reconstruction period. The Compromise of 1877 welcomed the period in African American history known as “the nadir,” which was characterized by extreme poverty, chronic racial violence, and the shaving away of recently gained citizenship rights. While the 15th amendment allowed African American men to engage in the political landscape of the South during the period of Reconstruction, the establishment of Black codes and the removal of federal troops from the South overturned this progress. Thus, the political agency that had been gained after emancipation was lost and African Americans would be engaged in a battle to reclaim it for decades to come. Determined to reclaim the 15th amendment for African Americans was a central trope in these textbooks as a proclamation of valid citizenship and entitlement to equal rights. These educators employed historical recounts of Black patriotism during wartime and Black labor as the driving force of America’s wealth to vindicate the race as entitled to freedom and citizenship.

Johnson writes, “It was the honest and faithful toil of the Negro that turned the richness of Georgia’s soil into English gold, built cities and created large estates, gilded mansions furnished with gold and silver plates.”⁸¹ Elaborating on this point in a later section of his textbook he offers: “They were not to feed, clothe, and protect themselves in a government whose treasury they had enriched with two centuries and a half of unrequited labor, and a country whose laws they must obey but could not read.”⁸² In this way Johnson presents the labor of enslaved Black people, their sweat equity, as indispensable to the development and maintenance of the United States and its economy.

All these educators emphasized the roles Blacks played in the various American wars as evidence of their proven loyalty and patriotism to America—Crispus Attucks being the first marker of this legacy. In the words of Johnson, “Though a runaway slave, his [Attuck’s] patriotism was so deep that he . . . sacrificed his life *first* on the altar of American Liberty.”⁸³ Pendleton also presents Attucks as the “first martyr” of American freedom.⁸⁴

All three of these textbooks spend an extensive amount of attention on Black soldiers in the American wars, which challenged the complete omission of African American soldiers in mainstream American textbooks. Lawrence Reddick’s study published in 1933 on textbooks in the South concluded that students “will find no references to American Negroes as soldiers or sailors; if he reads the actual accounts of the wars and battles as presented, he will be extremely fortunate if his search should be

⁸¹ Johnson, *A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1890*, 47.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 144.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁸⁴ Pendleton, *A Narrative of the Negro*, 98.

rewarded with one sentence.”⁸⁵ Dismissing this popular omission of Black soldiers, Johnson, Pendleton and Woodson’s textbooks are replete with images and profiles of notable Black soldiers and the stories of major battles in which African Americans played central roles. For example, Pendleton writes, “Nearly two hundred thousand Negro soldiers, including a number of officers, fought during the Civil War; they took part in scores of battles and always distinguished themselves for bravery.” She goes on to present a “resume of the American Negro as a warrior” where she begins with Attucks and lists major accounts of Black soldiers from the American Revolution throughout the Civil War.⁸⁶

The following passage by Woodson demonstrates his consistency with his predecessors who sought to embrace Black Americans entitlement to equal citizenship. By presenting the rebuttal by free Blacks to the American Colonization society and other attempts to have them immigrate to colonies outside of the US, such as Liberia or Haiti, Woodson offers a notion of Black patriotism whereby free Blacks demanded recognition of their citizenship.

They claimed this country as their native land because their ancestors were the first successful cultivators of its soil. They felt themselves entitled to participation in the blessing of the soil which their blood and sweat had moistened. Moreover, they were determined never to separate themselves from the slave population of this country as they were brothers by ties of consanguinity, of suffering and of wrongs.⁸⁷

Collectively, these presentations of Black labor and the sacrifice on the part of Black soldiers constructed a narrative that challenged the stunting of African Americans’ (particularly Black men’s) ability to exercise their 15th Amendment right. In short, these educators were offering to Black students, that their citizenship and entitlement to complete freedom was bought and paid for by those that came before them. This perspective on Black citizenship is embodied by Johnson’s language when he addresses his student-readers as follows: “Let us now study some of the efforts of the Negroes in helping to achieve this citizenship, after which we shall see how well they deserved to be citizens.”⁸⁸

As educators, the authors of these textbooks felt the need to offer vindicationist curriculums for their students to construct Black identities that were not confined by the limitations imposed by their Jim Crow reality. The historical inventory of Black resilience, intellect, and cultural achievements on all fronts and across geographic locations were offered as *identity resources* for Black students to imagine new possibilities for their collective futures.⁸⁹ Thus, these textbooks were crafted as material resources to aid teachers pedagogically in meeting the developmental needs of Black

⁸⁵ Reddick, “Racial Attitudes in American History Textbooks of the South,” 261.

⁸⁶ Pendleton, *A Narrative of the Negro*, 165.

⁸⁷ Woodson, *The Negro in Our History*, 161.

⁸⁸ Johnson, *A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1890*, 102.

⁸⁹ For more discussion on identity resources see Na’ilah Nasir, *Racialized Identities: Race and Achievement among African American Youth* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011).

students as they constructed their identities in a racially antagonistic society.

These teachers were well aware that the dominant curricula denied the cultural, political and economic presence of Black people, and furthermore that they rendered Black oppression invisible. They sought to address these voids by supplanting the narratives of Black life presented in White published textbooks, where Black oppression was nonexistent, and instead offer an accurate accounting of Black struggle to their students who were undeniably impacted by it.

In arguing that these textbooks articulated Black oppression as an endemic feature in the United States, I in no way mean to state that this was the only objective to the project. These textbooks were not written solely to call attention to White supremacy. While it was a central feature, it should not detract from the fact that these teachers strongly emphasized Black peoples cultural development despite the circumstances of their oppression. This dual engagement, with Black oppression and Black achievement, underscores the liberatory project inherent in these textbooks. They offered students a new engagement with the past in order to promote a different future. Through these textbooks, these educators were saying more than ‘you need to know this history’ but equally significant, ‘you are a part of this history.’ As Pendleton stated, “We are looking to you, dear children, to perform the things which we, in our youth had hoped and planned.” These teachers worked to vindicate the humanity of Black people in the minds of their students and reassure them that they had the capacity to change their reality, which was bound by oppression. In this way Black liberation was the ultimate objective of their educational mission.

The Business Behind the Books

All three of these textbooks were self-published, or published by an independent Black publishing house, which is an important distinctive feature. This further extends the narrative of Black educators creating alternative curriculums outside of the confines of mainstream American education.⁹⁰ Not only were these educators creating alternative curriculums that vindicated the race against wide spread societal claims of Black inferiority, but they also relied on self-sustaining Black institutions as a channel to make their impact. Johnson’s textbook was published by his own printing press, Pendleton’s husband was an independent publisher and by the time Woodson penned his textbooks he had created the infrastructure for an autonomous Black intellectual universe. Not only was he able to publish the *The Negro in Our History* through the Associated Publishers, Inc., but the international reach of the ASNLH offered a broad network, largely made up of Black educators and intellectuals to distribute his textbook. In this way, Woodson not only took up this legacy of textbook publishing embodied by Johnson and Pendleton, but he also expanded its impact.

While the ASNLH was still a relatively new organization by the early 1920s the work that the organization set out to do was quite timely given the cultural turn in Black America, particularly the Harlem Renaissance. This made for a ripe environment to expand the work of celebrating and researching about Black life and history as a valid intellectual area of study. The idea had taken hold in many Black communities by the 1930s, particularly with the celebration of Negro History Week, which Woodson started

⁹⁰ Murray, “Countering the Master Narrative”; Grant, Brown, and Brown, *Black Intellectual Thought in Education*.

in 1926; however, the dissemination of his textbooks became much more successful once he approved a book selling campaign across state lines by agents that were hired out by the ASNLH. Prior to this, a large inventory of his textbooks had been rotting away from mildew in the basement of Woodson's office.⁹¹ Lorenzo Greene, a mentee of Woodson's, was the proponent of this idea and the one that led the charge.⁹²

Woodson's professional relationship with Black teachers and their organizations also provided a critical venue to spread the cause of curriculum reform and opportunities to offer his textbooks as alternatives to the racist textbooks adopted across the U.S. Thelma Perry's study on the history of the American Teachers Association (ATA) has an entire chapter dedicated to the study of Negro History, most of which talks specifically about Woodson and the work of his organization.⁹³ Letters from the leadership of the ATA to various state educational representatives demonstrate their advocacy for the adoption of Woodson's textbook for their schools.⁹⁴ Addressing the body of Black teachers assembled at the ATA's national meeting at Tuskegee Institute in 1930, Woodson stated, "It is up to you to be up and doing and see that Negro children study Negro history in the schools. See that these books are put into the schools so that they may not forget what the Negro has accomplished."⁹⁵ Thus, the popularity of Woodson's textbooks, and later the *Negro History Bulletin*, in Black schools was a result of the infrastructure he created to support his vision of reforming the educational experiences of Black people. Additionally, the social currency that Woodson maintained in the professional networks of Black teachers by the time his textbooks were released also created fruitful opportunities for their distribution.

“Three Steps in Negro History”: Woodson's Elementary, High School, and Advanced Textbooks

While the previous analysis only engaged Woodson's first, and most popular textbook, *The Negro In Our History*, this section offers an overview of the breadth of his multiple textbooks. Woodson, as a pioneer in the early Black history movement, labored to transform the educational system, and particularly the way Black students learned about the history of their race, in relationship to the world around them. He did this by developing textbooks for students of all ages. *The Negro In Our History* went through nine editions between 1922 and Woodson's unexpected death in 1950; however, he published a number of other textbooks and supplemental texts in between that time. This demonstrates the pedagogical orientation of Woodson's scholarship and expands the popular image of him as primarily an historian.

Woodson's adaptation of *The Negro in Our History* into *Negro Makers of History* (1928) sheds light on his commitment to constructing curriculums to meet the needs of African American students at all ages. *The Negro In Our History* would remain his most

⁹¹ Lorenzo J. Greene, *Selling Black History for Carter G. Woodson: A Diary, 1930-1933*, ed. Arvarh E. Strickland (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1996).

⁹² *Ibid.*; Pero Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁹³ Thelma Perry, *The History of the American Teachers Association* (National Education Association, 1975), 197.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

exhaustive textbook; nevertheless, it generally served as an advanced high school, college level, or reference text for educators themselves. After the 4th edition of this text, in 1927, Woodson began crafting a textbook for elementary students, *Negro Makers of History*. His desk copy of *The Negro In Our History* (4th edition), found in his personal library, is filled with handwritten marginal edits where one can track Woodson's process of adapting the historical narrative of African American people to the capacity of a young child.⁹⁶ In advertising this elementary level textbook, Woodson notes that the book is "told in the language of children of the sixth and seventh grades" and that it was the "first pedagogic effort of this sort."⁹⁷ The goal of this text was to "facilitate the teacher's task of preparing children to play their part creditably in [the] new age." Even in elementary school Woodson felt it necessary to "hold up before them the examples of their own people, who have done things worth while."⁹⁸ The textbook also includes questions for class discussions and assignments at the end of each chapter as well as lists of recommended readings to aid the teachers in building comprehensive and effective lesson plans. Twenty years after the publication of *Negro Makers in History*, Woodson would suggest that this was his most popular text stating that it had sold more than 40,000 copies.⁹⁹

In 1928 Woodson released an additional illustrated textbooks for the elementary school audience entitled, *African Myths and Proverbs*. This textbook was Woodson's pedagogical assertion that the Negro race had a rich culture prior to enslavement, and that Black children should learn about this part of their heritage and take pride in it. This book was advertised as "a collection of interesting African Folk Tales adapted to the capacity of children of the second and third grades."¹⁰⁰ This text falls in line with Woodson's efforts to challenge the narrative that Black people were a race without culture. He supported the work of scholars such as Lorenzo Turner and Melville Herskovitz, who contended that there were retained aspects of African cultures that enslaved populations adapted while in the United States.¹⁰¹

During the time that *African Myths and Proverbs* was published, Woodson had been facilitating the study of various projects on "Negro folklore." For example, in the late 1920s the ASNLH had been financially supporting an ethnographic project, conducted by Zora Neale Hurston, on a Black community near Mobile Alabama who had arrived there in 1859 as enslaved Africans.¹⁰² Woodson further reinforced his position on

⁹⁶ Randall K. Burkett, Pellom McDaniels, and Tiffany Gleason, *The Mind of Carter G. Woodson as Reflected in the Books He Owned, Read, & Published: A Catalog of the Library of Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History* (Emory University, 2006).

⁹⁷ Carter G. Woodson, "Back Matter - Two Valuable School Books Now Available," *The Journal of Negro History* 16, no. 1 (1931).

⁹⁸ Carter Godwin Woodson, *Negro Makers of History*, (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1928), iii.

⁹⁹ Al Sweeney, "Dr. Carter G. Woodson, 72, Has Written 19 Books, Published 64 Others; Hopes Day Will Come When There'll be No Need for Negro History Week..." *The Afro Magazine* (1948): 3, excerpt in Box 370, folder 1 of Claude Burnett Papers (Chicago History Museum).

¹⁰⁰ Woodson, "Back Matter - Two Valuable School Books Now Available."

¹⁰¹ An extended discussion of Woodson's conceptualization of Black cultural suppression and its relationship to White supremacy is featured in chapter 2, "The Missed Education of the Negro."

¹⁰² Carter G. Woodson, "The Annual Report of the Director," *The Journal of Negro History* 12,

Black culture in a chapter entitled, “Negro Art Appreciated” in *Negro Makers of History*. He wrote, “The customary fashion of looking upon the Negro as an inferior and treating him as a sort of half-human animal has prevented the public from understanding his possibilities and achievement.” Woodson offered that enslaved Africans were forced to suppress “the promptings of their own native religious instinct and [cease] to give free exercise to their imagination.” He goes on to caution readers, “All that the Negro accomplished in Africa was not lost.” Suggesting that African retentions had informed Black American culture he states, “It tended to revive in the slave on the American plantation. It appeared in the tales, proverbs, and riddles of the plantation Negroes. The tribal chants of Africa paved the way for the spirituals, the religious expression of the slave.”¹⁰³ As evident in the dialogue between *Negro Makers of History* and *African Myths and Proverbs*, Woodson offered West African folklore as a sophisticated cultural legacy that can be traced through the development of Black Americans’ culture as well.

The Story of the Negro Retold was published in 1935 as the intermediate textbook between *Negro Makers of History* and *The Negro In Our History*. In the preface to the text Woodson presents it as “the second step in the series of three historical works demanded by the schools engaged in the teaching of the background of the American Negro.” This textbook was published just three years after Woodson’s controversial text *The Miseducation of the Negro*, and was sure to be held to intense scrutiny. One review in the *Journal of Negro Education* by D.A. Wilkerson (1936) offers that it lacked “basic sociological interpretation” which was a criticism “readily applicable to most history textbooks.”¹⁰⁴ Additionally, Wilkerson shared that, “Such scattered expressions as these [i.e. ‘atrocities in the congo’, ‘natives debased’, ‘spread of race hate’, ‘traducers of the race’], together with the evident pro-Negro (at times, almost anti-White) bias which pervades the volume, might well cause an impartial reader to question the [author’s] sincerity” as an objective scholar. Wilkerson nonetheless offers that, “this text is far more readily adaptable to secondary instruction than either of its predecessors” and that it would “assume a prominent role among the few existing recent works suitable for high school use.”¹⁰⁵ Some major strengths of this textbook, noted by both Wilkerson and E. Delorus Preston (1936), who also reviewed the text, was that it was “replete with illustrations” and offered teachers useful resources through project questions, extended bibliographies, and source materials in the appendix.¹⁰⁶

Woodson’s strong critique of the U.S. educational curricula, found in *The Miseducation of the Negro*, certainly made its way into *The Story of the Negro Retold*. Preston echoes this observation when he wrote, “With regard to the school, [Woodson]

no. 4 (1927): 570-571. The ASNLH supported “Miss Zora Neale Hurston collecting Negro folklore in Florida...and a similar study of Plateau or the negro settlement just outside of Mobile which sprang from landing there in 1859 the last cargo of slaves brought from Africa to the United States.” More discussion of Woodson’s support of research on African retentions provided in chapter 3.

¹⁰³ Woodson, *Negro Makers of History*, 346-347.

¹⁰⁴ D. A. Wilkerson, “A High School Text for Negro History,” ed. Carter G. Woodson, *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 4 (1936): 626–29.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 628.

¹⁰⁶ E. Delorus Preston, review of *Review of The Story of the Negro Retold*, by Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Journal of Negro History* 21, no. 1 (1936): 76–78, doi:10.2307/2714551.

says that the Negro is trained away from his people. He has not studied their background and his training has been in the education and history of other people.”¹⁰⁷

Charting the Reach of Woodson’s Textbooks

Widely cast advertising campaigns through the Black press, educational networks, the popularity of Negro History Week, and “house to house agents” introduced Woodson’s textbooks to schools and communities across the nation. By 1927 when the 4th edition of *The Negro In Our History* was released, it was being used by over 100 schools. A pamphlet advertising this textbook was circulated in 1927 by the Associated Publishers, listing schools, by state, that had adopted it as a part of its curriculum. The two middle pages of the pamphlet listed a total of 100 secondary, training, and norming schools in addition to colleges and universities. The locations included: Alabama, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.¹⁰⁸ In 1931 Woodson reported through the *Baltimore AfroAmerican* the following: “*Negro In Our History* Soon to Have Fifth Edition. Associated Publishers Sold Assortment of 10, 000 Volumes Last Year.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, Woodson’s counter-educational program was wide reaching and being taken up by Black educators across the country, particularly in the South where African American communities were densely populated.

In 1931 the ASNLH developed a study to evaluate the impact it had been making in schools and communities across the country.¹¹⁰ Through questionnaires, communication with educational leaders of schools around the country, campus visits, and course catalogues they sought to capture the impact of the ASNLH, its publications, and Negro History Week. Dr. Thomas L. Dabney produced the results of the study in a report entitled, “The Study of the Negro,” which the *Journal of Negro History* published in 1934.¹¹¹

Of the one hundred and seventy-four Black public high schools contacted, fifty of them (or 28.7%) reported that they offered courses on Negro History. While the schools contacted spanned a total of 21 states, the results showed that in 1931 Negro History courses were being offered in 16 of them, 14 being Southern states. The list of states offering courses included the following: Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri. While Washington D.C. was also sampled

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Associated Publishers. *The Negro In Our History* advertisement, ca. 1927. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

¹⁰⁹ Woodson, “House to House Agents Help to Popularize Books,” in *Baltimore AfroAmerican* May 2, 1931, p7

¹¹⁰ C. G. Woodson, “Annual Report of the Director,” *The Journal of Negro History* 17, no. 4 (1932): 394.

¹¹¹ Thomas L. Dabney, “The Study of the Negro,” *The Journal of Negro History* 19, no. 3 (1934): 266–307.

in the study it appears that its schools were integrated into the figures for the state of Maryland.¹¹²

The schools surveyed were primarily assessed for whether or not they offered credited courses on Negro History and or Negro Literature but the study also surveyed what books these schools were using. Of the textbooks adopted for these courses, Woodson's *The Negro in Our History* was the most common, it was listed by 26 of these public high schools; the second being Benjamin Brawley's *A Short History of the American Negro* (24), and the third was Woodson's *Negro Makers of History* (7). Some schools listed the texts they referenced to build the courses on Negro History as well; among these Woodson's *The Negro In Our History* was by far the most popular. Eighteen schools listed it as a reference, while Du Bois' *The Negro* was the second most common on this list (10). *Negro Makers of History* and *African Myths and Proverbs* were also listed as referenced texts. Lastly, thirty-three of these public high schools reported that they subscribed to the *Journal of Negro History*. In 1931 the highest enrollment of high school age students in Negro History courses were in the following states: North Carolina with 464 students, Alabama with 400 enrolled students, and Maryland and Kentucky both had 239 students.¹¹³

The data from this study also showed that of the 189 high schools and colleges contacted (both public and private) 84% of them reported that they actively celebrated Negro History week. The overwhelming majority of the questionnaires indicated that the community observances for Negro History Week took place at the school and there were no reports where the local Black school or college were not involved. The wide spread celebration of Negro History Week, coupled with the dramatic increase in course offerings on Negro History demonstrates the indelible imprint Woodson was making on the educational landscape—particularly in Black schools. Of the 21 states reflected in this sample only 7 reported having courses in Negro History in 1925 and by 1931 it had grown to 16 states, Woodson's textbooks and publications were the resources most commonly used by teachers in making this curriculum intervention.

Contextualizing Textbook Reform and Black Educational Resistance

The textbook industry has been a major site for producing national narratives on race since the antebellum period.¹¹⁴ In 1934 Lawrence Reddick, an African American historian, published a study of textbooks adopted and used across the Southern states and concluded the following:

Most of the books in these sixteen States are pro-Southern with a definite sectional bias. The picture presented of the Negro is unfavorable: As a slave he was happy and docile. As a freedman he was shiftless, sometimes vicious, and easily led into correction. As a freeman his activities have not been worthy of note.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid

¹¹⁴ Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹¹⁵ Reddick, "Racial Attitudes in American History Textbooks of the South," 264.

African American people have constantly worked to challenge these controlling narratives of Black life found in dominant curricula as they worked to challenge their experiences of oppression on all fronts. In connoting the educational resistance of Black people against the orientation of dominant racist curricula, William Watkins (1993) offers that, “The way African Americans have developed their views on education, and especially the curriculum, is connected to their socio-historical realities.”¹¹⁶ Therefore, one must contextualize Black educational thought in their politics of resistance to racialized oppression.

In 1939 the NAACP produced a pamphlet, entitled *Anti-Negro Propaganda in School Textbooks*, which criticized the widely used textbooks in U.S. public schools for their anti-Black ideals. This pamphlet was representative of a larger movement on the part of Black educational leaders, parents, and politicians working to challenge the racial attitudes of the American public school systems.¹¹⁷ Carter G. Woodson was at the heart of this movement and had been working as a curriculum reformist simultaneously, yet separate from, the White thinkers commonly affiliated with the progressive education movement.¹¹⁸ Through the production of his textbooks, Carter G. Woodson challenged existing theories of race and provided a more diverse and expansive presentation of Black life than the widely circulated social studies textbooks.¹¹⁹ Brown suggests that Woodson provided a counter-memory about African Americans during a time when dominant textbooks continued in a tradition of representing Black people through narratives that were consistent with the preeminent racial ideology of the time. These efforts made by Woodson must be grounded in the larger legacy of Black political and educational thought that challenged dominant racial discourse. Woodson embodied a legacy of Black educational thinkers that recognized how race, power, and ideology all converged in the production of dominant curricula to maintain White supremacy.

Conclusion

Race vindication as a tenant of African American pedagogy was an objective for humanizing Black students and countered the controlling narratives in dominant curricula, which served the interests of White supremacy. The publication of Johnson, Pendleton and Woodson’s textbooks demonstrate that race vindication was a major thematic strand in Black educational thought. These textbooks, and the classrooms of Black teachers using them, served as both the discursive and physical manifestations of the Black educational imagination, whereby teachers sought to tug closer “toward a collective Black Freedom” with their students, challenging an epistemology that rendered them as subhuman. Black educators saw it as their obligation to challenge myths about Black inferiority proliferated by White supremacist domination, which manifested in

¹¹⁶ William H. Watkins, “Black Curriculum Orientations: A Preliminary Inquiry,” *Harvard Educational Review* 63, no. 3 (January 1993): 322.

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America?: Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹¹⁸ King, Davis, and Brown, “African American History, Race and Textbooks”; Grant, Brown, and Brown, *Black Intellectual Thought in Education*.

¹¹⁹ Anthony L. Brown, “Counter-Memory and Race: An Examination of African American Scholars’ Challenges to Early Twentieth Century K-12 Historical Discourses,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 79, no. 1 (2010): 54–65.

school curricula and the larger public sphere. The proliferation of race vindication in the pedagogical orientation of Black teachers supported a professional and social commitment to facilitating self-recognition amongst Black students. Black education was conceived of as a training ground for the Black counterpublic sphere, whereby Black students could assume positive and self-affirming Black identities and engage in the “polyvocal cultural processes” of constructing new visions for their collective futures.¹²⁰ This tradition is traced through the thinking and work of Black educators who published textbooks from Edward Johnson in 1891, to Leila Amos Pendleton in 1912, and finally with Carter G. Woodson beginning in 1922.

While these textbooks continually harken back to Africa’s ancient civilizations as a means of vindicating the Black race as a people with notable history and culture, it is vital to point out the heavy reliance on Egypt and Ethiopia and the limitations of this. These examples demonstrate how these teachers were beholden to western standards of modernity in particular ways. This is the case insomuch as these narratives of Egypt and Ethiopia appear to be the only narratives of Africa that were deemed capable of vindicating the race’s history. Like many Black historians of the 19th and early 20th century, these educators relied on “aspects of the African background that were closely tied to western civilizations but were distinctively Black.”¹²¹ These scholars rested on ancient Africa and offered a limited engagement with the overall continent. Dickenson Bruce has argued that many early Black historians relied on ancient Africa because it helped reconcile their “segregationist reality and integrationist goals,” their desires to be both Black and American. These ancient civilizations, which were highly respected by western scholars and schools of thought, offered a Black past that could help “resolve the problem of their dual identity in ways that an appreciation for modern Africa could not.”¹²²

The authors of these textbooks rested on extraordinary elements of African American history to vindicate the race. While Benjamin Banneker and Phillis Wheatley were undoubtedly brilliant, what could have been said about the masses of Black people during the 18th century whose ability to try and maintain ordinary lives was in itself an extraordinary feat? To a certain degree it is reasonable that these same figures are threaded throughout the textbooks, likely because the preservation of Black voices in archives and historical materials was limited due to racialized silences.¹²³ Therefore, while these scholars may appear to be privileging exceptional Black narratives, it is still important to raise questions about how the more quotidian and mundane aspects of Black life throughout history may have been neglected.

Lastly, an important distinction must be made between race vindicationism and the politics of respectability. While both aimed to address distorted representations of Blackness in the mainstream, they differ in significant ways ideologically. Initially theorized as a means to describe the social politics of Black women in the National Baptist Convention, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham offered the term to describe how

¹²⁰ Dumas, “Sitting next to White Children.”

¹²¹ Dickson D. Bruce, “Ancient Africa and the Early Black American Historians, 1883-1915,” *American Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (1984): 685.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 695.

¹²³ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1997).

Victorian standards of womanhood (cleanliness, temperance, etc.) were used to police Black women socially as a measurement of respectability.¹²⁴ The politics of respectability was employed as a social reform strategy for Black women's racial uplift, but it also extended to the larger racial group. Black people were expected to behave and purport themselves along socially established lines of respectability as a means of proving to the White world that the race had integrity and was deserving of equal treatment. While this challenged scientific notions of racial difference, and the idea of Black inferiority in particular, it often became a social mechanism of policing intra-racial class politics and relied on European social standards.¹²⁵ Race vindicationism, as it is demonstrated through these textbooks, speaks to a much larger notion of Black humanity as opposed to ideas of racial propriety. Furthermore, it has much more to do with socializing Black students to develop racial pride and a critical understanding of their racialized ontology than behavioral politics. I do not argue that the politics of respectability are not found in the narratives presented by these educators (though they are sparse), but that the employment of race vindicationism is distinct and operates independently. Race vindication worked to supplant misconfigured imagery of Black history and culture through abrupt negations; instead it held up signage, testimony, and historical precedent of Black humanity and cultural achievement.

These educators crafted their textbooks as identity resources for their students to take up more expansive notions of Blackness that defied their Jim Crow realities. As human beings with equal capacity to live a life of purpose, they possessed the ability to be self-determined and bring about change through resistance whenever their right to do so was infringed upon. Based on the historical inventory of these textbooks, the intellectual capabilities of Black people were as vast as any other group; historical narratives of Black people on the continent of Africa to their contemporary Black leaders offered "living, breathing, convincing" proof of this.¹²⁶

Essential to Woodson's educational philosophy was a pedagogical reliance on race vindicationism to cultivate healthy, self-affirming racialized identities amongst Black students. This pedagogical tradition was inherited from a larger legacy of Black intellectuals that came before him, and was heavily influential in the thinking of Black educators as demonstrated by the consistency between his own textbooks and those of Edward Johnson and Leila Pendleton. The dominant trope in Black educational thought has been a conceptualization of freedom and education as inextricably bound.¹²⁷ These textbooks demonstrate Black educators innovative efforts to incorporate the liberatory principles of the Black counterpublic sphere into the curricula of Black schools. These teachers imagined education to be a vehicle to vindicate Black humanity and present

¹²⁴ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, Revised edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

¹²⁵ Paisley Jane Harris, "Gatekeeping and Remaking: The Politics of Respectability in African American Women's History and Black Feminism," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 1 (2003): 212-20.

¹²⁶ Johnson, *A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1890*, 83.

¹²⁷ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom ...* (Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855); James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 1 edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Williams, *Self-Taught*.

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Black students with identity profiles that transcended those made available through White supremacist learning resources. Understanding Black students as a specific group of learners, these textbooks were crafted with the intention of educating them based on their circumstantial needs as a historically oppressed and racialized group of learners.

CHAPTER IV

On the Training of Black Teachers:

Carter G. Woodson's Role as an "Abroad Mentor" to Black Educators

Carter G. Woodson supported Black teachers in providing a humanizing education to Black students during the first half of the 20th century. While Woodson was known to be highly critical of the Black elite, and educators in particular, he worked to create opportunities for, and partnerships with, Black teachers to increase their effectiveness in the lives of students.¹ Beyond functional educational skills, Woodson was concerned with addressing the cultural politics of White supremacy that undergirded the education of Black teachers who in turn passed it on to students through school curricula.

Beginning in 1915 with the founding of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), Woodson embarked upon developing an intimate relationship with Black teachers as a professional group. These educators were some of the earliest members of the ASNLH and played a critical role in its growth. In this chapter I argue that Woodson identified how the suppression of Black culture and African Diaspora achievement was used to “miseducate” Black students. As a master-teacher he worked to address this critical issue by providing supplemental training and resources for Black teachers. Through the institutions he created Woodson emerged as an “abroad mentor” for Black educators; and through said role, he provided them academic support to repurpose education in the lives of Black people.

Correspondences between Woodson and Black educators are used to explore their professional partnership. Furthermore, archival materials regarding Negro History Week and the *Negro History Bulletin* substantiate how Black educators took up Woodson’s educational philosophy and his publication as a medium for exchanging lesson plans and articulating an alternative teaching vision. Given that Black teachers recognized Woodson as a “Schoolmaster of his race,”² this chapter will reveal him as a central figure in the narrative of Black educational history. His thinking as an educational theorist offers an important perspective that should be factored into our memory of Black education during the Jim Crow era.

Black Teacher Training During Jim Crow

The suppression and manipulation of Black teacher training was an intentional strategy to perpetuate White supremacy during the era of Jim Crow.³ While there was an ideological struggle between classical versus practical education as it pertained to Black schools across levels, teacher training was seated squarely within this debate. Southern educational officials made little efforts to create equal opportunities for Black teacher training and White industrialists and philanthropists sought to educate Black teachers to develop their students to submit to the racial caste system and economic order of the

¹ Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (ASNLH, 2008 [1933]).

² “‘Schoolmaster of His Race’ Mourned”. *The Washington Afro-American*, (April 8, 1950).

³ Michael Fultz, “Teacher Training and African American Education in the South, 1900-1940,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 2 (1995): 207.

day—this centered on Blacks being a servant class of people.⁴ General Samuel Armstrong, an ideological figurehead of the “White architects of Black education,” demonstrated this point when he stated, “Let us make the teachers and we will make the people.”⁵ There were few publicly supported high schools and normal schools to aid in the training of Black teachers, and in some cases when Black teachers were well-educated White school officials discriminated against them in their hiring practices.⁶ Speaking to the discrimination against Black teachers, Du Bois and Dill (1911) wrote, “Wages for Black teachers were lower and in some cases poorly trained teachers were preferred to better ones.”⁷

In his 1933 study, *The Education of Negro Teachers*, Ambrose Caliver highlighted the fact that only 15.6 per cent of Black teachers had a college degree, and in the 1930-1931 school year 22.5 per cent of the teachers in Black elementary schools had nothing more than a high school diploma in comparison to 5.7 per cent of White elementary school teachers.⁸ For this reason, Caliver advocated for an upgrade of Black elementary teachers, particularly in the rural areas where poorly trained teachers were most often placed. Given the few opportunities for pre-service training available to Black educators, teacher networks such as the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools (NATCS) placed a strong emphasis on professional development.⁹

Black teachers resisted efforts to manipulate or stifle their development, and took an active role in creating opportunities for their professional growth early on. In fact, a former slave by the name of Clement Robinson founded Beulah Normal and Theological School in Virginia in 1862, making it the first Black normal school in the Southern region.¹⁰ Black educators coveted access to pre-service training for their professional class; this was a means to achieve a number of goals—to be more competent as teachers and improve educational outcomes for the race, to pass teacher certification requirements, to achieve equal pay, and as a means of increasing the quality of secondary and higher education experiences for their group.¹¹ Thus, to counter the discrimination they

⁴ William Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001); James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 1st edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

⁵ Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education*; Quote by Samuel Armstrong cited in Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 45.

⁶ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 110-11.

⁷ W. E. B Du Bois, Augustus Granville Dill, and Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, eds., *The Common School and the Negro American. Report of a Social Study Made by Atlanta University under the Patronage of the Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund; with the Proceedings of the 16th Annual Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, on Tuesday, May 30th, 1911.* (Atlanta, Ga.: Atlanta University Press, 1911), 7.

⁸ Ambrose Caliver, *National Survey of the Education of Teachers. Bulletin, 1933, No. 10. Volume Iv: Education of Negro Teachers.* (Office of Education, United States Department of the Interior, 1933), 68.

⁹ Thelma D. Perry, *History of the American Teachers Association* (Washington: National Education Association, 1975); Fultz, “Teacher Training and African American Education in the South, 1900-1940.”

¹⁰ Ronald E Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010), 27.

¹¹ Fultz, “Teacher Training and African American Education in the South, 1900-1940,” 205.

experienced, Black educators employed strategies to achieve equal access to professional development as their White peers, and furthermore, to help them provide a better quality education for their students.

Carter G. Woodson was similarly concerned with the training of Black teachers as evidenced in his book, *The Miseducation of the Negro*. Woodson, however, raised different questions regarding Black teacher training; he was concerned with the ideological shaping of Black teachers minds and its influence on their approach to instruction. He highlighted that “Negro History was not required of our teachers when they were in school, and they cannot be blamed for knowing less of this than of other things.”¹² However, while sympathetic to the plight of Black teachers, Woodson still held a firm critique of their lack of attention to the history and culture of Black people. He argued that the training received by Black teachers failed to prepare them to address the cultural politics of White supremacy enacted through dominant schooling. To this point, Woodson wrote,

Negro educators of today may have more sympathy and interest in the race than the Whites now exploiting Negro institutions as educators, but the former have no more vision than their competitors. Taught from books of the same bias, trained by Caucasians of the same prejudices or by Negroes of enslaved minds, one generation of Negro teachers after another have served for no higher purpose than to do what they are told to do.¹³

As an abroad mentor, Woodson supported Black teachers in repurposing education by centering the lived experiences of Black people and providing a counter-ideology to dominant curricula. This counter-ideology centered Black cultural achievements as an effort to recognize Black humanity and cultivate healthy racial and academic identities amongst Black learners.

Abroad Mentorship

In thinking through the relational ties formed between Woodson and Black teachers it is critical to contextualize it within the broader experience of African American people. Given the infringement of racial domination on Black life, unique socio-ecological dynamics have taken form within Black communities. Andrew Billingsley, for example, discussed the role of non-nuclear family models amongst enslaved Black communities.¹⁴ He offered that fictive kinship and extended family played critical roles in raising children and supporting community members during slavery and even thereafter. This demonstrates what some have referred to as “adaptive vitality,”¹⁵ whereby Black people have adapted and developed social strategies to cope with the racial hostility they experience under White supremacy. More specifically, Black Americans have

¹² Carter G. Woodson, “Negro History Week-the Fourth Year,” *The Journal of Negro History* 14, no. 2 (1929): 114.

¹³ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 35.

¹⁴ Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder: The Enduring Legacies of African-American Families* (New York: Touchstone, 1994).

¹⁵ Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1993).

continuously exercised their ability to form non-traditional relationships, at times to meet basic needs of survival, but beyond this, to work toward racial progress.

During slavery period “abroad marriages” were a common practice. These were marriages in which a husband was owned by one master and his wife and children by another—meaning they lived on different plantations.¹⁶ In the antebellum South approximately 27.5 per cent of slave unions were abroad marriages.¹⁷ Distance engendered a determination to create unique ways to maintain contact and offer love and support. Building from this conceptualization, I offer “abroad mentorship” to characterize how Carter G. Woodson demonstrated his commitment to racial uplift by imagining ways to connect his academic knowledge to others equally committed to racial progress but lacking in critical awareness of how White supremacy functioned through curricula and the educational resources to counter it. Thus, he remotely mentored Black teachers as a professional class through educational institutions he built. While he certainly never met the overwhelming majority of Black teachers, Woodson surely impacted them through the ASNLH, and especially Negro History Week and the *Negro History Bulletin*. Through this infrastructure, Woodson developed an intimate relationship with Black teachers across the U.S. by providing them pedagogical alternatives for teaching Black students. Through his institutions he emerged as a Master-Teacher to Black educators.

Abroad mentorship underscores both the geographic/physical distance and yet the closeness of the relationship between Woodson and Black teachers across the U.S., similar to how abroad marriages were intimate unions between the enslaved. Though these families were separated, the husbands and wives, mothers and father would travel long distances to visit and nurture one another. The distance surely posed challenges but the significance of these bonds anchor the humanity of the enslaved. Woodson, like many Black intellectuals, used every platform and medium to communicate the humanity of Blacks during Jim Crow. Yet, they also held a distant but intimate relationship to Black communities. One West Virginia State student writing to Woodson in the 1930s echoes this point in the opening of his letter; he states, “You do not know me but I have met you many times through your books.”¹⁸ More specifically, Vanessa Siddle-Walker has noted that elite Black scholars were connected to communities “through their influence on beliefs and practices in local communities rather than their presence,” thus supporting this claim of Woodson’s impact on the educational agenda of Black teachers. She asserts that through discursive interactions, Black intellectuals “helped craft an educational agenda for Black schools that was designed to lift a people up into full democratic citizenship.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Heather Williams, “How Slavery Affected African American Families,” accessed March 20, 2016, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1609-1865/essays/aafamilies.htm>; Diane Burke, ““Mah Pappy Belong to a Neighbor’: The Effects of Abroad Marriages on Missouri Slave Families,” in *Searching for Their Places: Women in the South across Four Centuries*, ed. Thomas Appleton and Angela Bosewell (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 57–78.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 58.

¹⁸ Correspondence, Clark Leo Smith to Woodson (No Date), Papers of Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1915-1950 [Microfilm Collection, University Publication of America).

¹⁹ Vanessa Siddle Walker and Ulysses Byas, *Hello Professor a Black Principal and Professional*

Through their persona and professional networks, Black teachers crafted what they believed to be the superior methods to meet the needs of their students. Black educators not only borrowed from their professional training in normal schools and colleges, which privileged White educational theories, but they also looked to Black intellectuals for critical perspectives on Black education. They blended the “best practices from schools of education and the best thinking of the Black intellectual elite on issues related to Black advancement.”²⁰ Woodson recognized the merit of Black teachers’ efforts and like other Black intellectuals he served as an abroad mentor by developing pedagogical objectives for teaching Black students. Through speeches rendered at Black teachers’ meetings, course offering through teacher training summer schools, and his publications, Woodson provided timely, supplemental training and resources to Black educators. These interventions transformed the way many Black teachers approached the education of their students, and created a new learning experience for Black students during the Jim Crow period.

Woodson’s “Direct and Positive Link” To Black Teachers

Thelma Perry, a longtime member of the American Teachers Association (originally the NATCS) and the Oklahoma and North Carolina state teachers association, documented the influence of Woodson’s scholarship on Black teachers in her history of the American Teachers Association.²¹ She offers that Woodson called “for a new perspective” as it pertained to educating children in schools, one which required an intentional “shift away from acceptance of Black people as inferior, even sub-human by so-called scholars.” Woodson was working, writes Perry, to “develop overall a sense of racial identity and pride in Black people.” She recalled, “It was his role to spread Negro History throughout the schools and colleges of the U.S., especially the Black schools.” Perry analyzed that Woodson was working to transform the minds of young Black children in schools, and that “he hoped to reach [them] directly and, of course, through the teachers.”²²

It is through Perry’s scholarship that the intricacies of Woodson’s abroad mentorship to Black teachers becomes evident. All of the work published and carried out by the ASNLH was first and foremost “communicated to the teacher groups and to many individual members, some of whom were among the authors and illustrators of the books; and most of whom, in turn, used those which were appropriate in their classes, clubs, churches, and fraternal organizations,” writes Perry.²³ Not only did Perry identify how Woodson’s work was used to enhance classroom instruction, but she also demonstrated how teachers took on primary roles in the production of educational materials through the institutions he created. Woodson strategically generated a “direct and positive link” to Black teachers through the organizational channels of the NATCS and state teacher groups.

Woodson’s Partnership with Black Teacher Organizations

Leadership in the Segregated South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 8.

²⁰ Ibid, 7.

²¹ Perry, *History of the American Teachers Association*.

²² Ibid, 192-193.

²³ Ibid, 195.

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The national and state teachers associations offered a reliable network and organizational structure to institutionalize Woodson's educational program across the country. For instance, in 1929 the NATCS advertised that a number of "prominent educators" were "to address teachers at the national meeting" in Jackson, Mississippi, from July 30th through August 2nd and Carter G. Woodson was listed among the guest speakers.²⁴ His influence on the national program of the NATCS was not only a result of his guest appearances, but also because of the personal relationships he had with many of the organization's presidents, such as: William Robinson of North Carolina (1927), Mary McLeod Bethune (1924), and especially H. Council Trenholm (1931-1933).

Trenholm was a graduate of Morehouse College and a very influential member of the Alabama State Teachers Association (ASTA). He was a close friend of Woodson and even served on the board of directors for the ASNLH.²⁵ Through his leadership in the ASTA, Trenholm conducted a study using questionnaires "among Black educators throughout Alabama to determine to what extent Black students and the Black community were being taught about the contributions of Black people."²⁶ Beyond this, he led a charge to develop a two-year Negro History Project, which began in 1936. This incorporated "distributing Negro History Project study kits to Black teachers throughout Alabama. As a result, Black schools began to hold annual Negro History Week programs, initiate essay and oratorical contests devoted to Negro themes, and feature Negro life and history themes in school plays and bulletin boards. Black educators also made efforts to secure books by and about Black people for their classrooms and libraries."²⁷

The ASTA published a *Handbook*, which they distributed amongst its members at their 54th Annual Convention in Birmingham (March 26-28, 1936). It outlined the explicit goals of this project and included relevant data on the schooling experiences of Black students. This project aimed to achieve the following: "the presence of Negro history in all public and private schools; the formation of a course of study in Black history; the development of creative expressions by Negro scholars leading to essays, books, monographs, and scientific research by and about Black people; the development of a more tolerant relationship between the races; an increased awareness and pride among Negro people of their contributions to ancient and modern civilizations."²⁸ The *Handbook* also covered the history and resources provided by Woodson's ASNLH to this cause. The language employed by the ASTA through this Negro History Project underscores how Black teachers operationalized Woodson's educational philosophy

²⁴ "Prominent Educators to Address Teachers at National Meeting," *The Bulletin: Official Organ of the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools* (June-July, 1929), vol. 9, no. 7, p 10, in National Education Association- Special Collections records, Series 1- American Teachers Association 1911-1986: Box 3044, Folder 10, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University

²⁵ August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession* (University of Illinois Press, 1986), 61.

²⁶ Jerome A. Gray, Joe L. Reed, and Norman W. Walton, *History of the Alabama State Teachers Association* (National Education Association, 1987), 91

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid, 91-92; the table of contents of *The Handbook* are reprinted in *History of the Alabama State Teachers Association*

through their professional organizations. It's no surprise that Woodson delivered the keynote address at this convention.

The previous account of Woodson's partnership with the ASTA is representative of how he maneuvered through the professional world of Black teachers as an abroad mentor. He was significant in shaping the ideological currents in these organizations, informed their critiques of curricula (which reached new heights in the 1930s), and Woodson offered them material resources to replace racist instructional materials.²⁹ For instance, in the late 1930s the Louisiana Colored Teachers Association "formulated a committee to review the textbooks used in the public schools to assure that unfair statements dealing with Black people were not included, and that a fair and accurate statement was included of such contributions as Afro-Americans had made to American economic and cultural life."³⁰ The West Virginia State Teachers Association actively "encouraged membership in the NAACP" and similarly "endorsed the work of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History."³¹ Dr. Luther P. Jackson, an historian whom Woodson mentored, made sure that the state program of the WVSTA incorporated Negro History Week celebrations across their schools.

Exploring How Teachers Took Up the Work of Woodson's Program

In 1930 Woodson delivered a speech to the NATCS membership as they convened at Tuskegee. He urged his audience to take responsibility for ensuring that "Negro children study Negro history in the schools."³² To this effect, Black educators would emerge not only as a part of Woodson's target audience, but they became partners in his larger educational project. For instance, Black educators had noted Woodson's research as early as 1915 when the assistant superintendent of colored schools in D.C., Roscoe Bruce, referenced his scholarship to build a case for incorporating Black history in schools.³³

In 1928 Black educators in North Carolina made a similar case. William Robinson who was the supervisor of Negro High Schools and a past president of NATCS wrote to the State Department of Education with a recommendation for textbooks to be adopted for the high school curriculum. This list featured Woodson's *The Negro In Our History* as the textbook for high school seniors. Woodson's influence on Black teachers was also evident in Robinson's declaration that there was "a general desire amongst Negro school people of the state that there be courses in *Negro Life and History* [italics added]." The parity of language taken up by Black teachers underscores the intellectual connection between them and Woodson's organization, the ASNLH. The work Woodson

²⁹ Ancella R. Bickley, *History of the West Virginia State Teachers Association* (National Education Association, 1979); Jerome A. Gray, Joe L. Reed, and Norman W. Walton, *History of the Alabama State Teachers Association* (National Education Association, 1987); George W. Brooks, *History of the Tennessee Education Congress, 1923-1967* (National Education Association, 1976); Ernest J. Middleton, *History of the Louisiana Education Association* (National Education Association, 1984)

³⁰ Middleton, *History of Louisiana Education Association*, 65.

³¹ Bickley, *History of WVSTA*, 64.

³² Speech excerpt reprinted in Thelma Perry's *The History of the American Teachers Association*, 1975, 197.

³³ Jacqueline Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History*, Reprint edition (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1997), 31.

set out to do through the ASNLH was taken up by teachers to transform the educational experience of Black students—this was not only an effort to change history curriculums, as Robinson was pushing for parallel readings on *Negro Life* to be incorporated in “both History and English courses.” These teachers were working to “foster a wholesome and justifiable racial self-respect based upon facts that every Negro child has a right to know.” Robinson also encouraged White schools to adopt texts that attended to the life and achievements of Black people; however, he made it clear that “our real object is to reach our own Negro boys and girls.”³⁴

In 1927 Miss Julia Davis, a 5th grade instructor of Music, Language and Reading in St. Louis wrote to Woodson asking him to reach out to Mr. Boggs, the Supervisor of Social Science Education for the St. Louis Board of Education. Davis informed Woodson that she had given Boggs a copy of Kelly Miller’s *An Estimate of Carter G. Woodson and His Work* and suggested that Woodson follow up with him because Boggs “is the man who can and will help us put over our program.” In his position as supervisor, Boggs taught night school courses for teachers, and Davis was urging Woodson to reach out to him before he solidified curriculum for his next round of night courses. Davis’ communication with Woodson exposes how Black educators across the country took a professional investment in the work of the ASNLH. Davis’ sense of urgency was easily detectable, and it is a tone that characterizes many of the communications between Woodson and Black educators. Because of Davis’ persistence, a conference was put together between Woodson and Boggs that led to the recommendation and final adoption of *Negro Makers of History* in a local traveling library, and in 1940 the first Negro exhibit in the St. Louis Public Library was installed. Davis was the first director of the exhibit and it would become an annual event to commemorate Negro History Week, which she led from 1940-1951.³⁵ Julia Davis did a lot of work extending the efforts of the ASNLH in her local community, after retiring in 1961 she donated \$2,500 to the local public library and in 1974 a branch of this library was named in her honor.³⁶

Albert N. D. Brooks was an educator in the Washington, D.C. public schools who embodied how teachers served as partners in Woodson’s educational project. He collaborated with Woodson on the *Negro History Bulletin (NHB)* from its inception (1937) and maintained the publication beyond Woodson’s death in 1950.³⁷ Brooks served as the editor of the NHB and was a principal at Shaw Junior High School. Woodson noted that Brooks played a central role in recruiting members to the ASNLH but also in increasing the circulation of the Bulletin through the newsstands.³⁸ Brooks supported Woodson’s educational vision because he also critiqued of dominant schooling. According to Brooks, Woodson understood that “history is the basis of the educational philosophy upon which the whole school system rests” and he therefore exposed how

³⁴ Letter reprinted in Thelma Perry’s *The History of the American Teachers Association* (1975)

³⁵ Correspondence from Julia Davis to Woodson, Feb. 17, 1927 in Woodson Microfilm Collection, UC Berkeley; “Julia Davis” in NHB (April 1, 1962) vol. 12, no. 2, p. 168

³⁶ Katie Moon, “Dr. Julia Davis: She Dedicated Her Life to Teaching African American History,” *History Happens Here - The Missouri History Museum’s Blog*, accessed March 20, 2016, <http://www.historyhappenshere.org/archives/7353>.

³⁷ Daryl Michael Scott “Seventy-Five Years of Educational Reform,” *Black History Bulletin* 74(2): 32

³⁸ “What’s Behind the Negro History Bulletin,” *NHB* October 1943, 19.

historical distortions sustained a program of miseducation “over several centuries.” He proclaimed that Woodson provided an alternative educational philosophy that supplied Black students with “motivation and inspiration” to “rise in spite of all handicaps to his highest potential.”³⁹ Brooks demonstrates the way many Black teachers not only subscribed to the counterhegemonic educational philosophy Woodson provided, but also how they took ownership of the work to expand his humanizing educational project.

Black teachers across states were lobbying in similar ways to reform the curriculum in their schools.⁴⁰ A 1941 letter to Woodson from E. Horace Fitchett, the South Carolina state chairman for the ASNLH, reinforces how Black teachers professionally supported Woodson’s educational project. Fitchett informed Woodson that the president of the State Teachers’ Association of South Carolina would be forwarding him a check as a donation for the ASNLH. He also highlighted that “for the last two or three years” Miss Grayson, an acquaintance of Mary McLeod Bethune, had been promoting the activities of the ASNLH through “lectures, discussions, and exhibits.” Grayson had a significant amount of influence in these efforts because she supervised the social science division of their South Carolina teachers association.⁴¹

The correspondences between Woodson and Black educators across the country denote the intimate relationships forged between him and Black teachers as a professional group. He sought them out because they had the power to impact the lives of Black youth on a day-to-day basis, and they sought him because his curricular interventions was redefining what a purposeful education could look like in their classrooms. Recognizing the luminary vision that Woodson provided in his alternative educational philosophy, these teachers responded by strategizing on a local level to transform their curricula and educational programs to incorporate his teachings. Through these structured and personal exchanges, Woodson mentored Black teachers on how to provide a more relevant education to their students—an education that incorporated the history and cultural achievements of Black people.

Nannie Helen Burroughs was a teacher and school founder that Woodson admired and arguably represented the archetype of what he considered to be an effective teacher of Black students. Burroughs’ school, The National Training School for Women and Girls (founded in 1909 in Washington D.C.), blended both practical and classical education for young Black women and had a strong commitment to the study of Black life and culture. In fact, Burroughs’ school is listed as one of the earliest institutions to have adopted *The Negro in Our History* as a textbook in the 1920s.⁴² He vouched for both her pedagogy and the institution she developed by supporting his niece to attend the school and he went to great lengths to help raise funds to support the school through newspapers, personal letters and collections taken up at churches and speaking

³⁹ “Dr. Woodson the Inspiration” by Albert Brooks in *NHB* (December 1, 1956) vol. 20, no. 3

⁴⁰ Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America?: Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁴¹ Fitchett to Woodson, May 1, 1941, Papers of Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1915-1950, Microfilm Collection, University Publication of America.

⁴² List of schools using textbook in “The Negro in Our History 4th Edition Advertisement,” n.d., Box 1 Folder 1, Carter Godwin Woodson collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

engagements.⁴³ Woodson also encouraged the featuring of Burroughs in Sadie Daniel's *Women Builders*, a book that highlighted African American women who founded institutions for the race.⁴⁴ Woodson not only backed her school with his public endorsements but he contributed to it financially. This financial sacrifice was done during the 1930s, a particularly trying time for Woodson given the fact that he was not receiving any philanthropic support for the ASNLH in tandem with the financial challenges posed by the Great Depression to the longevity of institutions like his.

Burroughs, like Woodson, dedicated her life to the cause of Black education and to sustaining the autonomous Black institution she founded. Their shared sacrifice for the cause of Black education led to an enduring friendship between the two of them. Lorenzo Greene would later note that Burroughs was only one of two people he had ever heard refer to Woodson by his first name—Bethune being the other.⁴⁵ Burroughs and Woodson both lived very meager lives in an effort to maintain their institutions and life's work. In a series of letters between the two of them in 1933 after Burroughs defaulted on her life membership payments for the ASNLH; she had assured Woodson that she would “sweep the streets to get the money” if necessary. Burroughs would eventually become a life member of the organization in 1944.⁴⁶

Woodson's relationship with Burroughs was unusually close, but he shared similar relationships with other teachers. Even for those who Woodson may not have been so personally acquainted with, he still made an indelible impact on their work through his institutions and strategic partnerships with Black teacher organizations.

Developing Negro History Week and a Black Educational Aesthetic

In partnering with Black teachers, Woodson was able to infiltrate the local school cultures of Black schools across the country—particularly with the development of Negro History Week in 1926. Woodson developed Negro History Week as an effort to publicize the work of the ASNLH across the nation and to help generate a larger investment in the organization from community members. The goal was to “dramatize the achievements of the race sufficiently to induce educational authorities to incorporate into the curricula courses in Negro life and history.”⁴⁷ In its first year, Woodson sent out pamphlets around the country encouraging communities and institutions to participate in the celebration.

⁴³ Letter, Woodson to Judge James Cobb, May 7, 1932 Box 32, Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; and Letter, Woodson to Nannie Burroughs, May 8, 1932, Box 32, Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Traki L. Taylor, “‘Womanhood Glorified’: Nannie Helen Burroughs and the National Training School for Women and Girls, Inc., 1909-1961,” *The Journal of African American History* 87 (2002): 390–402.

⁴⁴ Letter, Carter G. Woodson to Nannie Burroughs, August 15, 1930, Box 32, Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Sadie Iola Daniel, *Women Builders*, 1st edition (The Associated Publishers, Inc, 1931).

⁴⁵ “Dr. Woodson As I Knew Him,” 1976, Box 92, Lorenzo Johnston Green Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁶ Burroughs to Woodson Letter, Nannie Burroughs to Carter G. Woodson, 28 November 1933, Box 45, Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁷ “Negro History Week 1934 Brochure,” p. 3, 1934, Box 1 Folder 36, Carter Godwin Woodson collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Responding to Woodson's call, "The State departments of education of Delaware, North Carolina, and West Virginia, and the city systems of Baltimore and the District of Columbia sent out to their teachers special appeals for cooperation in this important celebration. Principals of private schools and presidents of colleges and universities likewise carried the appeal directly to their coworkers."⁴⁸ By 1935 Woodson would come to name Negro History Week (NHW) "the most popular effort ever made by the Association." Lawrence Riddick would later write that NHW was a "mass education program" and was "the most characteristic creation of Carter G. Woodson." He asserted that Woodson's "greatest influence upon the public mind came through Negro History Week... The response to it from young and old, educated and uneducated, pleased him to no end."⁴⁹ Woodson himself declared that even if people were not familiar with the ASNLH or his career as the founder of the celebration, they "nevertheless heard of and felt the impulse of Negro History Week."⁵⁰ Ironically, the same can be said for this contemporary moment—while many may be unfamiliar with Woodson and his work, they know about the celebration of Black History Month during February.

From its inception, Woodson located the significance of Negro History Week in its function as a counter to the abject experiences of Black people. It was a cultural celebration to promote a counter-ideology for educating Black students and it also had political implications. In promoting NHW, Woodson reminded his audience of the many ways in which Black Americans are denied citizenship and recognition as human beings. Negro history in schools was a necessary epistemic shift to challenge the violent misrecognitions of Black life, a process that took form at the ideological and material level. In his promotion of the first NHW, Woodson wrote:

A Negro is passed on the street and is shoved off in the mud; he complains or strikes back and is lynched as a desperado who attacked a gentleman... And what if he is handicapped, segregated, or lynched? According to our education and practice, if you kill one of the group, the world goes on just as well or better; for the Negro is nothing, has never been anything, and never will be anything but a menace to civilization.⁵¹

Woodson used this scenario of a Black civilian encounter with racial hostility as a means of demonstrating the disdain for Black life in American society, and furthermore, to position the violence that circumscribed Black life as being ideologically motivated. In this way, Woodson's goal for NHW, like his larger educational project, was to vindicate Black humanity.

Negro History Week represents a concerted effort to transform the ideological undercurrents of the education offered to Black students. This required shifting from a curriculum that gave "thorough instruction that the Negro has never contributed anything to the progress of mankind," to one that paid homage to Black people's contributions to humanity and that acknowledged their experiences with oppression under the hand of

⁴⁸ "Negro History Week" in *Journal of Negro History* (April 1926) vol. 11, no. 2, p. 238

⁴⁹ L. D. Reddick, "Twenty-Five Negro History Weeks," *Negro History Bulletin* 13, no. 8 (May 1, 1950): 178–80.

⁵⁰ "Annual Report of the Director" in *JNH* vol. 20, no. 4 (Oct. 1935), p. 369

⁵¹ "Negro History Week" in *Journal of Negro History* (April 1926) vol. 11, no. 2, 240.

White supremacy.⁵² Negro history week was a vehicle to accomplish this. Through it Woodson created a new “Black educational aesthetic” that transformed the learning experiences for Black students, reshaped learning agendas for Black teachers and offered a unique set of identities to both groups.

Conceptualizing Woodson’s Black Educational Aesthetic

In 1927 Woodson argued that, “In practically all the schoolhouses of Europe and America there is not a picture on the wall or a book on the shelf to show that a Negro has ever achieved anything.” This was an indictment of the prevailing educational culture in American schools and demonstrates Woodson’s attention to the social context of development, or more specifically, how anti-Black logic shaped the ecological landscaping of schools. In taking the physical layout of classrooms and the material images around the room, on the walls, and in books into account he identified this absence as an extension of the larger obscuring of Black humanity. The physicality of schools was an extension of the larger text of anti-Black curricula in this way.

I use the word “aesthetic” because through NHW, and his counter-curriculum, Woodson worked with teachers to develop new standards and principles for what classrooms should look and feel like for Black students. In positioning schools and classrooms as learning ecologies that have implications for student identities, one must account for the various resources in these spaces that offer meaning for who students are and who they can become. These meanings extend from relationships between teachers and students in the learning space, but also how the physical environment and the ideas circulating in them shape students’ identity development. Woodson offered instructional materials and decorations that presented developmentally appropriate imagery of Black life and culture to affirm students racialized identities. His counter ideology and the learning materials presented what Na’ilah Nasir (2011) has called “identity resources” in both material and ideational form.⁵³ Teachers were armed with a counter ideology that affirmed the humanity of Black students by providing interiority to the experiences of both them and their ancestors (ideational resource); the classroom decorations and textbooks developed by Woodson physically transformed the landscape of the learning ecology in Black schools (material resources). Therefore, the term *Black educational aesthetic* is employed to underscore not just a shift in the curriculum, but also how this shift translated to learning spaces that received students with a vibrant and intentionally affirming visual culture. This new aesthetic stood in bold opposition to the classificatory logic that informed the knowledge system of the dominant school curricula.

Operationalizing the Black Educational Aesthetic

Woodson recognized the lack of educational materials available for supporting the development of Black academic identities. After the first year of Negro History Week, Woodson noted that one of the major concerns raised by Black educators was the lack of books, plays, and artifacts depicting Black life suitable for school age children. Most of the books that had been published on Black life and history up to this point catered to a mature academic audience. To this point, Woodson wrote,

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Na’ilah Nasir, *Racialized Identities: Race and Achievement among African American Youth* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011).

The Association was unable to supply the demand for pictures, story books, and plays which can be made so useful in a popular effort of this sort. To supply this need, as set forth above, the Association has in preparation works to meet all of the requirements for properly inculcating in the mind of the youth an appreciation of the civilization of the Negro.⁵⁴

In 1927 Woodson shared that “in practically all the schoolhouses of Europe and America there is not a picture on the wall or a book on the shelf to show that a Negro has ever achieved anything.” This was an indictment of the prevailing educational culture in American schools; thus, he sought to transform the learning environments to positively affirm the racial identities of Black students. The new Black educational aesthetic generated through Negro History Week translated into life size images of Black historical figures being hung in schools for students to admire, the reworking of historical narratives to include the voices of Black people, and the history of Africa and the Black Diaspora. Woodson sought to bring before the eyes of Black students their own image. This new Black educational aesthetic was enacted discursively through curriculum development, materially through decorative educational resources produced for classrooms and schools, and affectively through performances and dramatizations during NHW celebrations. In the passage that follows, Thelma Perry describes some of the things Woodson offered through the ASNLH to help create this new aesthetic in the learning environments of Black students:

Dr. Woodson assembled an impressive array of pictures and scenes of distinguished Negroes and Negro Life. They could be procured for modest prices from the Association headquarters: small pictures for schoolwork, lithographs with suitable margins for framing, and large, nearly life-size photographs for assembly halls and offices.⁵⁵

Woodson developed these materials to help re-purpose education in the lives of Black people. With these materials teachers and students could have “the history of the Negro race told with pictures of its great men and women.” Woodson encouraged his audience to “frame them and decorate [their] home with them” and above all else, to “hang them on the walls of [their] school room.”⁵⁶ These pictures included, “small pictures for school work,” “scenes from the life of the Negro,” and pictures of Black men and women from various professions and backgrounds. For instance, these images were catalogued under titles such as “Negroes Internationally Known,” “Negro Women of Distinction,” “Negroes of Genius,” or “Negro Artists.”

In reflecting on Woodson contributions to the educational landscape of America, Dr. D.O.W. Holmes, of Morgan State University, wrote that this was “a minor, but none-the-less important project...instilling in the minds of school children, respect for and

⁵⁴ “The Annual Report of the Director” by Carter G. Woodson in JNH (Oct. 1926) vol. 11, no. 4, p. 552.

⁵⁵ Perry, *History of the American Teachers Association*, 195.

⁵⁶ “Pictures of Distinguished Negroes,” Box 1 Folder 3, Carter Godwin Woodson collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

familiarity with successful colored persons.” Holmes bore witness that Woodson had successfully transformed the learning aesthetics for many schools across the country with this one intervention. He had “seen these pictures displayed in large urban high schools and in small school in towns and rural areas for use at special exercises for pupils in classes in history, but hung so that they could constantly be seen.”⁵⁷

To be clear, Negro History Week was not created as the one time throughout the year when students should learn about Black history. In fact, Woodson declared that it was the “duty of all teachers,” no matter their subject, to incorporate the life and history of Black people into their curricula throughout the school year.⁵⁸ Negro History Week was an effort to demonstrate what students had learned over the academic year as it pertained to their history and experiences as Black people. These celebrations were meant to disrupt and ultimately displace the oppressive learning culture that otherwise persisted in schools year round.

Negro History Week celebrations offer an opportunity to see the close coordination and exchange between Woodson and Black teachers. Not only did he send out instructional material and suggestions on how best to observe the occasion, but teachers wrote back to him documenting how they answered his call. Miss Julia Davis of St. Louis, who was previously mentioned, shared the program held by the fifth grade classes in the Simmons School Auditorium in 1927. Some of the acts included student performances of Frederick Douglass and Madame C.J. Walker, performances of the Fisk Jubilee Singers’ spirituals, and even a talk on citizenship provided by the school principal.⁵⁹

Woodson’s push to incorporate Black history and cultural achievements in schools had broader implications for the celebration of Black heritage within the community. By his account, “No other single thing [had] done so much to dramatize the achievements of persons of African blood.” Speaking directly to how *NHW* created a rift in the learning culture of Black schools, Woodson offered, “The celebration has become of the important objectives of the school year.” Through these celebrations Woodson sought to extend the learning process beyond the classroom and into the broader community.⁶⁰ In most cases, Negro History Week celebrations were a collaborative process between schools, local colleges, community groups, and churches.

In 1930, Mrs. Alice Harris, the supervisor of the Colored Playground and Recreational Association, wrote to Woodson to inform him of the successful Negro History Week held in the city of Richmond, Virginia, which culminated with a pageant in which 800 people were in attendance. The week’s activities were a collaborative effort between her association, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, the Phyllis Wheatley Y.W.C.A, and other community organizations. According to her, the event was successful from “an educational viewpoint” because of the wide circulation of unconventional knowledge to its massive audience. She also noted how Professor Rayford W. Logan, of Virginia Union, organized ten-minute speeches to be given by students at churches across the city

⁵⁷ Holmes, Dr. D.O.W. “Spent Life Bringing About Respect for Race, Heritage,” *The Afro-American* (May 12, 1950)

⁵⁸ “Negro History Week Brochure 1934,” p.5, Box 1 Folder 36, Carter Godwin Woodson collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁵⁹ Julia Davis to Woodson, 1927 (UC Berkeley Woodson Microfilm)

⁶⁰ “Negro History Week-the Fifth Year,” *The Journal of Negro History* 16, no. 2 (1931): 125.

on various themes in Negro History.⁶¹ This example demonstrates how the new Black educational aesthetic Woodson was working to create in schools had broader implications for the larger community. The tenets of communal literacy that were at the foundation of Woodson's educational philosophy shaped his broader educational projects.

Woodson sought to leverage the momentum building up with Negro History Week to force school officials to adopt new textbooks and educational resources. Lucidly identifying cases in which Black teachers wielded Negro History Week most effectively, Woodson wrote the following:

This interest was capitalized in the right way. An effort was made to discontinue the use of books which teach bias and race hate. Boards of education were asked to adopt textbooks on the Negro for appropriate courses of study. Books and pictures of Negroes were purchased for schools and libraries. Documents of value were collected and sent to the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History...where they will be preserved under fire proof protection.⁶²

In highlighting how these strategies that were being taken up on the local level, Woodson aimed to show teachers and other educational officials how they could use Negro History Week strategically and maximize its impact. He was working towards "the reconstruction of the curricula without the loss of any of the essentials." He believed that mathematics, the natural sciences, and practical languages should continue; however, there needed to be a "radical reconstruction" in regards to the social science and humanities based courses.

Woodson consistently cautioned teachers against reducing Negro History Week to an annual performance. Negro History week was created to demonstrate what Black students had been learning throughout the year. To this point Woodson wrote,

Some teachers and their students have misunderstood the celebration of Negro History Week. They work up enthusiasm during these few days, stage a popular play, present an orator of the day, or render exercises of a literary order; but they forget the Negro thereafter throughout the year. To proceed in such fashion may do as much harm as good. It is a reflection on the record of the race to leave the impression that its history can be thus disposed of in a few days. Negro History Week should be a demonstration of what has been done in the study of the Negro during the year and at the same time a demonstration of greater things to be accomplished. The schools must work gradually toward the end of giving as much attention to the study of the Negro as they do the study of the Greek, the Roman, and the Teuton.⁶³

⁶¹ Alice Harris to Woodson (Feb. 28, 1930) including following newspaper clipping, "Negro History Pageant Marked By Good Acting" *The St. Luke Herald* (Feb 22, 1930), Papers of Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1915-1950 [Microfilm Collection, University Publication of America].

⁶² "Negro History Week-the Fifth Year," *JNH* vol. 16, no. 2 (April 1931), p. 126.

⁶³ "Starting Right" *NHB* (Feb. 1938) p. 12

Woodson clearly articulated that Negro History Week was a part of a larger strategic plan that had to do with transforming the learning experiences of students year round. To achieve this result, Woodson provided teachers with different activities they could conduct with their students and made recommendation on how to push for more systemic change at the district level through textbooks proposals and strategies for lobbying at local public libraries to get them to purchase books on Black life and history. He implored teachers to “throw out of the school all books which thus smear over the truth” and “invite attention to those facts of Negro life and history which have been purposely omitted...In this way propaganda may be uprooted, and truth will secure a hearing in our schools.”⁶⁴

Early on Woodson recognized that books and learning materials that included the narratives and experiences of Black people were not the only things in low supply; the majority of teachers in schools had not been trained to teach Negro History. In 1929, Woodson raised the question of “Who will teach Negro History when it is made a part of the curriculum?” He offered that Negro History Week exposed how little teachers knew about the history of Black people and its importance in schools. To address this, Woodson shared examples where Black educators worked to secure supplemental training to help them effectively teach about the race as one way of addressing this issue. In North Carolina, for example, the state education department allowed teachers to receive credit toward their certificate for work they did in studying Negro History. “Other groups of teachers and branches of the Association...designate some one as an instructor and pay the required fees for him to take a course in the Home Study Department of the Association.” Through the home studies department, participants submitted assignments by mail and they were returned with corrections and feedback. After completing a course through the ASNLH, this person could then be empowered to teach others locally.⁶⁵

Woodson used Negro History Week to raise awareness around the significance of Black teachers learning and having a deep understanding of Black history and culture. This demonstrated how Negro History Week had learning implications for both students and teachers. As an abroad mentor, Woodson encouraged Black educators to develop a more critical and informed perspective on the history of their race; he wanted them to realize that this was also essential for them to be effective instructors of Black students.

In 1941, Dr. Nyabongo wrote to Woodson sharing the activities he helped coordinate with his students at the State Teachers College at Montgomery, Alabama and those at the local high school. Nyabongo highlighted the theme of the program held by the 6th grade class, which focused on “Our Heritage of African Civilization.” Under his direction and with assistance from students of the State Teachers College, these youth performed songs in different languages from the West Africa, read papers on “Civilization of West Africa in the Middle Ages” and “African Womanhood.” Nyabongo noted to Woodson that “what pleased [him] most was the way these students with little training, were able to render these songs in two African languages.” This particular example demonstrates how Negro History Week celebrations functioned as a community event. Not only were teachers and students apart of these celebrations, but members of

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ “Negro History Week-The Fourth Year” JNH (Apr. 1929) vol. 14, no. 2, p 114

the broader community were also engaged in Woodson's program to expand the reach of Negro history.⁶⁶

Student Reflections on the Impact of Woodson's Program in Schools

Woodson's influence on the learning culture in Black schools across the country offered meaningful experiences for students, particularly in regards to the development of their racialized identities. Student reflection offer an opportunity to imagine the texture of this new learning culture Woodson was developing. Therefore, I will offer some vivid students reflections of how Woodson's instructional materials and counter-curricula impacted their learning experiences. The first is from a student at Burroughs' school in Washington, D.C. and the second is a reflection on Woodson and NHW by the Black revolutionary and intellectual, Angela Davis, who was born in 1944 and raised in Birmingham, Alabama. Taken together these accounts demonstrate how Woodson's educational program impacted students across regional boundaries and how it supported students in developing racial pride and explicit critiques of racist ideology.

Nannie Burroughs' school not only incorporated Negro history into its curriculum but they also had a Negro History Library and performed plays that attended to Black culture and heritage. A student who attended Burroughs school in 1929 wrote the following:

All schools teach some kind of history but all schools do not teach Negro history. This school teaches History and Negro History and the students are tremendously inspired by learning the truth about their own race. We know now that our race has been going on in the building of world civilizations. Dr. Carter G. Woodson's books are used as the text here and we have a room, a real library - if you please- set apart for the Study of Negro Life and history. If you want to see us in our glory visit us on Appreciation Day, February 22nd, and hear us tell what the Negro has done for the world and what has been done by some people for the Negro. We want to enter a contest in Negro History with some other School because when it comes to this race history the Training School Girls have the world beat, not including Dr. Woodson. However, come on, students of other scholars [schools] come on and we'll clean up with you. We know our material.⁶⁷

This students' reflection underscores how pride was operationalized in the learning culture offered to Black students through Woodson's interventions. Woodson's curriculum and the new Black educational aesthetic that began to take shape in schools offered academic identities that challenged racial myths. Students could find affirming notions of Blackness in their school curricula and be empowered as learners. In this way,

⁶⁶ Correspondence from Dr. Nyabango to Woodson regarding Negro History Week Celebration in Montgomery (March 7, 1941) in Papers of Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1915-1950 [Microfilm Collection, University Publication of America)..

⁶⁷ Student Yearbook, 1929, Box 312, Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

students were developed to be unapologetically Black within their academic selves and even take ownership within their learning community as someone that was grounded in the identity of the school through its cultural alignment.

Angela Davis, a woman who has come to symbolize a Black revolutionary icon, reflected on the impact Woodson had on her schooling experience as a young girl growing up in Birmingham—a Southern city known for its racial hostility during the Civil Rights Movement. In her autobiography, Davis recalled, “The weekend before Negro History Week each year, I was hard at work—creating my poster, calling on the assistance of my parents, clipping pictures, writing captions and descriptions.” She shared that NHW activities and the perspective that it offered students made a lasting impact on their thinking, it offered “a positive identification with our people and our history.”⁶⁸ In the following passage taken from a speech Davis delivered at Eastern Kentucky University in 2011, she offers a more in depth recollection of Negro History Week during her childhood and charts major themes covered, such as: resistance, pride, and community uplift.

Whenever I speak as a part of various observances of Black history month, my memories always transport me back to my childhood, in segregated schools. You learned from Gary Potter that I attended segregated schools, well they were all segregated at that time, in Birmingham, Alabama. I remember that Negro History Week was always the highlight of our year, because this was the one week when we allowed to cast aside our history textbooks. These were discarded history textbooks from the White schools, and these books did their best to persuade us that our ancestors were much better off during slavery, uh, than they would have been had they remained in Africa, and we were allowed then to rely on our own ability to produce knowledge about the conditions surrounding our lives. And I remember that the theme was always, whether explicitly or implicitly, that of resistance to the status quo of racism. This was the week during which we learned about the scholarly activist contributions of Carter G. Woodson, we learned all the words to the...what was then called the Negro National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” that actually should have been the national anthem of this country, uh, as opposed to this bellicose star spangled banner about bombs...well anyway, that’s another...[laughter]. We learned about Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, and of course Harriet Tubman helped more slaves to gain their freedom than any other conductor on the Underground Railroad. And I remember...I always visualized Harriet Tubman as my grandmother. I thought my grandmother bore this striking resemblance to her and that remains with me to this day. It was the week during which we celebrated many of the firsts. You know, first Black person, first Negro to do this, right?—the first individuals who broke the barriers of racism. But, I remember that it was always assumed that if there could be a first, then there could be a second, and then there would be a third, and so on, and so on, and so on. And I remember that when individuals were celebrated they

⁶⁸ Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1974), 90.

were represented as having strong connections to their communities, they were rising up for themselves, but they were also rising up for their people, for their communities.⁶⁹

Davis recounts how NHW celebrations offered a counter discourse to the dominant narrative presented in the textbooks her school was forced to use year around; and furthermore, how Black students were exposed to new social analyses that challenged distortions of slavery and White supremacy. In underscoring how resistance was an underlying theme of these celebrations, Davis also reflects on how these narratives became moments of prolepsis, in which resistance was projected onto their futures.⁷⁰ Woodson and other Black educators hoped to awaken in the minds of students that they could be the next to “[break] down the barriers of racism.” These narratives instigated a conscious awareness not only of racial oppression, but also models of resistance to such structures of domination. For Davis, NHW served as an incubator for more legible kinds of Black resistance that was to come. They instigated new forms of radical thinking that vindicated the humanity of Black people in the classrooms and in the minds of students.

Davis’ reflection also signals the identity work done through this counter-curricula and new visual culture, similar to the account of the student from Burroughs’ school. The affirming feeling Davis received when she recognized the resemblance of her Black grandmother in the image of Harriet Tubman speaks to the work Woodson aimed to do by wielding racial pride as a pedagogical tool. These narratives offered an epistemic shift away from the hegemonic ordering of “knowledge” that presented Blackness and Black people as culturally degenerate and ahistorical—and therefore, subhuman.⁷¹ Similarly, Burroughs’ student’s assertion that she and her peers were “inspired by learning the truth... that our race has been going on in the building of world civilizations,” demonstrates how Woodson’s educational program worked to restore the racial heritage of Black students, thus trumping the cultural politics of White supremacy. Taken together, these student accounts demonstrate how Woodson’s educational program

⁶⁹ Keppler Speakers. “Activist Angela Davis Reflects on the Notion of Black History Month”. Filmed [n.d.]. YouTube video. Posted [September 22, 2011]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqYyMRCmfvE>

⁷⁰ Michael Cole offers prolepsis as the “cultural mechanism that brings the end into the beginning,” whereby that which is aspired to is spoken/named/projected onto the identity of someone in the present. M. Cole, *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline* (Harvard University Press, 1996), 183-184

⁷¹ Sylvia Wynter (1984; 2006) has referenced Woodson’s work in her interrogation of “knowledge” and the ordering of knowledge, particularly as it relates to the “Human” and the role of curriculum and systems of knowledge in shaping the consciousness of human society. Woodson’s interrogation of human history and the studious absence of Black contributions to world development supports the “reflex automatic functioning of rules of figuration” that maintain the paradigms of power (Wynter 1984, 42-43). Sylvia Wynter (1984) “The Ceremony Must be Found: After Humanism,” *boundary 2*, vol. 12/13, On Humanism and the University I: Discourse of Humanism, pp. 19-70; Wynter, Sylvia (2006). “Proud Flesh Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter” *PROUDFLESH: A New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics & Consciousness*, 4, 1-36.

served to develop a critical consciousness within students' regarding their subjectivity as Black people, one where they understood both that they were oppressed and that it was structurally maintained.

The *Negro History Bulletin* as a forum for Black Teachers

Mary McLeod Bethune had been a newly elected member of the ASNLH's executive council when she delivered her address at the organization's annual meeting on September 9th, 1935. This meeting marked the 20th anniversary of the association. Bethune's talk was entitled, "The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History: Its Contributions to Our Modern Life," and she emphasized the importance of "interpreting" the findings produced by trained scholars to the masses. Bethune, who was an educator, political figure and school founder, was not an unfamiliar face to the general members of the ASNLH. In fact, she was the first woman to present a major paper at an ASNLH annual meeting in 1923, just over a decade prior.⁷² However, her talk on this day marks a significant moment in the history of the association; not only because she would become its president in the following year, but also because she would play a critical role in developing the *Negro History Bulletin* in 1937. The *Bulletin* would do the very things she outlined in her speech.

In her 1935 address, Bethune made an appeal to the body of the association for more emphasis to be placed on translating the scientific findings of the trained social scientists that had been doing work on Black life and history to the capacity of the masses. She stated, "Already we have an ample supply of investigators, but it appears to me that there is a shortage of readable and responsible interpreters, men and women who can effectively play the role of mediator between the trained investigator and the masses."⁷³ The annual conference one year later, in 1936, convened under the theme "The Teaching of Negro History, Literature, and Art;" surely Bethune's appeal for a greater emphasis on developing "interpreters" influenced the focus of the meeting. All of the papers and presentations at this meeting dealt with curriculum reforms that would incorporate Negro History and exploring how Black students should learn about themselves in schools. In essence, these scholars met to explore strategic ways that the research being undertaken by those affiliated with the association could be incorporated into the learning experience of students at the elementary through collegiate level.

At this 1936 meeting Bethune was elected as President (1936-1951) to fill the vacancy after the death of John Hope.⁷⁴ Her strong investment in the education of Black people, as a past president of the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools (1924) and founder of the Daytona Educational and Industrial Institute, would lead to an even more sturdy connection between Black teachers and the work of the ASNLH. It comes as no surprise that the *Negro History Bulletin* would be created within the first

⁷² Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, "Black Women, Carter G. Woodson, and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1915-1950," *The Journal of African American History* 88, no. 1 (January 1, 2003).

⁷³ "The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History: Its Contributions to Our Modern Life," Bethune JNH vol. 20, no. 4 (Oct. 1935), 408

⁷⁴ "Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the ASNLH, Held at Virginia State College, Petersburg, Virginia, October 25-28, 1936" JNH vol. 22, no. 1, (Jan. 1937), 11.

year of Bethune's presidency. This publication became a major tool taken up by Black educators to supplement the proscribed educational curriculum approved by public school officials. Black teachers came to take ownership over this publication as a space for them to exchange ideas on how to make education more relevant to Black students.

Furthermore, teachers themselves penned many of the articles, stories, lesson plans, and class assignments featured in this magazine. While Woodson would be the one to execute this vision, it was the request of President Bethune that the ASNLH "create a publication that would serve the needs of teachers and general readers" that prompted his creation of the *Bulletin*.⁷⁵

As John Hope Franklin would state years later, the *Negro History Bulletin* was perhaps the "most vigorous extension of the work of Dr. Woodson" into the lives of Black students. "Teachers were to find in it materials for use in classes in secondary and elementary schools, while students themselves were to discover in its pages stimulating and inspirational materials that would be valuable to their studies."⁷⁶ Therefore, the *NHB* became a resource to aid teachers in interpreting the facts about Negro life and history to meet the intellectual capacity of the youth and the masses of Black people who may not have been able to access the information presented at the Annual ASNLH meetings or in the *Journal of Negro History*.

When Woodson first created the *Negro History Bulletin* in 1937 he was intentional in targeting Black teachers, who served as the vanguard of his educational project. His objective for the magazine was transparent; it was "the stimulation of the study of the Negro in the public schools."⁷⁷ The language in this publication was written to the mental capacity of a child in the fifth grade, according to Woodson this made it accessible not only to younger students, but also the Black masses. Nine issues were to be released each year (October – June), which fell in alignment with the school year calendar. In advertising the first year's series to teachers, Woodson informed them that the *Negro History Bulletin* would be a good supplement to the poster printed and circulated by the ASNLH to schools around the country on "Important Events and Dates in Negro History" which hung in classrooms and different learning spaces.⁷⁸

Woodson utilized the infrastructure of the Black teachers' networks to popularize the *NHB*. For instance, after its first issue in October of 1937 the chairman of Missouri State Association of Negro Teachers, Miss Pearl Schwartz, wrote to Woodson asking for three hundred copies of the publication. She intended to circulate and publicize the magazine at their state meeting in November of 1937. Woodson's mentee and protégé, Lorenzo Johnson Greene, ensured him that it was his "intention to personally present the matter of the Negro History Bulletin to this group." This exchange between Woodson, the leadership of the Black teacher organization in Missouri and Greene demonstrate the partnerships forged between Woodson and Black teachers on the ground across the country.

⁷⁵ Daryl Michael Scott, "Seventy-Five Years of Educational Reform" (2010) vol. 74, no. 2 p. 32

⁷⁶ John Hope Franklin, "The Place of Carter G. Woodson in American Historiography," *NHB* May 1950, 176.

⁷⁷ Letter, Woodson to Lorenzo Greene, June 8, 1937, Box 74, Lorenzo Johnston Green Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁸ Letter, Woodson to Lorenzo Greene, June 25, 1937, Box 74, Lorenzo Johnston Green Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

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Woodson was intimately situated within the national community of Black teachers, which allowed him to provide guidance on transforming the curriculum in their classrooms remotely. Furthermore, even when he was not able to personally address the body of their state organizations, there were close associates and active members of the ASNLH to share his message of infusing the learning curriculum in public schools with the history and culture of Black people.⁷⁹ Greene, who was a professor at Lincoln University, had a great deal of access to teachers of this state because he taught summer school courses, in which many of his students were teachers. In 1938 Greene requested that Woodson send him materials to circulate amongst the teachers in his summer courses and copies of books that could be purchased from the Associated Publishers, Inc. to stock their school and class libraries. Likewise, Woodson requested in return the mailing addresses of the teachers enrolled in summer schools so that they could be included in the outreach strategies of the ASNLH.⁸⁰ Communications between Woodson and Greene demonstrates that Woodson's strategies for outreaching to Black teachers remained consistent. He continued to rely on the infrastructure of Black teacher networks, and the personal relationships he had with people across the country to gain support for his educational project.

Woodson's partnership with educators in Missouri was similarly replicated in other states across the country. For instance, Hilda Grayson in South Carolina was a field agent for the ASNLH and utilized her leadership role within The State Teachers Association of South Carolina. In 1941 Grayson would attend summer schools across the state to appeal to the Black educators in South Carolina to not only subscribe to Woodson's publications, but to explain to them the larger mission of the association. According to E. Horace Fitchett, the Dean of Claflin University, a large percentage of the state's Black teachers attended these summer schools. Therefore, Woodson was able to reach Black educators through various professional channels, their state teacher organizations and through summer schools, which many Black teachers attended for their own professional development.⁸¹

By 1943 Woodson reported that ninety-five percent of the ASNLH's income came from Black people, a fact that he was proud of because it demonstrated a communal investment in the work of the ASNLH. Further demonstrating how grounded this publication was in Black communities across the country, Woodson stated that "Negro teachers and their students are busy trying to fill the columns of the *Bulletin* with such materials as will be helpful to them." He notes how the letters written to him from community members regarding the magazine often use possessive language that denoted co-ownership of the publication. These teachers and students often referenced the *Bulletin* as "our magazine," "our periodical," or "our publication." Thus, Woodson

⁷⁹ Woodson to Pearl Schwartz (November 10, 1937), Box 75 in Lorenzo Johnston Greene Collection at Library of Congress; Greene to Woodson (November 13, 1937), box 74 in Greene Collection at Library of Congress;

⁸⁰ Greene to Woodson (June 22, 1938), Box 74 and Woodson to Greene (July 2, 1938), Box 74 in Lorenzo Johnston Greene Collection at Library of Congress

⁸¹ E. Horace Fitchett to Carter G. Woodson (May 30, 1941), Papers of Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1915-1950 [Microfilm Collection, University Publication of America).

celebrated how Black educators and their pupils were positively responding to the publication and ultimately appreciative of the educational vision he provided.⁸²

Woodson asserted that support and investment from the community was an essential part of his educational program. “In order to be independent and untrammelled for the task before them Negro agencies must be financed by the Negroes themselves.” He offers that this necessity has been proven by the curricula adopted by the “boards of education to inculcate an appreciation of the past of the United States never mention the Negro except to condemn the race.” Therefore, Black patronage financed the *Bulletin* and Woodson developed the content of the magazine in collaboration with Black educators that volunteered their services. Woodson shared that it was Black teachers who helped edit the magazine and translate the facts of Negro History to the capacity of the average reader.⁸³

By the end of its first year in publication, Woodson reported that Black teachers and students around the country were responding positively to the *Bulletin*. In May of 1938 he wrote the following: “The number of subscribers to the Negro History Bulletin has passed the 3,500 mark, and it is expected that it will reach 4,000 by the end of the school year. Most of these subscribers are instructors and students who use this monthly for supplementary work in teaching history.”⁸⁴ In 1940, Woodson noted that, “The circulation is now about 5,000, and it is increasing.”⁸⁵ The *Negro History Bulletin* became Woodson’s proudest accomplishment in his efforts to transform the learning culture in Black schools after Negro History Week. Together they represented the most vigorous attempts of Woodson to disrupt the learning culture of Black students and the educational objectives of Black teachers. Years after the founding of the *Bulletin*, the late John Hope Franklin would make a similar observation regarding its significance in Woodson’s larger educational program. He stated,

Dr. Woodson could not long neglect the students on the lower levels, and, in 1937, he began publication of the Negro History Bulletin... The Bulletin represented, perhaps, the most vigorous extension of the work of Dr. Woodson into the lives of the persons who were soon to share the responsibility of making their communities better places in which to live.⁸⁶

Woodson not only offered mentorship to Black teachers, but he also gave them the space to use their own professional creativity in crafting curricula and materials to be used in the classroom. He urged them to take seriously the study of Negro life and history, and in turn they labored to manufacture resources not readily available in their local libraries or approved textbooks. The pages of the *Negro History Bulletin* became a forum for them to exchange ideas, present effective lesson plans, and discuss important

⁸² “What’s Behind the Negro History Bulletin,” *NHB* (October 1943)

⁸³ *Ibid*

⁸⁴ *NHB* (May 1938), 7

⁸⁵ “An Accounting for 25 Years,” *JNH*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (October 1940), 43.

⁸⁶ “The Place of Carter G. Woodson in American Historiography” by John Hope Franklin, *NHB* (May 1950), 176.

issues for pushing forward a relevant and culturally enriching education for their students.

The Pages of the *Negro History Bulletin*

An early issue of the *Negro History Bulletin* identified the objectives of this publication, which echoed the larger work of “the Director” (Dr. Woodson). Its major concern was “to help the student grasp the meaning and importance of the Negro’s place in the family of races and the place his race holds in the development of civilization.” It was also the hope that this knowledge would inspire pride in the students, and “a questioning attitude towards existing conditions and to understand causes [sic] back of such conditions.”⁸⁷ In other words, the *Bulletin* aimed to repackage the academic scholarship emerging by scholars on Black life and history so that it was accessible to young students, and to develop a critical lens (or a “questioning attitude”) for assessing their lived experiences as future leaders. This magazine was a forum for presenting an alternative educational vision for Black students; one steeped in the counter-ideology of Woodson, which trumped the White supremacist logic of mainstream curricula that positioned Black people as ahistorical and without culture.

The *Bulletin* was a multifaceted publication. It appealed to both students and educators, and it presented historical narratives, current events, and sample lesson plans. Its themes varied from one month to the next. For instance, in the first year the publication covered themes such as “the negro in America when he was enslaved,” “the free Negro,” “the anti-slavery effort,” “colonization,” “achievements in freedom.”⁸⁸ In addition to the feature articles on historical topics, there were also articles from teachers sharing lesson plans from their own classrooms on effective methods for incorporating the history and experiences of Black people into curricula. The section entitled “School News” served to highlight the achievements and developments of Black schools across the country that were using the *Bulletin* effectively, or that offered special courses on Negro History. School News also featured stories about recent developments at particular schools: new buildings, successful Negro History week pageants, etc. Every issue also had a section that profiled new books for school age children. These reviews were meant to make teachers and students aware of the scholarship that was being produced about Black life and history, and as an effort to inform educators on texts they should aim to incorporate into their school libraries. Pictures and images of historical Black figures, teachers, and schools were also incorporated into the *Bulletin* to supplement the magazine’s written content.

In the October 1938 publication of the *Bulletin*, Elise Derricotte, principal of the George Bell School in Washington D.C., raised the question: “What type of materials are teachers giving our children? Just the cut-and-dry books furnished by the school systems? Or are they using supplementary materials, magazines, pictures, stories, news, articles and clippings to fill in the vacant places in the lives of these children?”⁸⁹ This inquiry raised by Derricotte underscores the void Woodson and the team of Black educators writing for the magazine hoped to fill.

⁸⁷ “Results Sought” *NHB* (Feb. 1938), 13

⁸⁸ Letter, Woodson to Greene, June 8, 1937, Box 74, Lorenzo Johnston Green Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁹ “The Negro Teacher at Work” *NHB* (Oct. 1938), 5

In the same issue mentioned above Miss L.A. Duckett, also of Washington D.C., shared a lesson plan she had used with her students when studying Negro Spirituals. Duckett wrote that the lesson plan was inspired by a radio broadcast by Howard University's Male Glee Club. It included lecturing on the origins of the spirituals, "She told why the spirituals were sung. She intimated that the reason for singing the songs in slavery days differed greatly from the reason for singing them today." Duckett offers how she began by providing the children with contextual information on why the songs were sung by the slaves and read a story entitled, "Sunday With Great Grandmother," which gave an account of slavery adapted to the capacity for elementary students. Duckett then developed group projects for the students to complete that included interviews, library research, and developing creative stories and artistic representations of their findings. Duckett offered that the assignment was developed from the questions students raised about the history of Negro music and their broader contributions to the world. Lastly, she facilitated group discussions on the topic and in her *NHB* column she stressed importance of these discussions for the student's growth in oral expression in the subject of English.⁹⁰

The lesson plans shared in the *Negro History Bulletin* implicated a politicized educational agenda. The teachers' articles and lesson plans in the *Bulletin* made it clear that their goal was to educate their students to be critical thinkers, but also to be able to confront and overcome the obstacles placed in their lives. For instance, Duckett prefaced her lesson plan on Negro Spirituals with the following statement, "This study...will also arouse in them a desire to overcome their own hindrances. These obstacles place new demands upon Negroes. They will be able to surmount these through constant, united effort and cooperative planning in the interest of all."⁹¹ Duckett's emphasis on a "constant, unified effort" explains why she incorporated group work into her assignment, where students had to work as a group to research information about the period of slavery and the purpose of Negro spirituals in the past versus their contemporary moment. In doing so she emphasized the importance of teaching students to develop a communal work ethic, because it would be necessary for them to overcome the obstacles before them in the future.

The content of the *Bulletin* challenged the framing of many historical narratives that were likely to be found in the students' textbooks. This is the case with the Civil War, enslavement, the abolitionist movement and Africa. For instance, while mainstream textbooks may have written about the abolitionist movement as one where kindhearted White men conceived of the idea and worked to free the enslaved men and women, the *Bulletin* disrupted this narrative. In the issue on the abolitionist movement, Woodson does make mention of the White sympathizers of the enslaved, but he also makes it clear that White abolitionists did not incite the desire for freedom in the hearts of Black people. "The very mention of Frederick Douglass discloses the important fact that the abolition movement was not a movement by others for the Negro. It was to some extent a movement by the Negro for himself. The Negroes from the very beginning were the first abolitionists."⁹² Thus, Woodson reframed this historical narrative so that Black students

⁹⁰ L.A. Duckett, "A Method for Studying Negro Contributions to Progress" *NHB* (October 1938)

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 3.

⁹² "The Struggle of the Negro Against Bondage" (February 1938), 3

would understand that, “During the days of bondage the slaves ever struggled in some way to be free.”

The *Negro History Bulletin* also tied historical narratives to the contemporary moment. For instance, the November 1939 issue covered the history of Black education in the U.S. from before the Civil War up until the present. The section entitled, “Education Prior to the Civil War,” highlighted that prior to the 19th century some slaves were allowed to acquire varying degrees of education; however, it explored how after the increase in slave revolts laws were implemented that made it illegal to teach Blacks to read and write. Another article entitled, “Snatching Learning in Forbidden Fields,” explored how some enslaved men and women went to extreme lengths to acquire literacy skills. The issue also presented the topic of “Education of the Negro Today,” whereby progress had been noted in regards to access to schools and the increase in the number of college educated Black Americans. Woodson’s critique of Black education also came across in this issue, in an article entitled, “Suggestions for Improvements in the Education of the Negro.” In this section of the *Bulletin* readers were offered a shortened version of *The Miseducation of the Negro*.⁹³

An array of pictures capturing the history of Black education was also featured in the *Bulletin*. These included images of Black children in school, new school buildings, a photo of a group principals studying at Fisk University and a commencement processional at Xavier University. The visuals in this issue reflect how Woodson, and the Black educators who partnered with him in editing the *Bulletin*, aimed to create a Black educational aesthetic that could both inspire Black children, and that reflected a dignified narrative of Black educators and their work. These images, narratives, and even Woodson’s criticism of Black education offered students a nuanced engagement with their educational reality.

Conclusion

Woodson was critical of the education offered to Black students and the ways in which Black teachers’ effectiveness was crippled by Eurocentric curricula. He also manufactured solutions to address these challenges. As a teacher himself, Woodson was very involved in the organizational structures that supported Black teachers and he eventually became a life member of the American Teachers Association in 1947. Through his close ties to Black teachers as a professional class, he provide mentorship that empowered them to disrupt the status quo within schools on a local level. He worked to construct a national effort whereby Black teachers challenged the ideological underpinning of dominant schooling by centering the lives and experiences of Black people. In demanding that Black history and culture be recognized in schools Woodson was not simply urging teachers to tell thrilling narratives of African American achievement. He was partnering with teachers to vindicate the humanity of Black people within the epistemological framework of the learning experiences offered to Black students.

Through Negro History Week, Woodson offered a new *Black educational aesthetic* that restyled classroom life for Black students and teachers—classrooms featuring pictures of Black historical figures, lesson plans that directly engaged with the history of slavery, systemic oppression, and yet Black achievement and resistance. These

⁹³ Negro History Bulletin (November 1939)

became central elements of the curricula taught by the many teachers who subscribed to Woodson's educational philosophy—a constituency that stretched across the nation.

With the *Negro History Bulletin*, Black teachers were able to partner with Woodson in building on his project of revolutionizing the educational curriculum for Black students. This magazine allowed Black teachers to develop amongst themselves new and transformative ways of teaching Black students that transcended the pedagogical toolkits they may have received in teacher training programs. Thus, through these institutions Woodson worked to influence the professional orientation of Black teachers from outside of the dominant channels of teacher education.

With the abroad mentorship of Woodson, Black teachers across the country were engaging in what scholars today may refer to as culturally relevant pedagogy, or culturally sustaining pedagogy, during the first half of the 20th century.⁹⁴ This approach to teaching students aims to “produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order.”⁹⁵ Woodson encouraged educators to aid students in developing the academic skills necessary to compete in the dominant culture, but not at the expense of their own heritage and cultural background. Furthermore, he encouraged teachers to develop in their students a “questioning attitude” that would allow them to be vigilant and critical of the inequities in the world they lived in—and more importantly, be committed to changing them.⁹⁶

As an abroad mentor, Woodson aided Black teachers in recognizing how the politics of White supremacy were at play in the curricula of dominant schools. The elision of Negro voices in textbooks not only silenced their stories, but it rendered their humanity illegible. Operating from the premise that Black people had no history or culture meant operating from a rationale that Black people were subhuman—this was the White supremacist logic that Woodson's educational program worked to trump. Furthermore, dominant schooling prevented Black students from having a clear vision of their subjectivity within the context of Jim Crow America, Woodson's educational program aimed to highlight these inequities that shaped Black life.

Black teachers clung to Woodson's educational model not simply because of his personal accolades, but because his philosophy tapped at the core of their consciousness as Black people. To be clear, Woodson critique of Black schooling was unique, but it did not occur in a vacuum. The writings of Black educators before Woodson demonstrate that there had been a scattered, yet consistent desire for Black cultural achievement to be incorporated in schools; thus, reflecting a consistent thread in Black educational thought.⁹⁷ What Woodson did, however, was create the institutional structure around this

⁹⁴ Gloria Ladson-Billings, “Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” *American Educational Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (1995): 465–91; Django Paris, “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice,” *Educational Researcher* 41, no. 3 (April 1, 2012): 93–97.

⁹⁵ Ladson-Billings, “Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” 474.

⁹⁶ Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995). “Towards a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy.” *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, pp. 608-630; Django Paris (2012). “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice.” *Educational Researcher* 41, no. 3, pp. 93-97

⁹⁷ E. A. Johnson, *A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1890 : With a*

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counter-ideology, which gave his philosophy greater emphasis and impact. His pronouncement of the call to investigate and center Black history and cultural achievements in schools was done with an unflinching vigor unlike ever before. Through his writings and institutions, Woodson also developed a theoretical language as to why the teaching of Black history and culture was a necessity. Teaching students about their history and culture, not only affirmed their identities as Black people, but it also served as a discursive vindication of Black humanity.

Short Introduction as to the Origin of the Race : Also a Short Sketch of Liberia (Raleigh : Edwards & Broughton, Printers, 1890); Anna J. (Anna Julia) Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (Xenia, O. : Aldine Printing House, 1892), <http://archive.org/details/voicefromsouth00coop>; Leila Amos Pendleton, *A Narrative of the Negro* (Washington, D.C. : Press of R.L. Pendleton, 1912).

CHAPTER V

The Black Educational Heritage:

A Triangulation Between Freedom, Education and Affect

The previous chapters have captured Carter G. Woodson's national prominence as an educational thinker, as well as the tangible ways in which he impacted the schooling experiences of Black students during the Jim Crow period. By exposing the range of his educational activities (i.e. textbook publications, professional partnerships with Black teachers, and Negro History Week) and how widely celebrated they were by Black communities my goal has been to write him directly into the historical and pedagogical narrative. In charting Woodson's iconic educational model, and therefore calling attention to his previous absence, I have also worked to expose the limitations of the current framing of Black educational history—which I will now discuss more at length.

Woodson's obscuring in the historiography of Black education, despite his deep entrenchment in the professional world of Black teachers and their schools, signals the need to (re)conceptualize how we frame the narrative. Recognizing the limitations of the current paradigms challenges us to rethink how we remember Black education, and particularly the need to step outside of the W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington binary of classical vs. industrial education. This iconic divide has over-determined our memory.

The Du Bois-Washington binary stems from the opposing ideological camps of White philanthropy, and lacks attention towards the agency of Black educational thinkers, whose ideologies extended beyond said parameters. In other words, Black educational thinkers that are not as easily placed within the spectrum of the Du Bois-Washington camps, which mimics the divide between missionary and industrial capitalist philanthropy, are marginalized in the popular recollection of Black educational history.¹ This mapping privileges White paternalism over Black intellectual ingenuity in guiding our interrogation of the historical archive. As a framework for the history of African American education it is insufficient, and particularly so when we consider the case of Woodson. Woodson's educational model directly engaged questions relating to culture and human recognition as they pertained to schooling. That is, the dominant historical framings of Black education do not account for the "culture war" always at play within the context of American schooling, one in which Black people and Black culture have been rendered non-existent or deviant, a discursive negation of Black subjecthood.²

To address this disjuncture, I offer the *Black Educational Heritage* as an analytical framework for studying and teaching the history of Black education. It is the amalgamation of recollections, ideas, practices, and histories that constitute the educational agency of Black people in this country, through which they worked to seek full human recognition, what I interpret to be Black freedom. I am proposing a more

¹ James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 1 edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988); William Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001).

² Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America?: Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

expansive framework for Black educational history to account for the breadth and depth of this struggle. While some aspects of this heritage overlap with the mainstream educational sphere, significant portions rest at the margins, if not completely outside of it.³ In this chapter I will present my conceptualization of the Black Educational Heritage, which extends from this study on Woodson, but that also has critical implication beyond him.

In mining the historical landscape of Black education and presenting this new analytical framework I hope to call attention to critical aspects that have been taken for granted—namely, the motif of ‘education as a bridge to freedom.’⁴ Thus, the function of this framework is to call out a core aspect of the Black educational experience that have not been thoroughly attended to, or, that have been rendered so commonsensical that its deeper conceptual meaning has been understated. This long held understanding of education and freedom as inextricably bound within Black America presents a useful theoretical position to begin our studies and teaching of Black educational history. To be clear, I am not presenting this framework as one that captures all of Woodson’s contributions or to elucidate the significance of Woodson’s narrative; but it does accentuate crucial aspects of his legacy as an educator and that of Black education overall.

The Black Educational Heritage functions as a prism of Black schooling that characterizes the dialectical relationship between schooling and Black life through a cultural lens. It explores how Black Americans came to view education as a bridge to freedom, how this cultural perspective shaped their educational pursuits, and what this tells us about the fundamental relationship between schooling and Black life. By thinking through the interplay of education, freedom, and affect in history we get more than just a sense of what happened or a descriptive history. This thinking offers a point of departure to get at how this history was experienced and felt by those Black people who sought freedom through education. Before presenting my theoretical argument for the Black Educational Heritage, I would like to explore how this history has been previously framed.

Framing Black Educational History

Historians have concerned themselves with the topic of Black education as early as the late nineteenth century. However, the history of Black education as a field grew dramatically after the Civil Rights Movement.⁵ The scholarship after this period

³ Thomas L Webber, *Deep like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1865* (New York: Norton, 1978); Derrick P. Alridge, “Of Victorianism, Civilizationism, and Progressivism: The Educational Ideas of Anna Julia Cooper and W.E.B. Du Bois, 1892–1940,” *History of Education Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (November 1, 2007): 416–46; William Henry Watkins, *Black Protest Thought and Education* (Peter Lang, 2005).

⁴ This trope, which I have referred to as ‘education as a bridge to freedom,’ is a paraphrasing of the many accounts by historians, and Black educational thinkers, that have discussed how Black Americans saw education to be part and parcel of freedom.

⁵ James D. Anderson, “Northern Foundations and the Shaping of Southern Black Rural Education, 1902-1935,” *History of Education Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1978): 371–96.; Ronald E. Butchart, “‘Outthinking and Outflanking the Owners of the World’: A Historiography of the

underscored the debate between classical vs. industrial education—a narrative that has produced a binary within Black educational discourse. This scholarship was integrationist in its stance. It highlighted disparities in resources between Black and White schools and the complicity of Black educators with segregation. Du Bois, with his insistence on liberal education to foster socio-political progress was cast as the hero in the post-Civil Rights historical scholarship. Washington, with his advocacy for practical education to build Black economic self-sufficiency while accepting political disenfranchisement, was cast as the villain. In a broad stroke, this is what the narrative offered.⁶

Arguably the most influential text on the history of African American education during the Jim Crow era is James Anderson's 1988 groundbreaking work, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1865-1935*. Anderson also raised questions regarding the framing of historical scholarship on Black education.⁷ He writes, "So often the histories of Black education attend excessively to the growth of intellectual currents and ideological debate, leaving the readers without a clear, concise, and comprehensive understanding of what actually happened in the way of elementary schools, normal schools, secondary schools, and colleges."⁸ To address this void, Anderson merged both an ideological and institutional history of Black education; but its framing, I would argue, is still informed by the ideological parameters of classical versus industrial education—a narrative that Anderson refers to as "the struggle for ideological hegemony." As a result, Woodson and his cultural educational movement that took place simultaneously to the history Anderson discusses, is mentioned only twice in passing. This is not to signal neglect, but more so suggests that in focusing on the popular debate taking place in the mainstream educational sphere, largely driven by private White funding entities, the broader span of intellectual thought by Black educational figures is overshadowed, and this continues to be the case.

The struggle for ideological hegemony between industrialists and advocates of liberal education does not account for Black educational efforts that operated outside of the mainstream educational sphere. In fact, this binary even fails to capture the evolving educational thinking of Du Bois and Washington themselves, though they have become icons for this framing.⁹ A more comprehensive understanding of Black educational history, and the breadth of Black educational thought requires that we step outside of the Du Bois -Washington binary of classical vs. industrial education that has over-determined our memory. There are two major limitations to the current framework.

African American Struggle for Education., *History of Education Quarterly*, 198," *History of Education Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (January 1988): 333–66; V. P. Franklin and James D. Anderson, *New Perspectives on Black Educational History* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Company, 1978).

⁶ Surely, the Post-Brown and Post-Civil Rights discourse shaped this portrait of Booker T. Washington, because many Black Americans continued to recognize Washington as a hero to the race during the first half of the 20th Century, Woodson included; see, for instance, Woodson's (1922) treatment of Washington in his textbook, *The Negro In Our History*.

⁷ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

⁸ *Ibid*, 3.

⁹ Derrick P. Alridge, *The Educational Thought of W.E.B. Du Bois: An Intellectual History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008).

First, this framing stems from the opposing ideological camps of White philanthropy, and overshadows the intellectualism of Black educational thinkers. In his book *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*, William Watkins offered an analysis of the competing ideologies of White philanthropist during this period and how “dominant economic and sociopolitical interests shaped schooling for Blacks, the curriculum, and ultimately the social life of the country.”¹⁰ In short, Watkins charted the stronghold that White philanthropists had on Black education during this period, particularly highlighting the industrial capitalists pushing for the Hampton-Tuskegee model. Watkins analysis grounds my argument that what we remember as the debate between Washington and Du Bois, the debate that continues to frame our memory of Black education, is actually a demarcation of opposing ideologies amongst White philanthropists. This mapping is shortsighted because it privileges White paternalism over the intellectual agency of Black educators in guiding our interrogation of the historical archive. In short, this ideological struggle has been so dominant in our historical memory because of the influence these philanthropists had over the institutional structure of Black education during the period. However, the ideologies they represented, classical vs. industrial education, were not definitive of the span of Black educational thought or models that existed during the post-Reconstruction and pre-Brown era. .

A second major flaw with this framework is that it obscures the intellectual span of Black educational thought during the Jim Crow era, such that the educational philosophies of scholars like Carter G. Woodson or Anna Julia Cooper are isolated.¹¹ In teaching the history of African American education it has become convenient to use the Washington-DuBois paradigm to evaluate Black educational thinkers and their educational models. The current framework makes such questions appear to be analytically sound, though it implies that the span of intellectual thought of Black educators can only exist between these two pillars, as opposed to beyond, outside of, above or beneath them.

Many educators challenged this rigid binary; Woodson was one of them. In *The Miseducation of the Negro*, he offered that when the “wave of industrial education struck the country by storm...the educational authorities in the cities and states throughout the Black Belt began to ...make the training of the Negro conform to this policy...The missionary teachers from the North in defense of their ideas of more liberal training, however, fearlessly attacked this new educational policy;...Negroes participating in the same dispute arrayed themselves respectively on one side or the other.”¹² Woodson argued that neither of these two programs succeeded in teaching the Negro “to think,” and as a result, “we missed the mark.” To place Woodson on the spectrum of Industrial vs. Classical education, though he critiqued this very dichotomy, is evidence that it obscures other, more grounded interpretations of Black educational history. Woodson’s educational model centered on challenging White supremacy’s distortion of Black cultural achievement. He argued for educators to be attuned to how the denial of Black

¹⁰ Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education*, 179.

¹¹ Carl Grant, Keffrelyn Brown, and Anthony L. Brown, *Black Intellectual Thought in Education: The Missing Traditions of Anna Julia Cooper, Carter G. Woodson, and Alain LeRoy Locke* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

¹² Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (ASNLH, 2008), 34.

culture was a misrecognition of Black humanity in the schooling process—a paradigm that is beyond the scope of the Du Bois-Washington framework of classical vs. industrial education.

Contemporary scholarship has continued to press the boundaries of this dominant Du Bois vs. Washington binary, uncovering elements of this history that was previously overlooked.¹³ For instance, a re-evaluation of Booker T. Washington has sought to expose his discrete politics as a race man, a trickster who understood the importance of accumulating an economic base before an intellectual movement could take place.¹⁴ Moreover, the post-Brown scholarship began to wane after the failures of integration became strikingly apparent by the 1980s. A second wave in Black educational historiography emerged. Noting the worrisome outcomes in Black schooling trends after desegregation, this phase was marked by efforts to re-investigate Black segregated schooling experiences.¹⁵ Scholars began to widen the analysis of African American education prior to the Brown decision. Vanessa Siddle Walker has done important work in this area by focusing on the communities and educators that worked collaboratively to provide a purposeful schooling experience despite Jim Crow.¹⁶ Thus, Siddle Walker recast the narrative of this period beyond being plagued with inadequacy, or by the classical vs. industrial ideological struggle, and revealed effective educational structures and practices that Black educators developed amongst themselves as a professional group. In particular, she held up the interpersonal relationships between Black educators, students and communities that were defining

¹³ Grant, Brown, and Brown, *Black Intellectual Thought in Education*; Dionne Danns, Michelle A. Purdy, and Christopher M. Span, eds., *Using Past as Prologue: Contemporary Perspectives on African American Educational History* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2015); Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South*, 1st edition, paperback issue, edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Vanessa Siddle Walker, “Original Intent: Black Educators in an Elusive Quest for Justice” (AERA 2012 Brown Lecture, October 25, 2012), <http://mp125118.cdn.mediaplatform.com/125118/wc/mp/4000/5592/5599/20007/Lobby/default.htm>.

¹⁴ Amanda Kemp, “‘Your Arms Are Too Short to Box With Me’: Encounters with Booker T. Washington, International Trixter.” in *The Racial Politics of Booker T. Washington*, Edited by Donald Cunnigen, Rutledge Dennis, and Myrtle Glascoe (San Diego, CA: JAI Press, 2006), 63–83; Robert J. Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ Michele Foster, *Black Teachers on Teaching* (The New Press, 1998); Michele Foster, “Educating for Competence in Community and Culture Exploring the Views of Exemplary African-American Teachers,” *Urban Education* 27, no. 4 (January 1, 1993): 370–94; Jacqueline Jordan Irvine, “Beyond Role Models: An Examination of Cultural Influences on the Pedagogical Perspectives of Black Teachers,” *Peabody Journal of Education* 66, no. 4 (1989): 51–63; Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential*; H. Richard Milner and Tyrone C. Howard, “Black Teachers, Black Students, Black Communities, and Brown: Perspectives and Insights from Experts,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 73, no. 3 (2004): 285–97.

¹⁶ Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential*; Vanessa Siddle Walker, “African American Teaching in the South: 1940–1960,” *American Educational Research Journal* 38, no. 4 (December 21, 2001): 751–79; Vanessa Siddle Walker and Ulysses Byas, *Hello Professor a Black Principal and Professional Leadership in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

features for many of these schools. Jerome Morris demonstrated how these schools often functioned on a “communally bonded” educational model, whereby teachers, students, and the broader Black community understood themselves as partners with linked fates.¹⁷

Lastly, historical scholarship on Black women professionals has exposed the silence of gender within the collective historiography, despite the extraordinary contributions of Black women to African American education.¹⁸ Evelyn Higginbotham’s work, for instance, points out that women made up the majority of the Black teaching force during this phase. She writes, “By 1910 the number of Black teachers had risen to 29,772, of which 22,547 were women and only 7,225 were men.”¹⁹ These scholars have done well to widen the scope of the field, but there are new elements that must be explored and held in conversation.

Revisions to the historical narrative of Black education have continued to suggest that the classical vs. industrial education binary fails to capture the complexity of Black education, or even the thinking of Washington and Du Bois. Ultimately, there is a need for a framework for Black education that sketches a broader parameter for Black educational possibilities. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will present the *Black Educational Heritage* as a more expansive analytical framework for studying queries on the history of schooling and Black life. Taking heed to the challenges being posed by contemporary scholarship to the lingering framework of Washington vs. Du Bois, the *Black Educational Heritage* is an historical framework that makes an explicit turn away from such limiting paradigms.

Conceptualizing the Black Educational Heritage

The Black Educational Heritage framework is born at the intersection of education, freedom, and affectivity. My use of affect is borrowed from Sara Ahmed’s work on “affective economies” where she outlines how “emotions do things.”²⁰ She asserts that, “Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective.”²¹ Therefore, the general feelings of loss, dispossession, and longing that are often affixed to the experiences of individuals and their collective community can, and should be, understood as having a critical role in mobilizing. I contend that Black America’s “*longing* for

¹⁷ Jerome E. Morris, “Can Anything Good Come From Nazareth? Race, Class, and African American Schooling and Community in the Urban South and Midwest,” *American Educational Research Journal - AMER EDUC RES J* 41, no. 1 (2004): 69–112.

¹⁸ Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, 1st Edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era*, 1 edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Sonya Ramsey, *Reading, Writing, and Segregation: A Century of Black Women Teachers in Nashville* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 42.

²⁰ Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 119.

²¹ *Ibid.*

freedom” was an affective economy, and it provided currency that helped sustain and develop their educational pursuits.

Thus, the Black Educational Heritage stands on three theoretical assertions. First, I offer that education has been an affective project in the lives of Black people. Secondly, the collective belief in “education as a bridge to freedom” was an inherited ideal in the Black collective consciousness, passed through the intellectual circuits and community pedagogies during the first half of the 19th century and beyond. Lastly, I contend that Black educational thinkers have historically carried a system of counter discourse that informed their educational pursuits.

My turn to affect is an effort to tease out the complexities and nuance of what scholars have long understood to be a kinship between education and freedom in the Black educational tradition. By naming the affective dimensions of Black schooling we achieve a deeper conceptual understanding of the history of Black education—a history that is laden with collective suffering, hope, and dreams of freedom. As Robin Kelley has written, “What sustained enslaved African people was a *memory of freedom*, dreams of seizing it, and conspiracies to enact it—fugitive planning, if you will.”²² Echoing a similar point on the philosophical dimensions of Black longing for freedom, Neil Roberts has offered marronage as “the transitional space between unfreedom and freedom.”²³ The term speaks to the liminality that exists between slavery and freedom and the psychic flight that took place prior to insurrection, truancy or running away. Roberts’ theorization attends to the agency of enslaved people despite their bondage and lays the groundwork for interrogating the ways in which Black subjects acted on, and embodied, their dreams of freedom.

The Black Educational Heritage is an inverted look into the educational experiences of Black people that begins with eyes on the outside of the schoolhouse as opposed to within. Meaning, my understanding of Black schooling does not start with Black students in the classroom, because Black learning took place even before they were permitted in such spaces. While African Americans were widely excluded from formal learning spaces during the period of enslavement, most of the learning opportunities they were offered by Whites centered on their submission to a subjugated status. The Black Educational Heritage denotes the processes by which Black people worked to repurpose education and knowledge toward their own emancipatory struggle—a battle that has been waged in both the material and affective realm.

Moving beyond cliché understandings of the trope “education for liberation,” I am working to generate a deeper analysis of this conception by highlighting the role of affect in the broader trajectory of Black education and Black educational thought. Historical texts, such as James Anderson’s (1988) *The Education of Blacks in the South*, Heather Williams’ (2005) *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and In Freedom*, Frederick Douglass’ *My Bondage, My Freedom* (1855) and even Woodson’s (1915) first book *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* highlight the kinship between education and freedom in the African American group consciousness.²⁴ Taken together, these

²² Robin D. G. Kelley, “Black Study, Black Struggle,” *Boston Review*, March 7, 2016, <http://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-Black-study-Black-struggle>.

²³ Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 15.

²⁴ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*; Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North

historical studies assert that Black desire for education overwhelmingly stemmed from a repudiation to their status as enslaved, non-citizen, non-human. This affective relationship between learning and freedom would persist during the post-bellum era as a result of the continued denial of Black citizenship rights and civic misrecognition.²⁵ As such, it continued to drive Black educational pursuits as a freedom project.

This affective economy, Black people's longing for freedom, offers the most reliable analytical juncture from which to evaluate the events, figures, and thinking that comprise the history of Black education. It allows us to take a step back from the Washington vs. Du Bois binary of industrial vs. classical education, which is emblematic of White philanthropists' struggle for ideological hegemony. In doing so, it expands the aperture of Black educational history and accounts for the diversity of educational thinking, models, and actions of Black people. This affective relationship between education and freedom is the genesis of the Black Educational Heritage.

As an umbrella framework that houses the big ideas in the history of Black education, the Black Educational Heritage is an effort to move beyond the limited scope that has previously left many important themes out of sight. These themes include the negotiation of Black humanity in the process of formal learning, the cultural politics of schooling, deeper understandings of the connection between freedom and education in African American History, and the connection of these factors to Black ontology. While contemporary scholarship has come to address some of these themes head on, I assert that many of them can be found within the Black Educational Heritage, the historical accountings of African American schooling.

The Black Educational Heritage emerges out of this study on Woodson because his direct engagement with culture provides striking examples of the framework, and particularly the significance of Black affect. Woodson built on the affective economy of Black America's longing for freedom to garner the support of teachers for his educational program. Black people's shared longing for freedom offered what V.P. Franklin has called "collective cultural capital" to do the additional work required by Woodson's educational program²⁶—lobbying for the adoption of new textbooks, purchasing alternative classroom decorations, celebrating Negro History Week, etc. Additionally, Woodson engineered an educational program that cultivated feelings of racial *pride*, yet another example of how affect played into the project of Black education.

Woodson's educational model centered on Black cultural life because he recognized that there was an intimate relationship between Black culture and Black humanity. Furthermore, if education is a humanistic project then a lens that centers the

Carolina Press, 2007); Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom ...* (Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855); Carter Godwin Woodson, *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 : Putnam, 1915).

²⁵ Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South*, annotated edition edition (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2007).

²⁶ Vincent P. Franklin, *Cultural Capital and Black Education: African American Communities and the Funding of Black Schooling*, 1st edition (Greenwich, Conn: Information Age Publishing, 2004).

cultural capacity of a people is vital. This is especially important considering the role culture has played in sustaining Black life and imagination, but also because the negation of Black culture has served to justify Black domination.²⁷ Woodson was a thinker at the forefront of exploring the critical function of culture and history in the project of African American education.

Questions that depart from the Black Educational Heritage framework acknowledge that education in the life of Black people always is, and always has been, a struggle over the recognition of Black humanity and the quest for freedom. As Joyce King and Thomasyn Wilson (1990) have written, “Bias against Africa and Blackness is manifested in school knowledge, definitions of intelligence, and processes of knowing and reflect the “dominant” values of society. Consequently, schooling does not value Afro humanity in its store of knowledge.”²⁸ This devaluing of Black humanity has been reproduced across time within the mainstream educational sphere; it has been a driving force behind the resistance employed by critical Black educators, keenly aware of their subjugated status.

Black Educational Heritage is a methodological framing that permits scholars to explore questions of Black education that are temporal and contextually situated, that attend to the affective realities and subjecthood of those involved, and the range of ideologies that have historically informed Black educational thought. While it allows for the previously mentioned fluidity, the Black Educational Heritage rests on an inherited cultural value of education amongst African American people premised on a legacy of misrecognized Black humanity by societal structures and a traversing of, and often times flat out rejection of that misrecognition. Black educational history is a narrative of consistent resistance. The Black Educational Heritage is the mixture of the histories, the feelings, the ideas, the theory and practice of critical Black educators and their students, and how they all center on the promise of freedom to be realized. As a framework, it is a pulling back of the curtain on Black education from the gaze of Black teachers and learners.²⁹

²⁷ Nell Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (Simon and Schuster, 1925); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*, Updated edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* Edited by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222–37; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 1978).

²⁸ Joyce Elaine King and Thomasyn Lightfoote Wilson, “BEING THE SOUL-FREEING SUBSTANCE: A LEGACY OF HOPE IN AFRO HUMANITY,” *The Journal of Education* 172, no. 2 (1990): 10.

²⁹ In referencing “the [Black] gaze” I am importing bell hooks notion of “oppositional gaze,” where she notes that White supremacy has suppressed Black people’s right to look [a synecdoche of Black agency], which continues to prompt the desire to look out of opposition, to document, and to resist such infringement on Black subjectivity; bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,” in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, Edited by Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2003), 94–105.

Black Education as a Battleground for Human Recognition

Knowledge acquisition and production holds a peculiar relationship to the subjecthood of Black people.³⁰ By this I mean ideas to maintain the fiction of Black inferiority led to social boundaries that restricted learning amongst Black people. Furthermore, anti-Black logic was, and is, foundational within American epistemology, which has been repackaged to adapt to the shifting contours of racial politics—all the while maintaining an allegiance to White supremacy, even if articulated in new ways.

Michael Goldberg's (2001) notion of racial naturalism describes how ideas of innate Black inferiority (in biological and natural terms) characterized the prevailing racist logic leading up to emancipation; however, abolitionism gave rise to a logic of racial historicism in which Black people were perceived to be culturally immature.³¹ While racism was once predominantly articulated in biological terms, it eventually became articulated on the grounds of culture. Racial historicism defined European standards as that which was to be pursued. To this latter point, culture becomes the articulation of how racism is expressed; racial inferiority becomes described as pathological as opposed to natural; nevertheless, Blacks are deemed inferior all the same. Race historicism offers that the only hope is to be civilized by White people and Whiteness; otherwise they (Blacks) will continue to be culturally inferior and subhuman. These logics have informed systems of knowledge within the United States and the social practices that policed Black people's access to certain kinds of learning.

Woodson recognized this peculiar relationship between the misrecognition of Black humanity and systems of schooling. He wrote, "What we call race prejudice is not something inherent in human nature;" instead, he argued that it was the result of an educational system that perpetuated anti-Blackness. Woodson believed that the societal disdain for Black Americans was "a logical result of tradition, the inevitable outcome of thorough instruction to the effect that the Negro has never contributed anything to the progress of mankind." Therefore, the mission of the ASNLH was generated in direct contestation of the misrecognition facilitated by the mainstream educational sphere.³²

The Black Educational Heritage is anchored within Black counter-ideology that developed in response to the White supremacist logic. This counter-ideology, which undergirds the gamut of Black resistance surfaced through Black affectivity and led to the development of ground-up education through alternative institutions and philosophies.

³⁰ Zeus Leonardo, "The War on Schools: NCLB, Nation Creation and the Educational Construction of Whiteness," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 10, no. 3 (September 1, 2007): 261–78; Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 1st New edition (Cornell University Press, 1999); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995); Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*; Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom ...* (Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855); Greg Thomas, "PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter," *ProudFlesh: New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics and Consciousness* 0, no. 4 (2006),

<http://www.africaknowledgeproject.org/index.php/proudflesh/article/view/202>.

³¹ David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

³² "ASNLH Brochure" (no date), Box 1 Folder 31, Carter Godwin Woodson collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Dominant Themes in Black Educational Orientations

Black people have resisted aspersions to their humanity in different ways. William Watkins offered six educational profiles to capture Black Americans responses to their socio-historical conditions. He states, “There seems to be clear evidence of at least six somewhat overlapping orientations: the functionalist, accommodationist, liberal, reconstructionist, Afrocentrist, and Black Nationalist.”³³ This turn towards Watkins’ work on Black curricular orientations is to illustrate the range of ideologies and pedagogical strategies employed by Black educators. In short, I do not seek to present the Black Educational Heritage as an essentialist approach, but instead one that recognizes the competing and sometimes overlapping curricular orientations of educational programs. These variations, however, do not diminish the fact that Black American’s longing for freedom was an affective economy that provided cultural capital for their educational pursuits.

As Watkins outlined, Black people’s employment of functionalist education was specific to the context of slavery; it was tied to “the practical, the useful, and the demonstrable.”³⁴ This approach was limited to basic instructions and avoided abstractions; functional education’s main preoccupation was survival in an extreme environment. The accommodationist orientation aimed to circumvent backlash from White racist authorities, and was particularly descriptive of education during the age of Jim Crow. The liberal orientation aimed to advance democracy, develop tolerance, and focused on moral development; in principle it does not necessarily challenge the social order. Afrocentric education centers African culture and explicitly rejects White western theories and history as legitimate or superior. Watkins offers the Black Nationalist educational orientation as the most “extreme reaction to American racism” given its emphasis on separation; this orientation expresses disillusionment with America’s ability to succeed at integration.³⁵ Reconstructionist visions articulated a need to socially transform society; it explicitly proclaimed, “Black people must use education not simply to study the world but to change it.”³⁶

These orientations capture the range of approaches employed by Black people to construct their educational visions. The Black Educational Heritage accounts for these shifting paradigms. In his analysis of Black orientations to education, Watkins displayed that Black people’s educational strategies were based on their socio-historical realities; however, I contend that at the root is an effort to challenge misrecognition and the yearnings for a more sincere freedom. For instance, Woodson’s educational philosophy was a fusion of Black Nationalism, Afrocentrism, and reconstructionism. He argued that the objectives for Black education should be established by Black people themselves, eurocentrism was explicitly critiqued in his curriculum, and he urged Black educators to develop students to challenge racial inequality and to cultivate their ability to imagine more humane possibilities.

³³ William H. Watkins, “Black Curriculum Orientations: A Preliminary Inquiry,” *Harvard Educational Review* 63, no. 3 (January 1993): 323.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 324.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 331.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 334.

Inheritance: Black Educational Structures and Counter-Ideology

The Black Educational Heritage requires that we widen the scope of our analytical lens to include the alternative and counter learning that Black people forged against the dominant systems of schooling. Thomas Webber demonstrated this need in his 1978 historical study, *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Communities 1831-1865*. Webber explored how the enslaved people succeeded in “actively creating, controlling, and perpetuating their own education,” through processes of enculturation and socialization.³⁷ The culture of these enslaved people shaped their values and behavior; therefore, Webber identified enslaved people as a “society within a society.” This meant not allowing the lessons and imposed cultures of the White masters to determine what we understand enslaved people to have learned. In grounding his inquiries in the voices and experiences of the enslaved people, Webber offered a narrative of education amongst the bondsmen/women that exposed their own technologies of learning—their peer groups, family structures, clandestine congregations, songs and folklore. I build on Webber’s expansive view of education and learning to develop the Black Educational Heritage and to explore Woodson’s educational institutions, which were non-traditional by mainstream educational standards but that impacted learning and Black identities nonetheless.

Heritage signifies inheritance, and intentionally so in the context of the Black Educational Heritage framework. I assert that the genealogy of the ideals and values that shaped Black educational thought in the post-bellum period through the first half of the twentieth century harkens back to the minds of the enslaved men and women. Thus, Black educational thinkers during this period inherited fundamental principles that shaped their work. The notion of education for liberation as the organizing principle in Black educational thought underscores this assertion. In the antebellum period, Black men and women went to great lengths to acquire literacy—risking their lives to do so.³⁸ It is in this context that education and freedom were conceptualized as inextricably bound and emerged as the central tenant in the memory, narratives, theory, and practices of the African American educational tradition. Historian V.P. Franklin has echoed this analysis in his previous work on “collective cultural capital” and African American education. He offered,

The desire for literacy and formal education became a ‘core value’ in the African American cultural value system as a result of the experience of enslavement (with its prohibition of education) and legalized oppression and discrimination in the United States. For formerly enslaved African Americans and their descendants, literacy and formal schooling was closely associated with ‘freedom,’ which they were willing to make great sacrifices to obtain.³⁹

Frederick Douglass offers a clear engagement with this principle.

When Douglass wrote, “Knowledge unfits a child to be a slave,” he presented the function of liberatory education within the slavery context. He had come to this

³⁷ Webber, *Deep like the Rivers*, xii.

³⁸ Williams, *Self-Taught*; Woodson, *The Education of the Negro prior to 1861*.

³⁹ Franklin, *Cultural Capital and Black Education*, xiii.

realization after his master's wife began naively teaching him to read and write; her husband scolded her and asserted that education would ruin a slave. From this moment, Douglass came to understand knowledge to be a direct pathway to freedom. This conceptualization would continue to shape African Americans' cultural orientation to education moving forward—not simply because of Douglass, but because of this configuration of learning/literacy within the power structure of the slave system.

To be clear, we should not understand Douglass' quote to imply that no education took place in the lives of the enslaved otherwise; there was a system of learning that taught allegiance and contentment to the social order of chattel slavery. In Douglass' narrative "knowledge" can in fact be read as a marker for "literacy," which was a synecdoche for the rights and privileges reserved for Whites. Learning to read and write, which in turn meant disproving myths of Black irrationality, instigated in Douglass a heightened sense of discontent; it made his lack of freedom even more unbearable and a proven lie; it unfit him for any sense of apathy for his enslaved condition. Douglass' acquisition of literacy skills, in practice, undermined the very logic used to justify his position at the lowest order of society. Thus, literacy/education was coveted in the minds of the enslaved for symbolic, practical, and intellectual purposes.⁴⁰

Within the context of the Black Educational Heritage, freedom is always at stake. Freedom is the tantalizing reward that has motivated Black educational strivings, no matter how short these efforts may have fallen. The Black Educational Heritage suggests that the educational desires of Black people have been rooted in an inherited memory of resistance against schooling practices that aimed to curtail their humanity; it is evident in the African American freedom struggle from its broadest strokes (i.e. demands for integrated schools as an effort to disarticulate notions of Black people as non-citizens) down to its finest points (i.e. demands for young children to have equal educational opportunities to realize their highest intellectual potential). While this heritage framework denotes a passing on of ideals and values surrounding education and Black life, this inheritance is not fixed but has developed and expanded over time. While freedom remained the organizing principle, methods have shifted, as demonstrated by Watkins' conception of Black curricular orientations. The Black Educational Heritage has offered itself as a well that critical Black educators continue to dip back into for refreshing and to inform their liberatory pedagogies, a reservoir of thought preserved in memories, affect, history, and practice.

I use Douglass' narrative of "education and freedom" not to position literacy as the singular articulation of liberatory pedagogy during the period of enslavement but as a site to locate it. I contend that even more vital than literacy was the counter ideology that undergirded many of the learning instruments of enslaved people, which shaped their beliefs and practices. Even those who did not have authority over written language may have developed the ability to "interact with and manipulate literate culture in the absence

⁴⁰ Jacqueline Bacon, "LITERACY, RHETORIC, AND 19TH-CENTURY BLACK PRINT CULTURE," ed. Phyllis M. Belt-Beyan and Shirley Wilson Logan, *The Journal of African American History* 95, no. 3–4 (2010): 417–23, doi:10.5323/jafriamerhist.95.3-4.0417.

of literary skills.”⁴¹ The development of slave religion reflects how Black people reconfigured knowledge and tools of knowledge to suit their needs.⁴²

The Black Educational Heritage framework suggests that even functioning illiterate people had heritage, and inherited culture that allowed them to be productive humans that developed their own learning practices and ideals. Webber demonstrated this with his study of education in the slave quarter community. I am also reminded of the critical thought of Sojourner Truth, who was never literate and yet offered profound insight to the world as an organic intellectual and as “the most visible nineteenth-century Black radical women.”⁴³ Ula Taylor (1999) has noted the following declaration by Truth: “I don’t read such small stuff as letters, I read men and nations.”⁴⁴ This quote not only demonstrates how Truth was fearless in her efforts to challenge the State and patriarchy, but also her critique of what may be understood as a reading culture—one in which literacy was used as a measurement of one’s worth as a human being and ability to offer rational thinking. In this way, literacy and the ability to write did not necessarily inhibit or diminish her capacity to develop sophisticated critiques of “men and nations;” her lived experience as a formerly enslaved Black women informed her reasoning. Her critiques may not have been polished and offered with the etiquette that most may have deemed proper, but they challenged the fundamental logics of domination within this country.

Learning to read and write was a direct challenge to the teachings that slave authorities sought to impose. The ways that literacy was operationalized in the freedom dreams of the enslaved would eventually be extended to include more educational desires—citizenship training, practical trades, Black history, etc. Despite the variation, the desires embodied in Black educational strivings reclaim and protect the dignity of Black humanity, upon which practices of White supremacy aggressively assaults.

Affect and the Black Educational Heritage: Longing and Resistance

As previously mentioned, Sara Amhed’s (2004) work has outlined “how emotions do things, and...align individuals with communities” therefore forging *affective economies*.⁴⁵ She contends that emotions stick people together, offering a social currency that has the power to facilitate adherence amongst those who are bound by affect (i.e. a shared desire to be free). I contend that Black America’s longing for freedom was an affective economy that provided currency for their collective educational pursuits. Woodson built on this affective economy of “longing” to garner the support of teachers for his educational program. I will now provide more discussion on Black America’s longing for freedom as an “affective economy.” This longing provided currency for the educational pursuits of Black people, both during the antebellum period and beyond. In offering affect as an important dimension of Black educational history, I seek to elevate

⁴¹ Shirley Logan, *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America*, 1st edition (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 138.

⁴² Raboteau, *Slave Religion*.

⁴³ Ula Y. Taylor, “Read Men and Nations”: Women in the Black Radical Tradition’, *SOULS: A CRITICAL JOURNAL OF BLACK POLITICS, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Fall 1999, Pp. 72-80.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 74.

⁴⁵ Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 119.

our understanding of the dialectical relationship between schooling and Black life/ontology.

The Black Educational Heritage attends to education and learning as an affective project in the lives of Black people. The kinship between education and freedom has made this particularly the case. Black conceptualizations of learning were intimately tethered to their longing for freedom during the antebellum period. In that enslavement was enacted on Black bodies by White society, the longing for freedom has always been a visceral response to bondage (physical and civic) in the African American group consciousness. This meant that Black people dreamed and longed for freedom in radically different ways than their White counterparts; Black conceptualization of freedom heavily relied on affective realm because of their lack of freedom in the material world. By the affective realm, I mean feelings, emotionality, and the imaginative. While we may note the challenges and denials Black people have experienced in relationship to education, affectivity attends to how Black subjects absorbed these acts imposed upon them, and how the emotions generated from such prolonged experiences have produced notions of collectivity amongst them—how it has produced a heritage.

Black Educational Heritage presumes that education can be a site and project through which Black people are able to imagine freedom, prepare for freedom, and in some spiritual sense, even be free. While an enslaved woman might contend that though her body is in bondage, her soul is free; one may consider how Black people may have conceptualized learning as a means to acquire autonomy and freedom in their thinking. In this way, even though my body is in bondage, my mind can be free. I contend that the affectivity of freedom (its emotionality, the stimulating power of the longing for such) in the lives of Black people signals the affective dimensions of Black education by virtue of the kinship between education and freedom in the African American consciousness. This triangulation between education, freedom and affectivity is captured in Du Bois' (1903) *Souls of Black Folks* when he wrote that during the days of the Freedmen's Bureau, "Six million dollars were expended for educational work, seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars of which the freedmen themselves gave of their poverty."⁴⁶ Thus, Du Bois underscored not only the faith placed in the work of education amongst the recently freed men and women, but also their material investment in education. It begs to question how a people that had so little were willing to give so much for the project of Black education. The Black Educational Heritage lends a conceptual understanding of education and freedom through the lens of affect that provides clarity.

Affectivity therefore offers an important lens to assess questions and studies on Black education. Michael Dumas' has implicated this notion of affectivity in his timely articulation of the Black educational imagination.⁴⁷ He offers this concept to archive how Black education emerged as an extension of the Black counter public sphere, whereby African American people worked out their understandings of race and education and how to appropriate schooling to work towards a collective Black freedom.

Black America's longing for freedom and, more specifically, their conceptualization of "education as a bridge to freedom" expanded and even formalized

⁴⁶ W. E. B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk (text Only)* by W. E. B. Du Bois and F. J. Griffin (Barnes & Noble Classics, 1903), 29.

⁴⁷ Michael J. Dumas, "Sitting next to White Children: School Desegregation in the Black Educational Imagination" (CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, 2007).

over time, fashioning the Black Educational Heritage. This heritage is one in which Black teachers and learners have been aligned by feelings of estrangement to the State, which continued to fuel Black educational projects centered on their longing for freedom. The Black Educational Heritage developed from the affective economy of Black longing for freedom and resistance to their misrecognition as human beings within the State, legally and then civically. This anxiety between anger and longing is captured in Salamishah Tillet's notion of "civic estrangement," which "occurs because they [African Americans] have been marginalized and underrepresented in the civic myths, monuments, narratives, icons, creeds, and images of the past that constitute, reproduce, and promote an American national identity." Speaking about the post-Civil Rights era, she offers that, "Civic estrangement is both ascriptive and affective. As a form of ongoing racial inequality, civic estrangement describes the paradox ...[of being] simultaneous citizens and 'non-citizens,' who experience the feelings of disillusionment and melancholia of non-belonging and yearning for civic membership."⁴⁸ Black civic estrangement is shaped by the continued prevalence of White supremacy and has been affixed at the heart of Black educational traditions. This paradoxical status is couched in the longing for Black equality and civic freedom, and simultaneously the anger and constant resistance toward their persistent civic denial.

Put another way, Black men and women were denied equal access to citizenship rights (learning included) to maintain their subjugation. They resisted this denial through their continued efforts to achieve freedom, some of these efforts heavily rested on the affective realm. Affectively, imaginings and dreams of Black futurity played a critical role as a space to think about freedom because it was physically denied in their immediate realities. Thus, the Black Educational Heritage is born at the intersection of affectivity, education, and freedom; at its core Black education has centered on a longing for freedom and resistance to Black misrecognition, which translated to an investment in the idea of a more promising future. The collective longing and shared resistance against State facilitated misrecognition fueled the shared investment, in and support for, liberatory educational projects by Black communities for themselves and the futurity of their race.

Similar to Franklin's notion of "collective cultural capital," Aldon Morris has offered his conceptualization of "liberation capital," whereby Black scholars create and sustain intellectual enterprises. He uses W.E.B. Du Bois and Black researchers at Atlanta University in the early 20th century as his point of reference.⁴⁹ These scholars historically formed what Morris refers to as "insurgent intellectual networks," a conceptualization that accurately describes the teachers and scholars that promoted Woodson's educational program and partnered with him in expanding it. Morris offered, "The providers of liberation capital, most often members of the oppressed group, work together to formulate new research methodologies that facilitate the collection and analysis of critical evidence leading to new theoretical perspectives on social conditions faced by the oppressed group, as well as programmatic innovations to be used as weapons for

⁴⁸ Salamishah Tillet, *Sites of Slavery: Citizenship and Racial Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Imagination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 3.

⁴⁹ Aldon Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

liberation.”⁵⁰ In the case of Woodson, Black educators participated in his development of counter-curricula and insurgent pedagogies to offer a humanizing education for themselves and their students.

Woodson galvanized the economic value associated with Black desires for freedom to expand his liberatory educational program. Black teachers willingly committed to his program because they saw its end goal of liberating the minds of Black students and preparing them for the work of transforming society to be intimately tied to Black freedom. Woodson’s educational model built on a familiar educational ideal that they all shared. Thus, Black teachers were easily won over by his program; it tapped at the core of their belief in education and the broader principles of racial uplift that guided their work. The counter-ideology that Woodson presented was in fact a familiar one to Black people, in that it spoke to a desire to achieve full recognition of Black humanity.

Woodson’s Educational Model and the Work of *PRIDE*

Woodson’s use of pride in his educational model presents an opportunity to apply the Black Educational Heritage framework, which can be seen threaded throughout this dissertation. Recognizing Black people’s estrangement within the State by way of their exclusion from not only national identity, but also human history, Woodson saw pride as a necessary goal of Black education. Speaking at the Tuskegee Institute in November 1921, he proclaimed, “If you will read the history of Africa, the history of your ancestors—people of whom you should feel proud—you will realize that they have a history that is worth while. They have traditions that have value of which you can boast and upon which you can base a claim for a right to a share in the blessings of democracy.”⁵¹ This cultural past offered an historical inventory of Black Diasporic archives that presented Blackness as an asset as opposed to a liability.

In challenging dominant tropes of Blackness that rested on deviance and sub-humanness, Woodson presented a new lineage for Black students, one that positioned them as capable of the expansive possibilities of human potential. Through Negro history he offered them an historical inventory that could instill pride, a new epistemological framework for Black educators and students to rely upon.

In an ASNLH brochure published sometime after 1937, Woodson underscores how his educational program was working to challenge distortions in human history that excluded civilization and cultural achievement from the heritage of Black people. Over twenty years after the founding of his organization Woodson argued, “Men are now learning to think of civilization as the heritage of the centuries to which all races have made some contributions.” Thus, he was advocating for an understanding of civilization that positioned the Black race as equal contributors to the development of human society.⁵² In this way, Woodson was advocating for a reconceptualization of Black heritage all together. He was articulating a new way of reading the familial legacies or bloodlines of African descendent people, one that challenged White supremacist readings of Blackness and notions of civilization.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 188.

⁵¹ Woodson, “Some Things The Negroes Need To Do,” *The Southern Workman* (January 1922), p 35.

⁵² “ASNLH Brochure,” n.d., Box 1 Folder 31, Carter Godwin Woodson collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

In Woodson's view, reassuring pride confronted the estrangement manufactured by state and civic misrecognition. In teaching Black students about their heritage, Woodson worked to prepare them to recognize the racial myths perpetuated within the dominant educational sphere that worked to compromise their dignity as human beings. As Givens has written, Woodson employed "educational diasporic practice," whereby diasporic subjects have created educational systems and resources that "1) recast the narrative of Africa, its people(s) and culture(s) as a source of pride and Black humanity; and 2) re-appropriated educational technologies that were employed explicitly for their dehumanization as tools for Black self-recognition."⁵³

In the late 1920s Woodson declared, "A man's social standing is determined by the record of his family. A nation is known for what it has achieved. The very name of Greek or Roman excites admiration; the mere mention of the Negro arouses contempt. And yet the Negro has contributed as much to the welfare of mankind as the Greeks or the Romans."⁵⁴ Thus, Woodson drew explicit connections between the social standing of Black people and their exclusion from the history of modernity and civilization. He pivots toward the perverse representations of Black heritage in the mainstream educational sector and the popular imagination.

Hortense Spillers theorized the historical distortion of Black humanity during the period of enslavement. In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," she offered that slavery perverted the family line in that the property status of the enslaved erased paternal lines and the status of slave was passed down from mother to child.⁵⁵ Through this status as slaves, prevailing attributes of Black deviance were also passed down—lazy, irrational, animalistic, etc. Thus, Woodson's restored racial heritage and offered that Black men and women have the possibility to pass down pride and other aspects of humanity. His educational model challenged the distortion of Black genealogy that Spillers captured. Pride was an interruption of the perverse genealogy/heritage that characterized the Black family line through White supremacist ideology, which informed dominant curricula. The status as property and later second-class citizens and the shame associated with such, was juxtaposed by Woodson's heritage of pride, of cultural achievement, resistance, and human possibility.

By employing pride as an affective inheritance of Blackness, Woodson disrupted White supremacy's distortion of Black familial genealogy, and re-articulated the racial heritage of Black people. In that pride was now what was passed down the family bloodline, and by extension Blackness, shame was no longer that which had to be inherited. The Black Educational Heritage, made up of the traditions of Black educators that centered on a longing for freedom and human recognition, offered a systemic structure through which this pride could be passed on. The Black Educational Heritage was built on the accumulation of Black longing for freedom and resistance to their misrecognition; it therefore allowed Woodson to position pride as an affective economy

⁵³ Jarvis Ray Givens, "A Grammar for Black Education beyond Borders: Exploring Technologies of Schooling in the African Diaspora," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 0, no. 0 (November 5, 2015): 7.

⁵⁴ "The Challenge to the Negro," 1926-1927, Box 1 Folder 33, Carter Godwin Woodson collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁵⁵ Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65-81, doi:10.2307/464747.

that dictated Black students relationship to one another and repositioned Black people in the world and in their own minds.

Reflecting on how Woodson employed pride in his educational program, Mary McLeod Bethune once wrote, “I believed in Carter Woodson because he stirred the dormant pride in the souls of thousands ignorant or unmindful of our glorious heritage... He gave me renewed sense of confidence in the capacity of the race for development and in the capacity of my country for justice.”⁵⁶ Thelma Perry of the American Teachers Association echoed this sentiment in stating that Woodson cultivated a “sense of racial identity and pride in Black people.”⁵⁷ Woodson’s attentiveness to pride forces us to consider how Black education has played on the affective realm of Black life, and how these emotions accumulated to produce and shape a heritage of education that functions on Black longing for a promised emancipation. Therefore, while the State’s misrecognition of Black humanity assaulted their dignity, Woodson offered a curriculum that restored pride and humanized Black students. This pride offered a place on which to stand as they continued their pursuit of freedom through active anticipation. The affectivity of Black education has existed on a continuum between hopeful anticipation of full citizenship and anger at the continued civic denial of that promised citizenship. For these reasons, I assert that freedom has been an affective project for Black people, and therefore so has education.

An Interdisciplinary Framework for Black Education

Black Educational Heritage captures more than just history; as Woodson asserted, education was “a life-and-death struggle.” This framework captures memory, motive, and mission. It builds on narratives of the past that are chronologically distinct. It is attentive to the larger problems faced by Black people, which motivated their particular orientations to education. Furthermore, it holds steady the broader objectives of their efforts—to be free and self-determined as human beings. Therefore, it is an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the relationship between schooling and Black life—this complicated history requires such a method of analysis.

Over the years, education has been both a promise and a debt inherited by African American people—by debt, I am signaling that schooling has continued to be a site where Black humanity is assaulted both through ideology and structural practices.⁵⁸ While their access to education has been historically limited and policed, they maintained a belief in its capacity to liberate. The debt and promise duality represents the appendages of education in the life of Black people; it carries a hopeful yet heavy burden in the African American group consciousness. For instance, in reflecting on the labor of love embodied by Black teachers in the Jim Crow South, historian Adam Fairclough professed that, “Education [like Black spirituality] provided a means of sustaining hope in an otherwise hopeless situation.”⁵⁹ A principle goal of Black Education Heritage is to capture the

⁵⁶ Mary McLeod Bethune, “True Leadership is Timeless,” *Negro History Bulletin* (May 1950): 173.

⁵⁷ Thelma D. Perry, *History of the American Teachers Association* (Washington: National Education Association, 1975), 193.

⁵⁸ Gloria Ladson-Billings, “From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools,” *Educational Researcher* 35, no. 7 (October 1, 2006): 3–12.

⁵⁹ Adam Fairclough, *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow*, First Edition

heaviness of, and the socio-emotional investments in, education amongst African American people. Education has been a spiritual matter in this way.

Overall, this framework contends that Black education is a matter of freedom and human dignity, a cultural value that has been inherited from one generation to the next; counter-ideology has always been present and sustained through alternative Black educational institutions from the period of slavery and onward; lastly, it recognizes the affective dimensions to the Black educational experience that offers significance for meaning and interpretation. To this last point, I would offer the example of Black teachers and their role as “double agents,” where they often had to perform deference to the racial order of Jim Crow and White school officials, yet they enacted a language and politic of resistance to the status quo in their classrooms and relationships with students.⁶⁰ Attentiveness to Black affectivity pushes us to interpret narratives of Black education from the inside of Black teachers feelings, thoughts, and philosophies which may at times conflict with illusions created from the outside looking in.

Understanding the triangulation between freedom, education, and affectivity offers nuance to the broader narrative of Black education. To this point, let us recall Du Bois’ observation of the “seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars of which the freedmen themselves gave of their poverty,”⁶¹ to develop a large scale educational program for the formerly enslaved. His attention to how a people who had literally nothing but the promise of freedom, in which they were cloaked, made a decision to give their all (in notable cases, this literally meant their last cent) for the project of Black education—something that is in many ways an abstraction. The Black Educational Heritage and its suggestion that there is a mutually constitutive relationship between education and freedom that hinges on the affective dimensions of Black longing and commitment to building towards such freedom. It offers a standpoint to rationalize and contend with the decision of the freedmen and women to give so much of their scant material possessions to invest in education. It was through education that they were able to create a model of freedom, perform freedom, and even believe in it. The affectivity of education helps us understand why the freedmen that Du Bois memorializes gave so much from so little.

The Black Educational Heritage enables a more holistic engagement with questions pertaining to Black education. As an analytical framework it attends to the socio-political and ontological particulars of Black learning experiences. I offer this framework to situate my study of Woodson because its expansive lens on Black education reveals how Woodson built upon the affective economy of Black longing for freedom and in doing so pushes our thinking on Black education as a whole. In other words, its helps us to see how Woodson inherited and built upon the theoretical ideals of education for liberation passed on by those that came before him and the dialectical relationship that persisted between schooling and Black life.

Potential Limitations of the Black Educational Heritage

(Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 9.

⁶⁰ Ibid; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Siddle Walker, “Original Intent: Black Educators in an Elusive Quest for Justice”; Zoë Burkholder, “‘Education for Citizenship in a Bi-Racial Civilization’: Black Teachers and the Social Construction of Race, 1929–1954,” *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 2 (2012): 335–63.

⁶¹ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk (text Only)* by W. E. B. Du Bois and F. J. Griffin, 29.

This framework is meant to be analytical, not prescriptive of what an ideal liberatory educational praxis is. While the Black Educational Heritage offers a more holistic approach to thinking through African American education, there are some notable limitations to acknowledge within the collective history that informs it. The first has to do with a reliance on notions of Blackness and unity that may suggest certain artificial fixities. The second anticipated limitation is the heavy emphasis on what some may consider a blind and trusting faith in education to bring about freedom and transformative social change. These articulations of education for liberation have at times produced fervent and rigid investments in education that obscures the structures of power and domination that have continued to circumscribe Black subjectivity. These cautions do not undermine the usefulness of studying through the lens of Black Educational Heritage, but reveals some ideological limitations that may have troubled Black educational possibilities of the past.

Within the historical archive, Black educators like many Black leaders relied on notions of a unified Blackness, even though this unity is to some degree imagined.⁶² Thus, the Black Educational Heritage denotes a story of identity politics, whereby Black educators sought to instill a group consciousness in Black people to be committed to racial uplift. Speaking to the limitations of identity politics Angela Davis (2005) has written,

Identity, by itself, has never been an adequate criterion around which communities of struggle could be organized—not even during those periods when we imagined identity as the most powerful engine of movements. Communities are always political projects, political projects that can never solely rely on identity. Even during the period when Black unity was assumed to be the sine qua non of struggle, it was more a fiction than anything else. The class, gender, and sexual fissures that lurked just beneath the construction of unity eventually exposed these and other heterogeneities that made ‘unity’ an impossible dream.⁶³

Davis’ quote underscores how identity politics have historically obscured the heterogeneity within Black communities in ways that even reproduced inequality intra-racially. Furthermore, efforts to constitute a unified form of Black education have led to anxieties and passionate quarrels, particularly amongst Black middle class leaders, because it at times called for an impossible homogeneity of thought. The identity politics within the Black Educational Heritage presented a rigid and fanatical reliance on collective, unified efforts of uplift in response to the hegemony of anti-Blackness.

Despite the limitations of identity politics that must be taken seriously, the Black Educational Heritage, while grounded in notions of a collective Black community, allows for a deeper understanding of the work done by critical Black educators. Notions of

⁶² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Revised Edition*, Revised edition (London ; New York: Verso, 2006); Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁶³ Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture*, 1ST edition (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 100-101.

collectivity was in many ways a pragmatic means of engaging Black education, no matter how imagined notions of Black community or unity might have been. Given the extreme terror and abject experiences of Black people in America, notions of Black collectivity and unity have offered a necessary political platform to develop and sustain counter-ideology that offered meaningful comfort, coping, and hope. Given these conditions, a “we all we got” mentality offered a covering that sustained Black life and a counter-public sphere that has historically produced some of the most radical and transformative political thought in America.⁶⁴

The next concern I raise deals with obscuring issues of power and Black citizenship within the “education as freedom” ideal. Saidiya Hartman’s interrogation of freedom and Black subjecthood lends useful discussion for this analysis. As a first thought, however, I would like to clarify that my intention is not to suggest that Black educators’ historical belief in education as a tool for liberation or “knowledge is power” was a naïve ideal; this would be a reductive analysis and complete assault to the intellectual and spiritual work of Black teachers. However, there are some important limitations to navigate within this conceptualization.

In his analysis of Black teachers and the freedpeople during the 19th century, Ronald Burchart offered that literacy was a symbolic exercise of their freedom, yet “symbols alone would not change their reality on the ground.”⁶⁵ In this sense, the power that knowledge did possess was severely limited in the material realm; “what literacy could not change was the distribution of power or the logic of race in the American South, no matter who the teachers were or what vision of an emancipatory literacy was dominant.”⁶⁶ Burchart’s analysis hints at the limitations that African American’s second-class citizenship imposed; or what Hartman offers as “the double bind” that was the “determining condition of Black freedom.”⁶⁷ Hartman gets at the paradoxical nature of being both Black and free or Black and citizen, and I would offer Black and “educated,” in a context where Black people have been understood as the least human of all the races.⁶⁸

Hartman asserts that chattel slavery hailed Black subjects as a “hybrid of property and person,” a logic which persisted in new form post emancipation even though this legal act conferred upon the freedpeople “inalienable rights of man and brought them into the fold of liberal individualism.”⁶⁹ This paradoxical status of being “free” yet racially scribed as inferior within the context of the State offered “riddled conceptions of liberty” in the lives of Black people. In this sense, “the unyielding and implacable fabrication of Blackness as subordination continued under the aegis of formal equality.”⁷⁰ While Black people were legally free after emancipation, they continued to be rendered abject within

⁶⁴ Michael C. Dawson, “The Future of Black Politics,” *Boston Review*, January 1, 2012, <http://www.bostonreview.net/forum/future-Black-politics-dawson>.

⁶⁵ Ronald E Burchart, *Schooling the Freed People Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010), 14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 118.

⁶⁸ Mills, *The Racial Contract*.

⁶⁹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 117.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

the American polity; this racial marking would continue to shape their existential experience within America and limit their ability to apply the ideals and liberal democratic principles learned within their educational experiences.

Despite this paradoxical status, Black people continued to enact “infrapolitics”⁷¹ and practices of subjectmaking from “under the threshold of formal equality and rights.”⁷² These constant strivings reflect the “unrealized freedom and emphasize the stranglehold of slavery and the limits of emancipation,” yet Black people’s consistent resistance to said denial.⁷³ While Black people recognized the daily limits of their freedom and citizenship, the Black Educational Heritage reveals how they continuously maintained faith in the promise of freedom. Their educational strivings reflect their hope and demands to cash in on their full rights as human and citizen within the American polity. These educational efforts nonetheless reflect Black people’s navigation through “a travestied emancipation and an illusory freedom.”⁷⁴ They were navigating a terrain, a nation that was committed to recurrently disavowing and pushing away at any gained progress towards Black human recognition, particularly if it aimed to be on par, or equal to, White Americans.

While the failures of freedom are inherent within the Black Educational Heritage, the consistent and innovative forms of resistance on the part of Black people within their counter educational projects continue to offer possibilities. They represent insistent demands for human recognition within the Black educational tradition, which continued to cultivate an otherworldly hope that has inspired generations of the past. It may surely have the capacity to evolve and significantly impact the life chances of the youth who continue to suffer from aggressive neglect in our schools today.

The Black Educational Heritage framework accentuates key aspects of Carter G. Woodson as an educational visionary. Understanding Woodson’s theoretical arguments for what constitutes a liberatory and purposeful education in the lives of Black people requires that we account for the non-traditional ways that Black people have facilitated their own learning and how they have culturally valued education. To be clear, this interrogation of Woodson’s philosophy has been the impetus for the Black Educational Heritage (or my development of it as an analytic), but the framework maintains its relevance across historical and even contemporary examples in Black education. Learning has been intimately tied to Black aspirations of freedom since the antebellum period, and is at the heart of Frederick Douglass’ assertion in his autobiography that “knowledge unfits a child to be a slave.” Thus, from its early conceptions, Black educational thought has centered on meditations of freedom and the “unfitting” of Black subjects for oppression; these feelings were tooled to instigate resistance to the logics and policies of White supremacy. The Black Educational Heritage stands on the belief that education as a bridge to freedom is an inherited ideal and underscores the affectivity of freedom and education in the African American group consciousness since the period of enslavement—where Black people were deprived of learning as a synecdoche of their enslaved status.

⁷¹ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels : Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

⁷² Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 14.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 14.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 119.

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The Black Educational Heritage framework explicitly acknowledges how freedom dreams have been the major impetus behind Black desire for education. Black America's longing for freedom was an "affective economy" through which they engineered their own conceptions of schooling. Furthermore, Black teachers have historically inherited and built upon the counter-ideology passed on from those who sought freedom before them.

As a young man parented by former slaves and raised amongst Black civil war veterans in the South, Woodson inherited their faith in the freeing capacity of education and allowed it to guide his life's work. He is a critical figure in the history of Black education, as evidenced by his relationship to Black teachers and his salient contributions to their pedagogy. Writing Woodson into the historical narrative and critically engaging the theoretical and institutional dimensions of his program has been my effort to reimagine and revise the current paradigmatic framing, which has been over-determined by the Washington-Du Bois binary. As a method for studying African American schooling, the Black Educational Heritage challenges us to relinquish worn frameworks that have previously limited the scope of our analysis.

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The Consequence of Woodson's Educational Model

History, like education, is undoubtedly political; needless to say, the historicity of Black education has implication for how we confront the current challenges in schooling for Black people. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, has demonstrated how power silences certain voices within the production of history, not only in how we recall and teach about history but also in the processes through which history is manufactured.¹ Woodson himself was attentive to this reality in offering that Black Americans had been excluded from the historical narrative of America, and beyond this, that African descendant people were collectively portrayed to have contributed little to nothing in advancing human civilization. This obscuring of Black achievement and cultural life formed the lining of the denial of Black humanity and citizenship within the modern world—it legitimized the negation of Black subjecthood. This negation of Black humanity has informed the schooling experiences of Black people across time.

My concern with the history of education is that while the field has made significant progress towards elevating the voices of African American people and attending to their efforts to educate themselves—certain voices continue to be privileged in the popular historical memory. The reliance on the Du Bois vs. Washington binary to frame Black education between Reconstruction and Brown vs. the Board of Education has functioned to obscure Black educational thought and models of instruction that were beyond the scope of classical vs. industrial education. In this framing, Du Bois and Washington have become signposts for the funding entities behind the two models of education they came to represent. The standing framework of Black education is built on White paternalism and fails capture the range of Black educational thought or the radical possibilities that are laden in the educational tradition of Black America.

This dissertation has written against the grain of Woodson's absence in the historical narrative and then offered the *Black Educational Heritage* as an analytical framework that centers the "affective economy" of Black *longing* for freedom in driving out interrogation of this history. This affective economy has significantly shaped the contours of Black educational pursuits over time and offers a useful point of analysis for the broader framing of the trajectory of Black education. This has implication for how we teach and study the history of Black education as a field. Black longing for freedom is the genesis of Black education as a liberatory project, or the conceptualization of it as such in the cultural life of 19th century Black America and beyond. The Black Educational Heritage offers that Black education has been an affective project; that the conceptualization of "education as a bridge to freedom" is an inherited ideal; and finally, that Black educational thinkers have inherited systems of counter-discourse that has historically informed their educational praxis. I have presented Woodson as a case study of these tenets and furthermore, I have argued that his obscuring in the historical narrative of Black education is evidence of the need for this more expansive framing of Black educational history. My analysis of Woodson's educational model is both proof of

¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995).

the need for the Black Educational Heritage as a mode of inquiry and of its fidelity as an analytical framework.

Woodson's early educational experiences were informed by the tenets of communal literacy and the oral traditions of formerly enslaved men and women, these elements would shape his pedagogy in his adult life as a "schoolmaster to his race." After working as a schoolteacher for nearly thirty years, Woodson began to develop an educational model in 1915 through the ASNLH that would restyle the learning experiences of Black people during the Jim Crow era. He offered textbooks, academic research, Negro History Week, and other curricular materials that built on a counter-discourse that asserted Black humanity. Woodson's offered a militant intellectual critique of White supremacist education and how it negated the humanity of Black people. To challenge it, Woodson built an educational model that centered on pride and galvanized Black communities to struggle and reshape their understanding of themselves in relationship to the society in which they lived, and the structures that diminished the quality of Black life.

The educational model developed by Woodson spoke to the core of Black communities in the early 20th century and their longing for freedom. It was a model that built of various dimensions found in the broader reservoir of the Black Educational Heritage—the similarities between Woodson's textbooks and those published by Black teachers before him demonstrate their shared vindicationist discourse. Black teachers across the country and communities alike cleaved to Woodson's educational program and found it to be a critical intervention for Black life even beyond school walls. Woodson's model targeted the Black masses and traced the social infrastructure of Black communities as opposed to simply the educated elite. At its height in the 1930s, the ASNLH and its various publication outlets were fully reliant on the financial support from its largely Black membership and the broader Black community. Woodson's educational model was iconic during the Jim Crow period and offered Black teachers and learners educational resources that affirmed their humanity in ways that mainstream educational models did not.

Our appraisal of the Black Educational Heritage has implication for developing relevant strategies to address the educational challenges faced by Black people today and in the future. Therefore, scholars of this history must be committed to critically engaging the thinking of Black educators who engaged popular educational movements *and* those that operated from beyond the mainstream educational sphere. This means attending specifically to how Black people, as an oppressed group, have articulated their unique educational needs given their positionality within America over time—as enslaved, non-citizen, abject.

The educational universe of the ASNLH was both iconic and subaltern. It was a grassroots educational movement that galvanized Black communities across the country to restyle the curricula and aesthetics of classroom life to challenge dominant conception of Blackness and humanize Black learners. Woodson's interventions had a national impact and garnered the attention of significant figures in the professional world of Black teachers and the leading Black intellectual figures of his time (Du Bois and Washington included).

Woodson represented a distinct line of Black intellectual thought that was attentive to Black cultural life. More specifically, he was attuned to the relationship

between the ordering of humanity along racial lines and the denial of Black cultural achievement. While the memory of Woodson has remained remotely consistent due to the popularity of his book *The Miseducation of the Negro* and those who recognize him as the Father of Black History, there has been an under-theorization of what he offered to Black educators during Jim Crow, and thus what this history can offer for today. The larger dissertation has addressed this first point. I will now bring my analysis of Woodson to a close by offering what I have come to assess as the consequence of his complete body of educational work.

Woodson Social Theory of Education and Black Life

There is a social theory that spans the breadth of Woodson's educational universe—the totality of his institutions, curricular developments, and educational communities forged around these interventions. Put another way, Woodson had a particular understanding of race (and specifically “the Negro”) that informed both his analysis of Black education and history, as well as the infrastructure of his educational program. I measure the following questions against Woodson's work to present my analysis of his social theory of schooling and Black life, and the implications it has for educating Black children today: How did Woodson understand anti-Blackness to function in society, and what did he believe to be its impact on the lived experiences of Black people? Relatedly, did he believe education could be a useful tool to ameliorate the challenges of race in the lives of Black people, and if so, how?

Caribbean scholar and philosopher Sylvia Wynter has credited Woodson with articulating a critical position—that “the order of ‘knowledge’ itself,” or “the regime of ‘truth... structures the ‘consciousness’... The system of ‘knowledge’ itself is what functions to motivate and to de-motivate.”² As Wynter outlines, Woodson called into question the way in which the dominant system of knowledge shaped the collective beliefs about both what it meant to be human and in doing so articulating its constructed antithesis, “the Negro.” Woodson argued that there was a correlation between the hierarchical structure of human history and the “gaps” in society; this can include what some may consider to be “the achievement gap.”

Thus, as Wynter offered, the episteme on which the current structures of the world are governed functions as an “autopoetic of the ordering of human society.” Social, political, and economic gaps are manufactured in accordance with these logics. Woodson worked to develop a new system of knowledge that capsized the current ordering. This was the important work of education in the thinking that Woodson channeled, the turning of “knowledge” and “truth” on its head. The reproduction of Black misery and abjection are intended results of the consciousness imparted through the Ideological State Apparatuses;³ this is not natural, but a system that has become self-fulfilling/cyclical, what Wynter has referred to as “the reflex automatic functioning of rules of figuration.”⁴

² Greg Thomas, “PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter,” *ProudFlesh: New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics and Consciousness* 0, no. 4 (2006), 5.

³ Zeus Leonardo, “Through the Multicultural Glass: Althusser, Ideology and Race Relations in Post-Civil Rights America,” *Policy Futures in Education* 3, no. 4 (2005).

⁴ Sylvia Wynter, “The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism,” *Boundary 2* 12/13 (1984): 43.

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Woodson declared that education, or more so the sham of an education that had been widely offered to Black people, served as an impediment to Black freedom. He stressed that freedom in the lives of Black people had never fully been achieved. Recall the following assertion by Woodson:

The so-called freedom mentioned in the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment merely showed a step in the right direction. Very little has been done since that time to emancipate the mind of the Negro by which real freedom may be attained. On the other hand, however, a systemic program has been worked out and promoted in enslaving the mind of the Negro.⁵

Therefore, Woodson believed that any hope of a liberatory consciousness of Black America would continue to be deterred under the self-fulfilling ordering of dominant epistemology. The modality of “knowledge” or “truth” mediated Black oppression and legitimized the lynching of Black humanity. Woodson’s poignant decree that “there would be no lynching if it did not start in the schoolroom,” emphasizes this precise point.⁶

(Mis)Education served to maintain the stability of the current human ordering; it functioned through the intellectual class of Blacks, who were perceived to be the leaders of the race. In Woodson’s view, “Their minds have been Caucasianized by their traducers that they may never depart from the groove into which they have been directed.”⁷ This was the stifling effect that (mis)education had on the larger project of Black Freedom. The lack of a coherent model of education that centered on the capsizing of “knowledge” in the learning process was an impediment to Black freedom and damaged the Black perception of self in the process; it inhibited any demystification of the Black condition within the ordering of things.

Woodson professed that the world’s interpellation of Blackness (or “the Negro”) continued to be vetted through racial logics of White supremacy. It drew upon the historical inventory of the myths, symbols, and narratives that have been maintained as representing the production of modern human civilization. Woodson found the exclusion of African descendant people within these histories to be a project that was studiously carried out, their subjugation an intended consequence. This obscuring of Afro-diasporic achievement within the historical archive and the larger arch of human history affirmed notions that Black people were irrational, sub-human, and were therefore “a negligible factor in the thought of the world.”⁸

The distortion of Black humanity and cultural achievement in the broader society justified the civic denial of Black people in America by Woodson’s assessment. It also clouded African American’s perceptions of themselves as a racial group and their

⁵ Carter G. Woodson, “‘Race Leaders’ Barred from History Conference--Ablest Scholars Have Been Poor Thinkers--Seventy-Five Per Cent of Colleges Should Be Closed,” July 22, 1935, box 370, folder 1, Claude A. Barnett papers (Chicago History Museum).

⁶ Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (ASNLH, 2008).

⁷ Woodson, “‘Race Leaders’ Barred from History Conference--Ablest Scholars Have Been Poor Thinkers--Seventy-Five Per Cent of Colleges Should Be Closed.”

⁸ Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, chapter 18.

relationship to the structures and policies that governed the society in which they lived. In short, Woodson believed that Black people were forced to contend with a racial logic that presented them to possess a dwarfed version of human potential. This was an ideology they not only had to negotiate on a personal/psychological level but also one which is actively acted upon by the outside world against Black people.

While Whiteness was the human ideal, Black people lacked the capacity to conform to it. Woodson said that this epistemology had to be challenged as a first step in addressing the oppression of Black people. It was the first step in any liberatory praxis. It was damaging to the self-perception of Black people, and it prevented them from having a clear analysis of their structural oppression. Woodson argued, “The education of any people should begin with the people themselves, but Negroes thus trained have been dreaming about the ancients of Europe and about those who have tried to imitate them.”⁹ He commonly referenced the idea that schools educated Black people to believe in the supremacy of White-European culture, that it relied on propaganda that suggested that Whiteness was the standard that should be pursued or mimicked. Yet, at the same time, Black people are constantly reminded that they can never be White.

Thus, race infringes upon the human capacity of Black people in that they have been offered a “truth” that positions them to be subhuman and that shapes their lived contexts. These rituals of “truth,” or the ceremony of knowledge, certainly impairs the ontology of Black people, who, as Du Bois wrote, are forced to see themselves “through the eyes of others,” and to “[measure their] soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” While Woodson understood this to be the reality of Black life, he still believed they had the capacity to overcome these impediments.

In writing Black history into the narrative of human history, Woodson sought to destabilize the ideology that informed schools and the broader society. He did more than provide the untold stories of Black people. It was an intentional strategy to produce racial pride and a conceptual understanding of Black oppression that exposed it as unnatural and ideologically manufactured through structures and policies throughout history. As Woodson emphasized, lynching as a violent act upon Black bodies was an extension of the ideology reproduced in the classroom, through the ceremonies of knowledge as Wynter suggests. He challenged the popular distortions of Blackness by proving through historical facts about early civilization in Africa, the cultural achievements across the diaspora, and by citations of Black self-determination and intellect. In trumping the cultural politics of White supremacy Woodson waged an intentional brawl against “knowledge” to protect the human dignity of Black people, primarily in the minds of Black people themselves.

Woodson’s capsizing of human history or his (re)articulation of the racial heritage of the Black world offered a refined conceptual understanding of the Black self, the world of White supremacy, and the lies upon which it was built. This offered students a new lens through which to see the world and themselves. This new lens, or the removal of the formerly imposed, or the merging of the two (because it is not possible to forget that which has already been seen), was the work of education. Woodson’s educational model asserted that the consequence of education must be the demystification of White supremacy and a turn towards explicit recognition of Black humanity; this meant a disavowing of the acclaimed “truth” and “knowledge.” In centering Black cultural life in

⁹ Ibid.

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the learning process we affirm Black humanity, in affirming Black humanity we trump White supremacist ideology, in trumping White supremacist ideology we create the possibility for student to imagine a new world-view. Exposure to the fallacies of “knowledge” and “truth” is our only hope for social transformation and ultimately “Black freedom.” While this is not an all-encompassing strategy, Woodson positioned it as the critical first step.

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