

Document Set A: Carter G. Woodson and the Origins of African-American History Month

In February 1926, Carter G. Woodson established “Negro History Week,” an event designed to allow schools, communities and individuals across the United States the opportunity to display what they had learned over the previous year with regard to Americans of African descent. He chose the second week in February for the celebration because it contained the birthdays of Frederick Douglass (February 14, 1818) and Abraham Lincoln (February 12, 1809). The celebration was promoted by Woodson’s adopted fraternity, Omega Psi Phi, and was expanded officially to a month in the mid 1970s.

Source: Excerpt from Carter G. Woodson, “The Celebration of Negro History Week, 1927” *The Journal of Negro History*, Volume XII, No. 2 (April 1927) (Modified)

“This is the meaning of **Negro** History Week. It is not so much a Negro History Week as it is a History Week. We should emphasize not Negro History, but the negro in history. What we need is not a history of selected races or nations, but the history of the world void of national **bias**, race hate, and religious prejudice. There should be no indulgence in undue **eulogy** of the Negro. The case of the Negro is well taken care of when it is shown how he influenced the development of Civilization.”

Source: W.E.B. DuBois, “A Portrait of Carter G. Woodson” (1950) (Modified)

“Carter Goodwin Woodson, who died in Washington on April 3, (1950) at the age of seventy-one, illustrates what race prejudice can do to a human soul and also what it is powerless to prevent...From subscriptions to his quarterly, from donations made by small groups and organizations, from sale of books, [Woodson] not only continued to publish [The Journal of Negro History], but he also went into the publishing business and issued a score of books written by himself and others; and then as the crowning achievement, he established Negro History Week. he literally made this country which has only the slightest respect for **people of color**, recognize and celebrate each year, a week in which it studied the effect which the American Negro has upon life, thought and action in the United States. I know of no one man who in a lifetime, unaided, build up such a national celebration.

Source: Mary McLeod Bethune, “True Leadership is Timeless”, *Negro History Bulletin*, Volume XIII, No. 8 (May 1950) (Modified)

“He dug down into the cells of darkness and revealed to us the background of the Negro, while he kept us constantly aware of history influx around us, still responsive to shaping by today’s dynamic action--and of our duty to contribute to that action in increasing measure.

I believed in Carter Woodson because he stirred the **dormant** pride in the souls of thousands of **ignorant** or unmindful of our glorious heritage, and then struck the roots of his leadership deep, to produce the orderly and keen-sighted evaluation and objective interpretation of the facts unearthed through his efforts.

I shall always believe in Carter Woodson. He helped me to maintain faith in myself. He gave me renewed confidence in the capacity of my 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 force he moved back the barriers and broadened our vision of the world, and the world’s vision of us.”

Vocabulary

Negro: a term that has fallen in and out of favor when referring to someone of black ancestry or appearance. Currently accepted when used in historical context.

Bias: prejudice in favor or against one thing, person, or group compared with another

Eulogy: a speech or piece of writing that praises someone or something highly, typically someone who has just died.

People of color: term used to describe any person who is not white

Dormant: temporarily inactive as in a deep sleep

ignorant: lacking knowledge or awareness

Document B: The School Reform Commission's resolution for African-American Studies

SRC-1 (February 16, 2005) African and American History Curriculum

Passed unanimously by the School Reform Commission

WHEREAS, on December 23, 1968, the School District of Philadelphia in an effort to address the academic and cultural needs of its African American students, initiated a program of staff development on African Heritage and African-American History in order to provide teachers and students with the knowledge and perceptions necessary for their better understanding of the vital role that people of African descent have played in the past, present and future, and

WHEREAS, in addition, the work resulting from this resolution was intended to provide teachers from Kindergarten through Grade Twelve with the necessary background for teaching African and African-American history to their pupils, and

WHEREAS, the School Reform Commission recognizes that the goal of the 1968 resolution has not been fully realized, and that the concerns related to academic achievement addressed by this resolution remain a concern in 2005, and in an effort to close the largest academic achievement gap in the District, now be it

RESOLVED that the District:

- ensure that all students and teachers gain the intellectual respect for children of African descent through the infusion of African and African American history and culture in the total curriculum, grades PreK-12;
- mandate an African and an African American History course in all Senior High Schools by September 2005; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the District utilize experts from within and external to the District in the development of a comprehensive plan that will:

- develop and implement specific goals and objectives to close the academic achievement gap for all racial and ethnic subgroups in the District;
- diversify the teaching and leadership staff within the District;
- provide professional development on various teaching and learning styles that improve the educational attainment of African American children, particularly African American males;
- identify the causes and provide remedies for the over representation of African American and Latino males in special education; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Chief Executive Officer will report progress related to these issues every 120 days until such time that satisfactory progress has been made.

Vocabulary:

School Reform Commission: Governing body of the School District of Philadelphia

Resolution: a formal statement that expresses the decision of a governing body

Unanimously: with agreement of all involved (no opposing votes)

Whereas: taking into consideration the fact that...

Achievement Gap: in education the large difference in performance by groups of students, especially defined by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and gender.

Source C: Clip from “More Than A Month”: Philadelphia’s Innovative Black History Requirement (2/16/2012)

In February 2012, filmmaker Shukree Hassan Tilghman created a documentary that had him exploring whether or not we should still have a Black History Month. This is a 5 minute clip in from near the of the movie in which he takes his exploration to Philadelphia.

We will watch the video in class. This is the link to the video: <http://video.pbs.org/video/2175179566/>

Document D: New York Times, “Philadelphia Mandates Black History for Graduation” (Modified)

This article was originally published on June 25, 2005 and was written by journalist, Michael Janofsky.

Document E: The Notebook, “New Course Grew out of Years of Struggle” (Modified)

The Notebook is an independent newspaper that reports on the Philadelphia Public Schools. This article was published on November 24, 2005 and written by Yulanda Essoka.

Document F: The Notebook, “Mandated Course Draws Strong, Varied Reactions”

Compiled by Janine LaBletta and published on November 24, 2005

Document G: The Notebook, “Opinion, Black History-Correcting the Record: The Case for Mandatory African-American History” (Modified)

By Yulanda Essoka and published on November 24, 2005

Document H: The Notebook, “Opinion, Course Provides a Lens on U.S. History”(Modified)

By Ron Whitehorne and published on November 24, 2005