



The Mis-Education of the Negro

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Originally released in 1933, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* continues to resonate today, raising questions that readers are still trying to answer. The impact of slavery on the Black psyche is explored and questions are raised about our education system, such as what and who African Americans are educated for, the difference between education and training, and which of these African Americans are receiving. Woodson provides solutions to these challenges, but these require more study, discipline, and an Afrocentric worldview. This new edition contains a biographical profile of the author, a new introduction, and study questions.

The Mis-Education of the Negro Details

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Micah Smurthwaite says

The father of Black History Month, Woodson started Black History Week in 1926. A newly freed slave should receive education, but what is the utility of a liberal education? Liber is Latin for free; the education available to every free man. It is also the education to free your mind. Philosophy, science, history, and the humanities (which are called such because they are what differentiates us as human and the study of humanizes us).

However, how useful is a man's knowledge of Plato in an agricultural economy? While Woodson studied the classics at Harvard, his peer had a vocational education in wool and has multiplied earning power.

Woodson grapples with this debate and encourages his fellow Black aristocrats and intellectuals to do all they can to uplift his race.

"The problem of holding the Negro down, therefore, is easily solved. 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"

Daya Washington says

This is the kind of book you will need to read and hear over and over again to grasp all that is being said. Every word is purposeful and every concept perfectly complex and all wrapped up in a challenging bow for the educated African American female (especially). The insight in this book dismantles all that I thought education would be at an HBCU. I wish this was required reading at my high school or even my community college before I transferred to one. An EPIC read for African American community organizers and those still stuck in the American system so much so that they lose grasp of just who they are and what they should be fighting for. This time, I am listening to the audiobook and I just stopped at chptr 6 so I can savor the part that mentions religion in depth. After this sober read, I'm already restless to find a less heavy read to balance out. I get so politically charged reading books like this-- makes me antsy!!

Trae Brookins says

A great historical document and extremely important to those in education who are concerned with racial injustice. A powerful read--unfortunately, so many of his observations regarding white hegemony and the systematic subjugation of African Americans remain true today. Woodson is clear in his critique and makes so many excellent points that I was highlighting a sentence almost every other page. I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in human rights, social justice, racial equality and education.

A'Tru Dreamx says

This was an excellent analysis of the state of black American culture. It was inspiring, as well as a saddening truth. Despite being written in 1930 it reflects current trends. I was disturb to find that as a race African Americans have not made significant gains since the time of Mr. Woodson. Hopefully, his warnings, suggestions, and ideas will be revisited by the new generation to make a positive change.

Ty'ronn Spriggs says

I want to read this book so badly. I have read a couple of excerpt from the book, but I have not read the whole thing yet. When I get this book I will tell you all about it!

Chris brown says

It is amazing that after almost 75 years this book remains at the forefront of forward thinking. More than just a book, it is a manual; blue print rather for the uplifting and enlightening of a people without the common stowaway of blaming “the-man” as the father, author, creator, and personified of every woe upon the African American people. More amazing yet is that after 75 years the content and thermos of the book remain sound and accurate. The years may have passed but the spirit in which this book was written; the solutions that it gives; and the unequivocal wisdom that lies with in has not. This should most definitely be required reading in every high school English class across America.

leynes says

I read *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933) upon the recommendation of Yamini. Thank you so much, girl, for never letting me down.

Why should the Negro wait for some one from without to urge him to self-assertion when he sees himself robbed by his employer, defrauded by his merchant, and hushed up by government agents of injustice? Why wait for a spur to action when he finds his manhood insulted, his woman outraged, and his fellowmen lynched for amusement?

Carter Woodson produced a constructive critique of the educational system of his time, with special reference to its blighting effects on black people. The most crucial element in his concept of *miseducation* hinged on the system's failure to present authentic African(-American) history in schools since most books gave little or no space to the black man's presence in America.

Woodson believed that this form of miseducation, the willful withdrawal of facts and the distortion of history, led to a brain-washed acceptance of the inferior role assigned to black people by the oppressor.

His researches and writings were designed to provide educational sustenance, to fill the void which existed

by reason of neglect of Black Studies. If one wants to comprehend today's race relations and debates, one must turn back to those earlier efforts and acknowledge the ideas and the work which 'seeded the ground' as it were, and made possible a climate of opinion within which concerted action for equality could prosper.

In 1930, the average expenditure per school-age child was \$45.00 per white pupil and \$14.95 per black pupil. Average southern investment in public school property per school-child amounted to \$120.09 for whites and \$29.62 for blacks. The average white teacher's salary was \$1020, while the average black teacher earned \$524.

The so-called modern education, with all its defects, however, does others so much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker peoples. No systematic effort toward change has been possible, for, the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor. The problem of holding the Negro down, therefore, is easily solved. When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it.

Woodson's main criticism – the fact that black children are taught to despise their own race and admire the white race – is definitely a fair point and something that is worthy of discussion up to this day. Even though we have come a long way since the 1930s, it is still prevalent that whiteness is not only dominant but also idealised in the educational setting, whether it manifests itself in the fact that only books by white authors are on the curriculum or the fact that the history and achievements of minorities are glossed over in history lessons. Or the beauty standard (and default-whiteness) set by society, which is affirmed in all forms of media/advertisements/etc.

I highly appreciated how structured Woodson was in his work and that his focus was clearly on black people – their history, their current situation and how they may get out of this mess. I haven't encountered many authors of his period who were so unapologetic about autonomous, self-thinking black individuals who were in no need of the white man's aid to rise above themselves.

In the church, the Negro has had sufficient freedom to develop this institution in his own way, but he has failed to do so. His religion is merely a loan from the whites who have enslaved and segregated the Negroes; and the organization, though largely an independant Negro institution, is dominated by the thought of the oppressor of the race. In chameleon-like fashion the Negro has taken up almost everything religious which has come along instead of thinking for himself.

He talks at length about the corruption and toxicity of the Christian church and how Black churches were being used to indoctrinate blacks into believing in their own inferiority. He was also unapologetic about the fact that black students didn't learn anything useful or relevant at school/university, which resulted in their incapability of finding a suitable job after graduating.

His own definition of what 'educated' really means in a system in which racism is institutionalized was so on point. 'Educated' blacks were not people who could think for themselves and act accordingly, no, 'educated' blacks were those who knew 'their place', recognized their 'inferiority' and knew 'they would never achieve anything'.

Fortunately, Woodson offers a solution to stop this form of 'education' from happening:

At this moment, then, the Negroes must begin to do the very thing which they have been

taught they cannot do. They still have some money, and they have needs to supply. They must begin immediately to pool their earnings and organise industries to participate in supplying social and economic demands.

Can't believe I'm saying this but this approach actually reminded me of Jay Z's new song *The Story of O.J.* in which Jay preaches that blacks finally have to invest in valuable shit (e.g. by capitalizing on real estate opportunities) and give back to their communities.

In general, Woodson is brutally honest when it comes to his assertion of the black race. He doesn't fail to address their shortcomings. He talks at length about the fact that hundreds of black employees frankly say that they will not work under another black man. One is afraid that the other may prosper more than he does and be recognized accordingly.

For example, there may be a Negro grocer in the neighborhood, but the Negro chauffeur for a rich man down town and the washerwoman for an aristocratic family in 'quality row' will be more apt to buy their food and clothing at the larger establishment with which their employers have connections, although they may be insulted there.

I can't speak to the fact whether these sentiments are still prevalent today or not, but I think they're worth mentioning and thinking about. It's important to reflect one's behavior and one's internalized stances.

In conclusion, I really appreciate this study by Carter Woodson since it provides a comprehensive overview of the educational system of the 1930s and the resulting problems (some of which are yet to be battled). As mentioned above, I think it's crucial to understand the history of a problem to truly examine it in today's setting.

Eddie says

"The mere imparting of information is not education." (Ch. 1)

The Mis-Education of the Negro is a powerful glimpse into the state of the Negro in the Early 20th Century as analyzed by noted African-American historian and scholar, Carter G. Woodson. Throughout Mis-Education, Woodson addresses several key points:

How the Negro ended up in his predicament:

Woodson explains that the traducers of the race, those who oppress the Negro through propaganda and mis-education, "...by teaching [the Negro] 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." Ch. 1 -The Seat of the Trouble)

Education:

"...the schools for the classical education for Negroes have not done any better... The Negro trained in the advanced phases of literature, philosophy, and politics has been unable to develop far in using his knowledge because of having to function in the lower spheres of the social order." (Ch. 2 - How We Missed the Mark).

The apathy of the highly educated Negro:

"...the highly educated Negro often grows sour..." (Ch. 1 -The Seat of the Trouble) with many siding with segregationists on the best solution for the Negro race.

Entrepreneurship:

Why Negroes will not patronize black owned businesses & the need for the Negro in professions other than religious ministry are some of the topics Wooden expounds upon.

Sarah says

I know. I know. This is a classic that should be read by all black people everywhere. I have no real qualms about the content but there were just so few "ah-ha moments" that I was a little underwhelmed. To Woodson's credit, I'm sure that has more to do with the impact this book has had on black culture and education since it's publication. Many black people and institutions have taken Woodson's admonishments to heart and made positive changes. There are some areas pointed out in this book that still need serious work but even in those areas, I thought, "I already knew that." Even then, it's good to be reminded. I would recommend this book but don't expect for your world to be rocked by new revelations. Expect more of a reminder of how far we've come and how far we have to go.

Cherisse says

Excellent book! Every African American needs to read this book in order to understand how we've been so brainwashed to hate ourselves.

Linda says

The Mis-Education of the Negro was originally published in 1933. In it, Woodson outlines what he sees as the repercussions of an ineffective Negro educational system. The book may have been shocking when it was written, but it represents mainstay thought about education, today. The book remains relevant, because even though most agree, as a community, we still have a way to go in putting many of his recommendations into practice. As a modern reader, I appreciated chapters XVII and the appendix the most. In chapter XVII, Woodson says that it doesn't make sense for Blacks to simply give their vote to one political party.

Any people who will vote the same way for three generations without thereby obtaining results ought to be ignored and disfranchised. As a minority element, the Negro should not knock at the door of any particular political party.

In the appendix, Woodson examines the question of what the race should be called. I don't think he ever answers the question, but I love the following quote:

It doesn't matter so much what a thing is called as what a thing is.

Although the topics Woodson covers in chapters VII and the appendix aren't new, I think he offers an opinion that isn't often articulated as eloquently and is relevant to a modern discussion.

Tama says

I felt a great deal of conflict coming from Woodson as I read this book. He seems to be a great observer of the Negro people. He has provided depth and perspective in his writing. Yet it seemed that for every concept he approached, he consistently countered his own initial point of view. As an example, I was intrigued by his discussion of an educated and uneducated minister. The educated minister understands (and can read) the established teachings, but the uneducated minister understands the people. I feel as though the constant comparison was written of Group A (uneducated) and Group B (educated). I did not get a sense of what happened as the very person he wrote about in Group A transitioned to become a member of Group B. The member of Group B seemed to have succumbed to the values or oppression of the White population, but does that mean he has entirely rejected the values from which he arose?

Sheehan says

Well I have had this book for almost a decade collecting dust on my shelf, just kept getting passed over for other seemingly more relevant texts that came across my desk.

Can't say it was "worth the wait", it is not bad, but not earth shattering either. Even for it's time, I imagine much of it must have seemed like a reiteration of WEB DuBois's Souls of Black Folks, in fact Woodson's whole chapter on the state of teachers was a pallid reconstruction of a much more poetic DuBois version.

Now to be fair, I'm sympathetic to many of the rhetorical arguments, regarding community self-sufficiency, a radical rethinking of the idea of equality and the agency to do for self, as opposed to awaiting your "due". Woodson's insistence at that time that the black community would suffer if reliant upon the good graces of whites and lose the same empowerment of other communities of immigrants that organize collectively, has clearly played out in the modern urban communities, where resources are immediately exported out of the community via trans-national corporations, and owners who do not live among the urban communities.

I enjoyed Woodson's call to service over leadership; stating, "The race needs workers, not leaders" suggesting better the steady investment of people in bettering their communities by doing work for themselves, instead of lining up to be recognized as leaders of the whole race by those in power doling out concessions and opportunities. There was a persistent bias against leadership throughout the book, generally asserting that many "leaders" in the communities were out for personal rather communal gains.

Lastly, the appendix was a bit nutty, a hodgepodge discussion of nomenclature for blacks, negroes, colored, etc., fashion advice, and prognostications on the future of color palette selections for the race...so that was sort of interesting ending!

Michael Strode says

"The Negro, whether in Africa or America, must be directed toward a serious examination of the fundamentals of education, religion, literature, and philosophy as they have been expounded to him. He must be sufficiently enlightened to determine for himself whether these forces have come into his life to bless him

or bless his oppressor. After learning the facts in the case the Negro must develop the power of execution to deal with these matters as do people of vision." ~ Carter G. Woodson

Carter G. Woodson proposed this notion in the context of outlining a plan for advancing racial education through the development of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH). In this sentiment, we can discern a challenge from Woodson to begin interpreting historical phenomena in a manner that establishes its measurable utility for influencing black people to claim full agency in altering their own condition. While making a comparative reading between this text and "The Souls of Black Folks", conversations I encountered with others led me to the conclusion that many have not afforded the most popular single thesis by Woodson the thorough examination required. While the language is often less florid than DuBois, the analysis offered here is no less comprehensive and lends itself to neither imitation nor repetition of the facts elucidated previously in "The Souls of Black Folks". Through his work as a historian, Woodson uses an incisive reading of the history of Negro education from the Reconstruction period forward to bolster the argument that it has been improperly administered by others to the detriment of black people. This injustice would only be resolved when we took ownership of creating the input and defining the outcome.

While the text opens by focusing its attention upon the process of miseducation, Woodson expands the diameter of the discussion markedly with each new chapter to display how this process takes root in each aspect of Negro life impacting the church, political ambitions, business sector, vision, and leadership. The argument he constructs finds him squarely balanced between Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey. While he endorses the fierce work ethic Washington sought to make the hallmark of black people, he rejects a servile acceptance of the permanent social underclass. His devotion to an educational system which nourishes black identity and intellect at every level builds upon the work of DuBois, but he admonishes educated Negroes to pair their higher learning with the grassroots service still being performed by those lesser educated. In practice, this pairing of ideas and implementation would form the framework for an independent community enterprise. Throughout the text he exudes the fierce nationalism exemplified in the Garveyite philosophy, but differs upon the subject of repatriation.

Amongst the most astute observations offered here comes in a discourse on Marxism where he states "History shows that it does not matter who is in power or what revolutionary forces take over the government, those who have not learned to do for themselves and have to depend solely on others never obtain any more rights or privileges in the end than they had in the beginning." The insight Woodson offers on this matter would later prove prescient when we saw our leftist alliances of the Renaissance crumble upon the realization that they held no serious desire to address racism within their ranks. This other facet of miseducation arising in the black community then being the dynamic adoption of new philosophies with no strategic or tactical analysis of merit or usefulness. In summation, Woodson offers us one of the many early attempts at developing a black social theory which draws upon the most valuable assets our community while exhorting us to take serious measures in addressing its liabilities.

His legacy of Negro History Week which later evolves into Black History Month is not born of a desire to give either ourselves or America a concession that equality has been achieved nor are we to be cavalier in our observance of this milestone. Negro History Week was to be a first stage towards the objective of building black institutions that could both educate children in their history being overlooked and afford them opportunities and avenues to expand upon that legacy. Cases in Arizona and Tennessee have given us a clear lens into the peculiar quality of American forgetfulness which occurs when a synthesized and complete historical record is not the way an educated mind is measured. As this forgetfulness becomes more pervasive, we must return to the work of Carter G. Woodson, Lorenzo Johnston Greene and the pioneers of varying strains of Black Studies whom arose post-Civil Rights for a template that will guide us back to the

goal of establishing independent systems of education where the curriculum is not dictated to us, but decided by our own best assessment of the needs of our communities.

Bobby Wright offered us possibly the most sage insight on our renewed ethnic education debate in stating "Education is a political dynamic and for a people who have no social theory, reading, writing and arithmetic should be much less important than what is written and read." "The Miseducation of the Negro" is an opening gambit in helping us to shift that political dynamic in another direction, but only if we read it again with a far more critical eye than we have applied in the past for miseducation has implications which extend far beyond the classroom.

Joi Reece says

As I contemplate the state of today's black adolescents, rereading this piece of literature provided a new perspective on the present condition of African-Americans. This book is more than a piece of literary history; it is the lens with which we should use to reevaluate our education, our family and our commitment to building a helping system.

What I loved most about this book is how it illustrates the power of education and knowledge. It explains how an improper education can make people unfit to solve their own problems and how a proper education can lead to freedom. I whole-heartedly believe that the neglect and continued falsification of African American History taught in the school system as well as the blatant distortion of the facts concerning us in most history books, has gravely deprived black children of their racial of a heritage, and relegated them to state that I see today- a perpetuated feeling of nothingness. What I see before me is the product of the aftermath: a completed cycle of this misguided conditioning- ignorance begetting more ignorance.

As stated by Woodsen "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. Play up before the Negro, then, his crimes and shortcomings. Let him learn to admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and the Teuton. Lead the Negro to detest the man of African blood--to hate himself."

A quote that I try to live by. Education is power and the key!!
