

## TRUTH IN LOVE

### Goals of White Supremacy: Subvert, Revise, or Eliminate Black History

By Parris J. Baker  
January 2024



One of the educational objectives of Carter G. Woodson,<sup>[1]</sup> considered the Father of Black History, was to negate the racist narratives and inaccurate portrayals of African Americans and Africans in American history and literature. Dr. Woodson, believed the experiences and narratives of African Americans and other people of color had been intentionally omitted, invalidated, or distorted by the writers, archivists, and educators of American history. Moreover, Woodson asserted African Americans were being miseducated, inculcated, and indoctrinated to accept a Eurocentric version of American history. This version of history venerated the contributions of white Americans while denigrating the accomplishments of Africans and African Americans.

After being barred from attending conferences with the American Historical Association, Dr. Woodson, recognizing that white historians were not interested in Black history, created multiple ways to produce, distribute, and consume Black history. In 1926, during the second week in February, Woodson commenced Black History Week.<sup>[2]</sup> Black History Month was established in

1976. Contrary to the shared opinions of most Americans, Black History is celebrated in February, not because it is the shortest month of the year, but in honor of President Abraham Lincoln and Statesman and Abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who were born on Feb. 12 and Feb. 14, respectively.

Indeed, the pedagogy of the 19th century American education system was intended to inculcate democratic virtues, values, and morality for future U.S. citizens (Tyack, 2003). The design and operation of public school education was informed by racism, classism, religious bigotry, and ethnocentrism (Asante, 1998; Tyack, 2003). Much of the authentic, self-reported histories of Black people, Native Americans, Hispanics, and immigrants from southeastern Europe were excluded from textbooks, curriculum design, and forbidden in classrooms and religious institutions.

Now, almost 100 years later in 2024, there appears to be an unhallowed and profane collaboration and a calculated and relentless assault by politicians, educators, and Christian nationalists to subvert, revise, or eliminate Black History. New vernacular such as the co-opted term “woke[3]” (wokeness), cancel culture, my Second Amendment rights, and critical race theory have entered the lexicon of nearly every American. Disinformation, misinformation, and artificial intelligence (A.I.) have only complicated how we learn, engage, understand, and use history.

In the decades of social reforms, 1950 to 1969, our nation witnessed amazing progress: the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and affirmative action policies that addressed systematic discrimination against racial minorities and women. In the areas of religion, spirituality, and cultural celebrations, African Americans introduced Kwanzaa, Afrocentrism, Juneteenth, Black History Month, and Black Liberation Theology to America. Each of these cultural celebrations, philosophies, and paradigms centralizes Black people as the protagonists in the stories of extraordinary achievements by Africans and African Americans, presented through an Afrocentric paradigm. The main purpose of each is to correct the skewed perception of Africans and African Americans for all people.

Presently there is a shortage of African American teachers at all institutional levels in the U.S. education system. Given the recent attack on Black history and the goal of white supremacists to subvert, revise, or eliminate the contributions of African Americans, it is important to determine who will teach *all* children about Black history. Both Asante (2003) and Freire (1985) affirmed that competent, compassionate teachers of any racial background; teachers who are committed to creating classrooms that confront oppressive ideologies and collaboratively struggle with their students to obtain liberation and consciousness-awakening education can teach Black history.

Who teaches Black history is crucial. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips<sup>[4]</sup> was a college professor from 1902 to 1934. An American historian and educator with special interests in the economics of Antebellum South and slavery in the United States, Phillips believed and taught that slavery was beneficial to enslaved Africans. Phillips provided a paternalistic evaluation of slavery arguing that the basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, and healthcare) of enslaved blacks were met sufficiently by the slave master. Moreover, he credited slavery with educating, training, and socializing of enslaved blacks. These outrageous, offensive, and false arguments were largely accepted.

In July 2023, the Florida State Board of Education revised and approved new African American history standards for grades K-12 that dictate how slavery must be taught. House Bill 7, signed into law by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis in 2022, states, “Classroom instruction and curriculum may not be used to indoctrinate or persuade students to a particular point of view inconsistent with the principles enumerated in subsection (3) or the state academic standards.”<sup>[5]</sup> Under this new standard, slavery will be taught essentially as an apprentice program in which enslaved people gained useful skills that later benefited them. If this outrage were permitted, the works of Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King, Jr., Maulana Ron Karenga, Cheikh Anta Diop, Molefi Asante, Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B DuBois, James H. Cone, and the National Committee of Negro Churchmen – all determined to defeat and dismantle racism – would be sanitized by those who could rewrite history. That appears to be a history that, once again, presents the guys wearing the white hats always winning.

Black history, how its defined, who narrates the history, and what should be included in African American history, has and will probably remain a contentious topic in America. Cornel West (1999) asserts that an increasing number of white Americans avoid discussions about race because the debates raise important questions about what it means to be truly American. Moreover, West maintains the difficulty of defending America as a democratic nation is to acknowledge that the historic construction of America must include the subordination of Black people and the near genocide of American Indians. These are sobering, discomfoting, but necessary histories (Theoharis, 2018).

It has been suggested that America’s desire to silence race-related discussions is based on white fragility – the avoidance or refusal by white people to engage in discomfoting and complicated discussions about race and racism (DiAngelo, 2018). This assumption is based on the misconception that the United States has become a post-racial society. It is painfully obvious that the United States is not presently a post-racial society.



However, America has been presented with an amazing opportunity to correct the miseducation of all students. The challenge is this: Do not avoid race-related conversations. Black History offers a safe space to engage in elements of our shared histories. Dr. Woodson acknowledges that the promotion of African and African American history would not have been

successful without the cooperation and commitment of elementary and secondary teachers.

Support and encourage education and cultural events that expose students to diverse perspectives of history. Visit virtually or in-person the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.[6] Take a Walk in Black history, an educational program and tour sponsored by Urban Erie Community Development Corporation (UECDC),[7] or visit the Historical Institute of Culture & the African American Experience in Erie, Pennsylvania.[8]

[1] Carter Godwin Woodson. (December 19, 1875 – April 3, 1950) was a graduate of and the second African American tenured professor at Harvard University. Dr. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915 ([Here](#)) and in 1916 he inaugurated the Journal of Negro History which is known today as the Journal of African American History.

[2] Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (1915). [Here](#)

[3] Woke was originally a black colloquialism that meant to politically and racially astute, aware, and educated regarding social injustices. To be encouraged to stay woke was a method of empowerment and encouragement.

[4] Ulrich Bonnell Phillips. [Here](#)

[5] Florida Department of Education. African American History. [Here](#)

[6] Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. [Here](#)

[7] Walking in Black History. [Here](#)

[8] Liz Allen. Historical Institute of Culture & the African American Experience. Erie Reader. Erie, PA. [Here](#)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Parris J. Baker is an Associate Professor at Gannon University, where he is the Social Work, Mortuary Science and Gerontology Program Director. An alumnus of Gannon, Baker received his graduate degree from Case Western Reserve University, Jack, Joseph, & Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences and his doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work. Presently, Baker serves as the Senior Pastor of Believers International Worship Center, Inc. He is married and has five children.



Dr. Baker can be reached at: [baker002@gannon.edu](mailto:baker002@gannon.edu).

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