

Seventy-Five Years of Educational Reform

By Daryl Michael Scott

Twenty-one years after establishing the *Journal of Negro History*, Carter G. Woodson responded to a request from Mary McLeod Bethune—founder of Bethune-Cookman College, advisor to President Theodore Roosevelt, and member of the board of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History—that the Association create a publication that would serve the needs of teachers and general readers. The result was the *Negro History Bulletin*, now known as the *Black History Bulletin*. The artist Lois Mailous Jones served as advisor and artist, probably designing the original masthead. Increasingly, the magazine carried articles written by women who taught in the public schools, and before long women such as Helen A. Whiting, E. P. Derricotte, Mavis B. Mixon, Esther Popel Shaw, Annie E. Duncan, and Wilhelmina M. Crosson joined the editorial board. Indeed, it was largely a women's operation. Given this, it is fitting that the *Black History Bulletin* marks its seventy-fifth anniversary in the year ASALH celebrates the contributions of African American women to American life and culture.

Through the pages of the *Bulletin*, Woodson provided teachers with the background for the *Negro History Week* theme. It was his belief that the study of black history should be 365 days a year and that in February, teachers should set aside a week to demonstrate what the students had learned. He warned teachers against bringing in unqualified speakers during the week, for many would know less about black history than the pupils who had benefited from their ongoing instruction. It is not known how many teachers subscribed to the *Bulletin*, but in many areas of the country, teachers became central figures in the Association's branches. In contrast to the *Journal*, the *Bulletin* provided teachers with the historical overview necessary to create lesson plans for middle and high school students. In this sense, the *Bulletin* was the perfect compliment to Woodson's general history, *The Negro in Our History*.



Since the days of Woodson, the Association has been fortunate that a number of dedicated educators have taken up the task of maintaining and extending his creation. From the beginning, Albert N. D. Brooks, who would become a principal in the Washington public schools, worked alongside Woodson until the founder passed and continued for an additional fourteen years—twenty-seven in all, leaving this world at the helm of the *Bulletin*. Though he never served as director of the Association, it was Brooks who kept the organization going on a daily basis. After his death, Charles Wesley returned to Washington, D.C. to carry the load as director and editor of the *Bulletin*.

A sea change has taken place in education since the early years. The integrationist and black power movements transformed the representation of blacks and other peoples of color in American textbooks, and no history text that excludes them is considered fit for the classroom. Yet all is not well with African American history in our schools. Too often the shift has been from either exclusion or denigration to inclusion coupled with trivialization. Moreover, history itself has become a beleaguered topic with the recent parochialism of testing, especially in math and science. The penalties in “No Child Left Behind” and the national anxiety over America falling behind in math and science has left America's youth, regardless of their origin, knowing hardly anything about their place in history. What would Woodson or Bethune make of the need to fight to get American history of all sorts in the classroom?! Would Woodson write *The Mis-Education of the American*?

The *Black History Bulletin* is thus still relevant after seventy-five years. Recognizing this, ASALH made provisions to restore the journal to its original mission in 2004. Since 2005, when La Vonne I. Neal and Alicia L. Moore became co-editors, the *Bulletin* has rededicated itself to serving the needs of teachers. Promoting culturally responsive teaching, much of which was anticipated by Woodson in his classic social commentary, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, the *Black History Bulletin* carries forth the tradition of the Association and yet is in sync with current thought in teacher education. One cannot know what either Woodson or Bethune would think of the *Bulletin* today, but it reflects the educational direction that they set forth. May it continue to evolve and yet remain consistent with the fundamental goal of making an America in which all children value their ancestors' contributions to our nation.



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