**The Miseducation of the Negro by Carter G. Woodson (1933)**

*Summary*

The most imperative and crucial element in Woodson's concept of *mis-education* hinged on the education system's failure to present authentic Negro History in schools and the bitter knowledge that there was a scarcity of literature available for such a purpose, because most history books gave little or no space to the black man's presence in America. Some of them contained casual references to Negroes but these generally depicted them in menial, subordinate roles, more or less sub-human. Such books stressed their good fortune at having been exposed, through slavery, to the higher (white man's) civilization. There were included derogatory statements relating to the primitive, heathenish quality of the African background, but nothing denoting skills, abilities, contributions or potential in the image of the Blacks, in Africa or America. Woodson considered this state of affairs deplorable, an American tragedy, dooming the Negro to a brain-washed acceptance of the inferior role assigned to him by the dominant race, and absorbed by him through his schooling.

Moreover, the neglect of Afro-American History and distortion of the facts concerning Negroes in most history books, deprived the black child and his whole race of a heritage, and relegated him to nothingness and nobodyness. This was Woodson's conviction as he stated it in this book and as he lived by it. In his Annual Report of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History for the year ending June 30, 1933, the publication period of *Mis-Education*, he stated:

Regarding the Negro race as a factor in world culture rather than as an element in a sequestered sphere, the Director (Woodson) has recently made two trips to Europe to extend the study of the notice taken of Negroes by European authors and artists, and to engage a larger number of Europeans and Africans in the study of the past of the Negro.

Thus it is evident that the stress which Dr. Woodson places on historical research, writing, and teaching in this volume was not theoretical jargon. It represented rather, a firm belief; also a judgement of the available type of education that was so strongly oriented as to warrant his complete and selfless dedication to its betterment. This devotion became a crusade which, in the above instance, carried him to Europe in an effort to open new avenues for recreating and writing of the black man's past. This was in line with his basic charges against the omission by most historians of such an important part of history.

*Mis-Education* criticizes the system, and explains the vicious circle that results from *mis-educated* individuals graduating, then proceeding to teach and *mis-educate* others. But the book is by no means a study in negation. The author goes to great lengths in tracing the historical foundations of the problem, its development, and its influence on interpersonal relations and historical scholarship. Numerous other scholars now follow its example.

The youths of the race were Woodson's particular concern because he recognized that it was with, the boys and girls that *Mis-education* began, later crystallizing into deep-seated insecurities, intra-racial cleavages, and interracial antagonisms. All of these factors have been discussed over and over in the immediate past, by historians, sociologists, psychiatrists, and laymen, but Dr. Woodson, and a pitifully small number of others, had pointed the way a full generation earlier.