

Religion and the Mis-Education of the Negro

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

"...there would be no lynching if it did not start in the schoolroom." – Carter G. Woodson

In 1933, the historian Carter G. Woodson wrote the classic *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. Woodson contended that Blacks had been "trained and not educated." He thoroughly discussed the mis-education of Blacks in religion, politics, schools, institutions of higher learning, and so on. (The book can now be found online at www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/misedne.html.)

Woodson was particularly profound on the subject of religion – especially Black religion. He believed that, though the actual religion was unimportant, Black churches should have pragmatic value. However, he stated that "[Black]...religion is merely a loan from the whites...." He continued that the Black church "is dominated by the thought of the oppressors of the race."

Woodson believed that Black people had to learn to be independent thinkers, but that most of the churches discouraged serious thought. He wrote that "In chameleon-like fashion the Negro has taken up almost everything religious which has come along instead of thinking for himself."

Theologians came in for especially harsh criticism from Woodson. He wrote, "Theologians have been 'the bane of bliss and source of woe.'" He continued, "To begin with, theology is of pagan origin." Indeed, Woodson discussed the fact that Albert Magnus and Thomas Aquinas used the logic of Aristotle, that old heathen from ancient Greece. (Yet, ironically, many Christians continue to write and speak insultingly of so-called pagans.) Woodson also wrote that "They justified the Inquisition, serfdom and slavery. Theologians of our time defend segregation and the annihilation of one race by another."

This situation was complicated by the fact that religious schools "do not teach the people how to tolerate differences of opinion...." On the contrary, Black churches in Woodson's day had been "serving as the avenue of the oppressor's propaganda...."

Moreover, according to Woodson, most White Christians had given up the medieval “hell-fire scare.” Yet many Black Christians to this day continue to blindly embrace a belief in a perfectly good God that sends souls to be eternally tormented.

However, Woodson believed this should have been expected. He related that the first Black Christians in America received “their religion from the early white Methodists and Baptists, who evangelized the slaves and the poor whites when they were barred from proselytizing the aristocracy.” Woodson demonstrated that rather than paying so much attention to religious dogma, more Blacks should seek to understand the history of their religion.

Woodson wrote that many of the Whites teaching Blacks religion were Anglican church leaders sent to the colonies. They constituted:

a degenerate class that exploited the people for money to waste it in racing horses and drinking liquor. Some of these ministers were known to have illicit relations with women, and, therefore winked at the sins of the officers of their churches, who sold their own offspring by slave women.

The historian related a humorous story from his past. Many of the rich or well-to-do white men belonging to the churches in Buckingham County, Virginia indulged in polygamy. Parson Taylor was a pastor of a White Baptist church for about 50 years. He had a White wife but a “colored paramour.” After his death, people gathered to praise the pastor. However, one man believing that he and others would be reunited with the pastor in Heaven could not help wondering which woman would be with Taylor in eternity. And if both women showed up, would they “get into an old-fashioned hair pulling”? (You gotta ask!)

Woodson addressed many other important topics. For example, in his chapter titled “The need for service rather than leadership,” he pointed out that many handpicked Black leaders did not truly serve their people. He said that Black people need more doers and fewer leaders. Not everyone can lead, but everyone must serve.

Woodson also wrote that many people in the ghetto are unable to think outside their small box. This is especially clear in the world of hardcore rap today.

Hardcore rappers have no moral imagination and are content to wallow in the gutter. Most of them get and offer no intellectual growth or stimulation whatsoever and seemingly want to keep it that way.

It is fitting to close with these powerful words from Woodson:

It is clear, then, that if Negroes got their conception of religion from slaveholders, libertines and murderers, there may be something wrong about it, and it would not hurt to investigate it. It has been said that Negroes do not connect morals with religion. The historian would like to know what race or nation does such a thing. Certainly the whites with whom Negroes have come into contact have not done so.