



THE POWER OF TELLING STORIES

CARTER G. WOODSON (1875-1950)

A scholar whose dedication to celebrating the historic contributions of Black people led to the 1927 establishment of what would become Black History Month, marked in February.

"The real servant of the people must live among them, think with them, feel for them, and die for them."

"I am not afraid of being sued by white businessmen. In fact, I should welcome such a law suit. It would do the cause much good. Let us banish fear. We have been in this mental state for three centuries. I am a radical. I am ready to act, if I can find brave men to help me. (1915)

"If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated."

"History shows that it does not matter who is in power... 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 did in the beginning." *The Mis-Education of the Negro (1933)*

Philosophers have long conceded, however, that every man has two educations: that which is given to him, and the other that which he gives himself. Of the two kinds, the latter is by far the more desirable. Indeed all that is most worthy in a man, he must work out and conquer for himself. It is that which constitutes our real and best nourishment. What we are merely taught seldom nourishes the mind like that which we teach ourselves....The mere imparting of information is not education. Above all things, the effort must result in making a man think and do for himself."

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....The lack of confidence of the Negro in himself and in his possibilities is what has kept him down. His miseducation has been a perfect success in this respect.

This is the meaning of Negro History Week. It is not so much a Negro History Week as it is a History Week. We should emphasize not Negro History, but the negro in history. What we need is not a history of selected races or nations, but the history of the world void of national bias, race hate, and religious prejudice. There should be no indulgence in undue eulogy of the Negro. The case of the Negro is well taken care of when it is shown how he influenced the development of Civilization. (1927)

"As the English were primarily interested in founding new homes in America, they thought of Negroes not as objects of Christian philanthropy but rather as tools with which they might reach that end. It is not surprising then that with the introduction of slavery as the economic factor in the development of English colonies little care was taken of their spiritual needs and especially so when the English were confronted with the unwritten law that a Christian could not be held as a slave..." *The History of the Negro Church (1921)*

OLAUDAH EQUIANO (1745-1797)

Author of "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African," was the first political activist within Britain's African community during the 18th century. Born in what is now southeast Nigeria, he was kidnapped at the age of 11 and enslaved until he managed to purchase his freedom. The ill-treatment he received and the suffering of other Africans inspired Equiano to join the campaign to abolish the so called 'transatlantic slave trade'.

I can now relate hardships which are inseparable from this accursed trade....I might say my sufferings were great: but when I compare my lot with that of most of my countrymen, I regard myself as a particular favorite of Heaven, and acknowledge the mercies of Providence in every occurrence of my life."

[on the Middle Passage to Barbados] Many a time we were near suffocation from the want of fresh air, which we were often without for whole days together. This, and the stench of the necessary tubs, carried off many...The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship. . . almost suffocated us. . . This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; . . . The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable."

...I inquired of these what was to be done with us. They gave me to understand we were to be carried to these white people's country to work for them. I then was a little revived, and thought if it were no worse than working, my situation was not so desperate. But still I feared that I should be put to death, the white people looked and acted in so savage a manner. I have never seen among my people such instances of brutal cruelty, and this not only shown towards us blacks, but also to some of the whites themselves.

[On the ship's arrival in the West Indies in 1756] Many merchants and planters came on board...They put us in separate parcels and examined us attentively. They also made us jump, and pointed to the land, signifying we were to go there. We thought by this we should be eaten by these ugly men, as they appeared to us. When soon after we were all put down under the deck again, there was much dread and trembling among us and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all the night from the apprehensions. At last the white people got some old slaves from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten, but to work...

We were conducted immediately to the merchant's yard, where we were all pent up together, like so many sheep in a fold, without regard to sex or age. As every object was new to me, everything I saw filled me with surprise. ... The noise and clamor with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers, serve not a little to increase the apprehension of terrified Africans...In this manner, without scruple, are relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again. I remember in the vessel in which I was brought over...there were several brothers who, in the sale, were sold in different lots; and it was very moving on this occasion, to see and hear their cries in parting.

"O, ye nominal Christians! might not an African ask you -- Learned you this from your God, who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you? Is it not enough that we are torn from our country and friends, to toil for your luxury and lust of gain? Why are parents to lose their children, brothers their sisters, or husbands their wives? Surely this is a new refinement in cruelty, which, while it has no advantage to atone for it, thus aggravates distress, and adds fresh horrors even to the wretchedness of slavery."

PRAYER by Martin Luther King, Jr. from a 1957 Billy Graham evangelistic crusade

O God, our Heavenly Father, out of whose mind this great cosmic universe has been created, toward whom the weary and perplexed of all generations turn for consolation and direction, we come before Thy presence this evening thanking Thee for the many blessings of life. We come recognizing our dependence on Thee. We also come, O God, with an awareness. The fact that we have not always given our lives to that which is high and noble. In the midst of all of the high and noble aspects of justice, we followed injustice. We stand amid the forces of truth and yet we deliberately lie. We stand amid the compelling urgency of the Lord of Love, as exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ, and yet we live our lives so often in the dungeons of hate. For all of these sins, O God forgive.

And in these days of emotional tension, when the problems of the world are gigantic in extent and chaotic in detail, give us penetrating vision, broad understanding, power of endurance and abiding faith, and save us from the paralysis of crippling fear. And O God, we ask Thee to help us to work with renewed vigor for a warless world and for a brotherhood that transcends race or color. Grant that our hearts and spirit will be opened to the divine inflow. All of these things we ask, in the name of Him who taught us to pray. Our Father who art in heaven...

A LENTEN PRAYER by Cole Arthur Riley | Black Liturgies

God of Sorrows, we cry holy for a God who is moved to tears when met with the conditions of this world. We are grateful that You are not a God who drags us out of our pain before we are ready- one who is not threatened by our tears but beholds them as holy. This Lent, help us to make space for a faithful examination of injustice, death, and decay in this world. We confess that we so often reduce salvation to the personal; let ours be a salvation tethered to the liberation of the world. And so form us into people who truly see the world, in all of its beauty and depravity. And when we find ourselves tempted to look away, steady us, that we may see with clarity our most desperate need for a Christ.

As we prepare for the memory of God hung from the cross, let us bear witness to all that requires it. Oppression, famine, war, neglect, loss, exclusion, loneliness, grief- all suspended by sin itself- let us resolve to see and name it all. That we would daily apprehend the breach between what we were created for and the distortion we see in the systems and powers of this world today. Let us grieve the chasm. And as we allow ourselves to weep with you, let us hope with you in the coming restoration of all things.

Glory to the One who met the cross with tears on his face. We look to You. Amen.

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