

Jeffrey Aaron Snyder. *Making Black History: The Color Line, Culture, and Race in the Age of Jim Crow*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018. 264 pp.

Appropriately framed around scholar Carter G. Woodson's life, Snyder delves into the production, consumption, and reception of the multifaceted black history movement in *Making Black History*. This compelling work recovers how the study and celebration of black history became a unifying cause in twentieth-century activism. By advocating the "whole truth," Snyder contends that Woodson and a dedicated group of African American scholars countered dominant understandings of the color line, culture, and race that undergirded the Jim Crow era (p. 6).

Opening the first section is a chapter-length biographical sketch of the movement leader: Carter G. Woodson. His interest in black history grew out of listening to his father and other Civil War veterans recount their experiences, reading early African American scholarly accountings, and attending public events celebrating African Americans' "recalled past" (p. 21). At Harvard, white professors scoffed at Woodson's interest. Instead of converting Woodson to their notions of race, progress, and American exceptionalism, Woodson's post-Harvard work served as his rebuttal of historians Edward Channing, Albert Bushnell Hart, and Frederick Jackson Turner. While completing his doctoral research in Washington, DC, Woodson tapped into the black intellectual and activist communities of Howard University, the Bethel Literary and Historical Society, the American Negro Academy, and the NAACP. These experiences profoundly shaped Woodson's first monograph, *Education of the Negro* (1915), which served as the template for his future books presenting unvarnished examinations of black history. This initial book also afforded Woodson with his first major opportunity to present black history to a broader audience: the Lincoln Jubilee in Chicago in 1915.

Within months of the successful Lincoln Jubilee, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) emerged and the *Journal of Negro History* (JNH) debuted. Mainstream white scholars criticized the ASNLH for not meeting the "highest standards of scholarship" in its publications, and in return Woodson criticized the historical profession for "propaganda" in regards to black history (pp. 35-36). At the same time, the "modern turn in African American history," according to Snyder, became "the cause" that linked scholars, members, and audiences (pp. 37, 39). Snyder concludes this pivotal chapter with an exploration of Woodson's early publications that dealt largely with the color line—*Education of the Negro, Century of*

Negro Migration, and *The Negro in Our History* textbook. These early efforts facilitated Woodson's creation of a black archive "within the veil" that would be employed for challenging popular American understandings of progress, the nation, and race (p. 45).

Through the JNH and other ASNLH publications, Woodson built and organized an archive and historiography that went against the grain of contemporary works that featured a triumphalist American narrative. In addition to essays, Snyder contends in the second chapter that the primary sources showcased by the ASNLH's publishing arm revealed African Americans' perceptions and navigation of, and challenges to, the color line over time. This excavation provided better and nuanced insights over the caricatures presented in contemporary American textbooks, scholarship, and newspapers. In contrast with Benjamin Brawley's *A Social History of the American Negro*, for instance, Woodson's watershed textbook, *The Negro in Our History*, boldly asserted that "African American history was American history" and recovered both themes and people traditionally ignored at the time in textbooks (p. 56).

In the second section, Snyder connects the black history movement with the New Negro and Negro Renaissance movements. All promoted positive representations of Africa and the Diaspora, and encouraged the national spread of interdisciplinary understandings of a people with a "shared past, a shared struggle, and a shared culture" (p. 71). Snyder examines the underappreciated role of history and the black archive Woodson created in the major anthologies of the Negro Renaissance. In this sense, Brawley, James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, and other anthologists defined, codified, and published African American cultural history. Snyder argues that these texts are "quintessential" for understanding the era's logic, terminology, and works (p. 77). In terms of documentation and classification, John Wesley Work's anthology *Folk Song of the American Negro* (1915) defined Africa as a positive progenitor for African American cultural forms and provided the foundation for later works of the Negro Renaissance, specifically Johnson's *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925), Brawley's *The Negro in Literature and Art* (1918), and Locke's *Four Negro Poets* (1927). Closing the era of anthologies, Sterling Brown's *The Negro Caravan* (1941) viewed these scholars' efforts as documenting the evolution of American literature and not simply showcasing African American literary traditions.

Snyder then examines the significant role segregated schools and educators played in spreading black history. While the origins remain murky, Negro History Week was launched in February 1926 with an inaugural pamphlet outlining the reasons, souvenir-quality images, and a curriculum for local celebrations. This annual celebration

dovetailed with the active cultural work of the Negro Renaissance and the African American press's antiracist efforts. Replacing Emancipation Parades, Negro History Week pageants celebrated race, reimagined Africa as a positive place, and instilled racial pride. Moreover, the *Negro History Bulletin* provided teachers with the tools to bring both black history and the New Negro movement into the segregated public schools.

In the last major section, Snyder addresses the post-World War II shift in black activism and conceptions of race. After deftly summarizing the antiracist positions of the late 1930s and early 1940s, Snyder transitions to the postwar ontological debate over "Who and what is Negro?" following the rise of racial individualism (p. 133). Black scholars, specifically Charles Wesley, Rayford Logan, and John Hope Franklin, advanced some of the most original and nuanced discussions of race and defied their respective professional fields, which remained invested in racial individualism. Ultimately, no single consensus emerged.

As shown in the final chapter, Woodson and other ASNLH scholars looked to history to explain the modern civil rights movement and to apply history as a tool in the struggle. Woodson's death in 1950 allowed the organization to take a more direct role in postwar civil rights activism. Though positing previous freedom fighters as role models for the modern generation, not all African Americans bought into the ASNLH's hopeful outcome for meaningful integration. Devoting both time and ink, Logan, Franklin, and other ASNLH scholars actively advanced history as essential to securing truth, justice, and progress. The 1954 *Brown* decision demonstrated that the black history movement had not been in vain.

Snyder concludes with the opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture as the embodiment of the "whole truth" philosophy embraced by Woodson and early ASNLH scholars. In the era of "fake news," this detailed volume is a testament that the work engaged by early black history movement advocates must continue. Notwithstanding the numerous publications, historical actors, and developments discussed, undergraduate students, graduate students, scholars, and nonacademics will find Snyder's approach, analysis, and conclusions both refreshing and compelling.

HILARY GREEN
The University of Alabama

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