

PERO GAGLO DAGBOVIE

What is African American History?



Table of Contents

[What is History? series](#)

[Title page](#)

[Copyright page](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

[1: From the Margins to the Mainstream](#)

[Notes](#)

[2: The Burgeoning of African American History](#)

[Notes](#)

[3: Black Women's History](#)

[Notes](#)

[4: History, Historians, and African American Studies](#)

[Notes](#)

[5: African American History in the New Millennium](#)

[Notes](#)

[Suggestions for Further Reading](#)

[Index](#)

[End User License Agreement](#)

What is History? series

John H. Arnold, *What is Medieval History?*

Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* 2nd edition

John C. Burnham, *What is Medical History?*

Pamela Kyle Crossley, *What is Global History?*

Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, *What is African American History?*

Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder, with Donna Gabaccia, *What is Migration History?*

J. Donald Hughes, *What is Environmental History?*

Andrew Leach, *What is Architectural History?*

Stephen Morillo with Michael F. Pavkovic, *What is Military History?* 2nd edition

Sonya O. Rose, *What is Gender History?*

Brenda E. Stevenson, *What is Slavery?*

What is African American History?

Pero Gaglo Dagbovie

polity

Copyright © Pero Gaglo Dagbovie 2015

The right of Pero Gaglo Dagbovie to be identified as Author of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in 2015 by Polity Press

Polity Press

65 Bridge Street

Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press

350 Main Street

Malden, MA 02148, USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-6080-6

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-6081-3 (pb)

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-9590-7 (epub)

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-9589-1 (mobi)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dagbovie, Pero Gaglo.

What is African American history? / Pero Gaglo Dagbovie.

pages cm. – (What is history)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7456-6080-6 (hardcover : alk. paper) – ISBN 0-7456-6080-0 (hardcover : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-0-7456-6081-3 (pbk. : alk. paper) – ISBN 0-7456-6081-9 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. African Americans–Historiography. 2. African American historians–History. I. Title.

E184.65.D35 2015

973'.0496073–dc23

2014038134

The publisher has used its best endeavors to ensure that the URLs for external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of going to

press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publisher will be pleased to include any necessary credits in any subsequent reprint or edition.

For further information on Polity, visit our website: politybooks.com

Acknowledgments

In retrospect, this is the type of book that I have wanted to write for some time. I am indebted to many historians whose scholarship and advice have influenced me over the years. Feedback and encouragement from Darlene Clark Hine, V. P. Franklin, and Robert Harris, Jr. have been invaluable during the course of this project. I thank Andrea Drugan, who supported this work from its inception, and Elliott Karstadt at Polity for being patient with me as this study went through its various incarnations. Thanks also go to Leigh Mueller for her first-rate copy-editing. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to test out several chapters at three invigorating conferences between 2012 and 2014: “A Beautiful Struggle: Transformative Black Studies in Shifting Political Landscapes – A Summit of Doctoral Programs” at Northwestern University, the 98th Annual Association for the Study of African American Life and History Convention, and “Black Historians and the Writing of History in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries: What Legacy?” sponsored by Sorbonne Paris Cité. Significant parts of this book were written and reworked in the company of LaShawn Harris, Ben Smith, and Ed Murphy. Our conversations helped me work through many of the ideas that appear in this volume. Graduate students Ronald Jackson, Jewell Debnam, and Richard Mares provided key assistance over the course of this project. I would also like to thank Walter Hawthorne, Chair of the Department of History at Michigan State University, for his support. Special thanks go to my close friends and family for their encouragement as I grappled with completing this book. And, lastly, I thank my sons and best friends (Perovi, Kokou, and Bé) for putting up with their oftentimes cantankerous dad while he was writing this book. I did not

mean it when I many a time retorted: “No!”, “What do you want?”, “Leave me alone!”, and “Get out of my room!”

Introduction

What we now commonly call African American history - in previous times identified as *Negro* history, *Black* history, and *Afro-American* history - first achieved some sense of "legitimacy," and closely thereafter popularity, in the mainstream US historical profession sometime between the late 1960s and the mid-1970s. Generally speaking, prior to the civil rights - Black Power movement, a diverse group of amateur and professionally trained African American historians defined what it meant to be historians of the black past. They produced various genres of black historical scholarship and actively participated in the early black history movement, a struggle to popularize, validate, and institutionalize the study of black life, history, and culture in the United States. Prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), a very small yet at times influential group of white historians likewise challenged normative renditions of US history by producing scholarship on African American history. In the decades since the early 1970s, the composition of the black historical profession has noticeably changed and scholarship in African American history has expanded by leaps and bounds, nurturing the development of numerous lively subspecialties. In each succeeding decade, most notably since the 1980s, historians have optimistically celebrated the field's advancement in scope, breadth, and recognition.

African American history is now unquestionably a thriving area of scholarly specialization in the US academy. It is no longer uncommon to see publications on black historical subject matter on the *New York Times* bestseller list and among the ranks of award-winning books. Many historians of the black past, namely African American historians, have

attained notoriety as leading scholars in national and international contexts. President Barack Obama has delivered emotional “National African American History Month” proclamations and the corresponding commemorative events and programs are recognizably a part of American popular culture. Furthermore, while claims that the United States became a “post-racial society” with the election of Obama as the 44th President of the United States in 2008 have been exaggerated and are problematic, to say the least, since 2011 a cluster of Hollywood historical dramas that depict – although at times superficially – episodes and icons from the black past have reaped massive profits at the box office, such as *The Help* (2012), *Django* (2012), *42: The Jackie Robinson Story* (2013), *The Butler* (2013), and British filmmaker Steve McQueen's multi-award-winning *12 Years a Slave* (2013), an adaptation of Solomon Northup's classic 1853 slave narrative.

Whether one considers Benjamin Lewis, William Cooper Nell, James W. C. Pennington, William Wells Brown, George Washington Williams, or W. E. B. Du Bois to be the “first” genuine black historian (this, of course, is contingent upon how one defines the term “historian”), the study of African American history is undeniably more than a century old. Change over time being a fundamental characteristic of all history, it should come as no surprise that the body of historical writings on African American history, the African American historical profession, and black history's meaning have transformed dramatically from the nineteenth century until the present. There is a wide assortment of historians and scholars active in the field. Scores of historians, scholars, intellectuals, and black social activists have conceived, defined, and conceptualized African American history in countless manners. There have been plenteous debates and controversies, interventions, innovations, and

invigorating findings. What these thinkers, chroniclers, and interpreters have written about, how they have theorized their scholarly endeavors, and their approaches and methodologies have inevitably been informed and shaped by the times in which they existed. The field will continue to evolve as succeeding generations cope with the times that await them, re-interpret the past, introduce and draw upon new methodologies and theoretical points of departure, benefit from future technological advancements, and discover what they consider to be “new” subject matters worthy of investigation.

Like all types of history, African American history is created by professional historians or those who act as historians. Armed with knowledge of the existing historiography on their topics of interest and by engaging with a range of different primary sources, historians attempt to piece together the past. Most people are only familiar with history through the eyes of those who have constructed it. Historiography – commonly and often simultaneously defined as the study of historians' scholarship, how history has been and is contrived, the history of historical writing, and the body of historical scholarship on historical subject matter – is, therefore, essential to understand when studying history.

This book focuses on African American history as a field of study and scholarly discipline, a profession or academic enterprise, and a meaningful ingredient of black culture and the enduring black freedom struggle. Examining and unpacking historians' ideas, scholarship, and actions are central to this book. This volume is predominantly about the ideas, perceptions, theories, and findings of historians of the black past and *African Americanists* (professional scholars whose expertise is in the study of African American life, history, and culture) who have produced significant published historical scholarship. Shortly after

beginning this book, I abandoned attempting to write a truly comprehensive study. Therefore, I have had to make some conscious decisions about which historians, historiographical debates, and historical scholarship to include.

The fundamental purpose of this book is to offer an introduction to the field of African American history, past, present, and future. Designed to be used by undergraduate students who are unfamiliar with the broader contours of black history as a field, graduate students who seek clarification of the field's general history, growth, and scope, and those interested in the fundamental features of African American history, historiography, and the profession, *What is African American History?* discusses some of the field's important subspecialties, evolution, turning points, defining characteristics, theories, debates, key texts and scholars, and imaginable future directions.

As my research concentrates on twentieth-century African American history, I focus much of my examination on scholarship on the black experience in the United States during the period that Giovanni Arrighi dubbed “the long twentieth century.” At the same time, this book does call attention to some of the pressing issues in the historiography of the once highly contested subjects of slavery and Reconstruction. Though I do address historical scholarship on African Americans in global and diasporic contexts in several chapters, this is not a major focus of this book. I am primarily concerned with scholarship on African Americans residing in the United States. All of the scholarship analyzed in this study is written in English and published in the United States. Important scholarship has been produced on African American history abroad. For instance, building upon the research of Michel Jacques Fabre, co-founder of the Center for Afro-American Studies at the University of Paris, a noticeable group of French

scholars and historians has produced significant scholarship on African American history and culture. Future scholarship on African American historiography would benefit from analyzing the study of black history abroad, especially in France, the UK, Japan, Australia, and Africa.

Non-specialists in African American history have certainly contributed to the field. This book, however, focuses on those with specific expertise in the field. Experts in African American history, African Americanists, generate scholarship and teach courses that focus on the lives, experiences, culture, and thoughts of African Americans from the past. The most obvious credential for a professional historian is the Ph.D. degree in history. While this book prioritizes the scholarly activities of professionally trained historians, I do acknowledge more than a few self-taught and non-Ph.D.-holding historians as well as professional scholars from other disciplines who have made important contributions to African American historiography and the black historical enterprise.

What is African American History? is organized chronologically as well as thematically. The first two chapters span from the late nineteenth century through the 1990s. [Chapter 1](#) critiques the historiography of the black historical profession and explores the evolution of scholarship on African American history from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries until the 1960s and 1970s. I highlight the approaches and contributions of historians who most profoundly shaped the field's development, as well as the key turning points in the field. A major discussion of this chapter is African American history's movement from the margins into the mainstream of the US historical profession. [Chapter 2](#) charts the evolution of key theoretical approaches, debates, and subspecialties in black history from the civil rights - Black

Power movement through the 1990s. Because the study of African American history mushroomed, flourished, and became fragmented into numerous subspecialties during these decades, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to identify every area of significant African American historical inquiry. I highlight predominant trends and historiographical debates, focusing on the African American biographical genre; scholarship on slavery; black working-class, labor, and urban history; and the historiography on prominent long-twentieth-century black organizations.

The next two chapters are thematically oriented. [Chapter 3](#) traces the growth and maturation of black women's history, one of the fastest-growing fields of African American history since the 1980s. I sub-divide African American women's history into several interconnected major phases from the 1970s until the present, and showcase the voices of black women historians, the field's chief practitioners. [Chapter 4](#) examines how historians have contributed to, shaped, and sparked debates within the Black Studies enterprise from the late 1960s until the present. I also delve into the role of history as a core “basic subject area” of Black Studies and consider the relationship, including the similarities and differences, between Black Studies and African American history. [Chapter 5](#) discusses the 21st-century black historical profession, identifies trends in African American historiography during the new millennium, and offers suggestions for future research in the field.

1

From the Margins to the Mainstream

In 1925, a mere decade after he began his unrelenting quest to institutionalize, legitimize, and popularize the then-marginalized study of African American history by founding the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), Carter G. Woodson, “The Father of Black History,” reflected: “whereas a decade ago only a few institutions gave the study of the record of the Negro any consideration, practically all reputable universities and colleges and even some high schools now feature the study of the Negro in that of racial relations or provide special courses in this neglected aspect of our life and history.”¹

More than three decades later, historian John Hope Franklin, who by this time had established himself as a leading authority on black history with his *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (1947), echoed Woodson's optimistic sentiments in a state-of-the-field essay, “The New Negro History” (1957).

Though Franklin acknowledged the “far-reaching” and “deadly” impact of racist US historiography, he was very optimistic about the progress made by what he dubbed “the new Negro history.” For Franklin, what he described as a sort of renaissance in African American history between the late 1930s and the late 1950s was “as significant and, in some ways, even more dramatic than the very events themselves that the writers have sought to describe.”² He portrayed “the new Negro history” of the late 1950s in a manner that suggests that he truly believed that the study of African American history had gained a somewhat secure footing in the mainstream (i.e., white-male-dominated) US historical profession and even in scholarly communities

abroad. Franklin surmised that black history had “come into its own” and that “White and Negro historians, Northern and Southern historians, Japanese and Dutch historians have turned their attention to the study of the history of the Negro in the United States.” He added: “Every major historical association in this country in the past ten years has given considerable attention to subjects related to Negro history at its annual meetings ... For the first time in the history of the United States, there is a striking resemblance between what historians are writing and what has actually happened in the history of the American Negro.”³

African American history's positioning *vis-à-vis* the mainstream US historical profession has changed in many significant ways since Woodson and Franklin imparted their aforementioned observations. Ultimately seeking to substantiate and publicize the profound influence that African Americans had on the development of American history, Woodson, Franklin, their predecessors, as well as their pre-Black-Power-era disciples were concerned and often preoccupied with integrating African American history into mainstream US history. A prevailing characteristic of the field for more than half of its existence, the movement to transport African American history from the margins into the mainstream of US historiography and the US historical profession was, in a sense, part of the broader black freedom struggle.

One of the most sudden, conspicuous, and thought-provoking defining moments in the evolution of the study of black history - from a marginalized subject of intellectual inquiry primarily embraced and produced by African American activists, writers, and professionally trained scholars to a field with noticeable mainstream scholarly curiosity - clearly materialized beginning in the late 1960s, coinciding with the early years of the turbulent Black

Power movement, the black student movement, and the Black Studies movement. This almost spur-of-the-moment mainstream awareness and symbolic sanctioning of African American history during the late 1960s is undeniable, yet it is a more complex phenomenon than historians have acknowledged. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, more than a few historians, including prominent white male US historians like C. Vann Woodward and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., reiterated Woodson's and Franklin's encouraging sentiments about an increased mainstream interest in African American history. During the 1980s and 1990s, leading African Americanists periodically continued to draw attention to African American history's more anchored presence in the mainstream US historical profession. "Today Afro-American history is a respected and legitimate field of American history,"⁴ remarked Darlene Clark Hine in 1986. A decade later, Thomas C. Holt surmised that the "black experience has ceased to be a peripheral topic in American history; it is now among the central phenomena of the national experience."⁵

Nearly a decade and a half into the twenty-first century, historians of black America are no longer preoccupied with demonstrating or proclaiming the mainstream status or legitimacy of the study of African American history. African American history is now certainly an established and flourishing field of scholarly endeavor with its own frequently invoked traditions, productive institutions, distinctive theoretical constructs and methods, lively subspecialties, vast historiography, and recognizable niche in the mainstream US historical profession.

Like US history in general and its numerous subfields, African American history as a distinct field of historical inquiry has undergone a host of transformations over the last century. It is important to understand how what was most often called *Negro history* until the late 1960s, and

what we now interchangeably call *African American history* and *black history*, became the dynamic and familiar field that it is today. Since the late nineteenth century, historians have appraised the evolution of the US historical profession and American historiography. At the same time, very few historians have explored the intriguing development of African American history as a distinct scholarly field.

From the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century, most authors of widely read monographs on American historiography and the US historical profession largely ignored African American history or minimized the contributions of the field's most innovative scholars. In the late 1950s, one historian of the black past was correct in concluding that “the literature on American historiography has had almost nothing to say about Negroes.”⁶ In his classic *History: Professional Scholarship in America*, first published in 1965 and periodically reprinted and updated until 1990, John Higham neglected to mention the contributions of African American historians and African American history as a field. The third edition of Ernst Breisach's *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (2007) was advertised as containing a “compelling” section on African American history. Yet he grossly misinterprets the field by stating in passing: “Carl Degler began the integration of Afro-American history into mainstream American history.”⁷ Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (1988) and Ellen Fitzpatrick's *History's Memory: Writing America's Past, 1880-1980* (2002) are the first major monographs on the American historical profession to discuss African American history in substantive ways.⁸

Earl E. Thorpe produced the first major study of the black historical craft, *Negro Historians in the United States* (1958), later revised and updated as *Black Historians: A*

Critique (1971). He focused solely on the historical writings of “any American of color who wrote history” from the early nineteenth century until the late 1950s. A prevailing argument of Thorpe's is that the black historians featured in his book remained largely committed to Carter G. Woodson's corrective and black pride-instilling brand of historical writing, in turn employing “black history as a weapon in the fight for racial equality.”⁹ Though he defined black history in a reflectful manner, demarcated salient distinctions between the various generations of black historians, and offered insightful suggestions for the future cultivation of the field, Thorpe's work is more of a collection of intellectual biographies on amateur and professionally-trained black historians than it is a comprehensive assessment of the growth and evolution of African American history as a field or profession.

In 1986, two important works focusing on the study of African American history were published: *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future* edited by Darlene Clark Hine, and August Meier and Elliott Rudwick's *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980*. The first studies of their kind, these works complicated and revised previous representations of the US historical profession and historiography by offering expansive historical overviews of African American history as a field of study.¹⁰ *The State of Afro-American History* brought together a collection of papers that were delivered at an American Historical Association-sponsored conference on black history in October 1983 at Purdue University. The participants agreed that “the time has come to assess and evaluate the historical outpourings of the last several decades” and to overview areas of future research and dissemination.¹¹ In a brief essay in this volume, “On the Evolution of Afro-American History,” John Hope Franklin identified four generations of scholarship in black

history from 1882 until the mid-1980s signaled by different publications and events. In *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980* (1986), still one of the most comprehensive overviews of the African American historical enterprise, August Meier and Elliott Rudwick provide a detailed periodization of the field, sub-dividing African American historiography into five phases from approximately 1915 until 1980 and probing into innumerable historians' contributions. While Franklin's concise essay overviews broad contours of the field's maturation over a century and complicates conventional interpretations of its hasty integration into institutions of higher education, it does not delve into the nuances of the field's evolution. On the other hand, Meier and Rudwick's study is extensive, but they were fixated upon explaining what motivated white historians to produce scholarship on black history.

Historians have ascribed the beginnings of the field of African American history to many different individuals from the early years of the republic until the first several decades of the twentieth century. How one determines the genesis of African American history, or any other field of historical study, is of course contingent upon how one decides to identify the starting points of intellectual historical thought and define the criteria for what constitutes significant historical production. In *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (2009), historian Stephen G. Hall represents one school of thought by arguing that, from the era of the early republic until the end of the nineteenth century, a group of amateur black historians occupied an important place in the “genealogy of African American historical production” and, equally important, “laid the groundwork for the evolution of college and university programs in African American history and studies.”¹² John

Hope Franklin maintained that African American historiography most appreciably began with the writings of George Washington Williams, the first person to author a “coherent” study of the African American historical experience, the two-volume *The History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880* published in 1882. A strong case can also be made for positing that African American history as a branch of knowledge began with the early historical scholarship of W. E. B. Du Bois, the first African American to earn a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University in 1895. With good reasons, August Meier and Elliott Rudwick maintained that Woodson “was virtually single-handedly responsible for establishing Afro-American history as a historical specialty.”¹³

However one decides to delineate the specific starting point of African American history or periodize its development, certain unambiguous features prevail when considering the field's characteristics until the late 1960s. Most importantly, before it gained a significant following and a sense of legitimacy within the white mainstream US historical profession, African American history was primarily studied, researched, and promoted by a group of black scholar-activists and historians, professionally trained and amateur, who operated on the margins of the mainstream US historical profession. Carter G. Woodson and those connected with him were most responsible for the institutionalization of the “scientific” study of African American history from the founding of the ASNLH in 1915 until his death in 1950, the field's formative years known as the early black history movement. This movement laid the foundations for the eventual mainstream interest in African American history. The mainstream US historical profession's unforeseen curiosity with African American history during the late 1960s is much more complicated than has been described by historians. It had its limitations.

The mainstreaming of African American history was a byproduct of the long black freedom struggle, the early black history movement, and the black student movement of the Black Power era. This unprecedented mainstream interest in the black past sparked important debates about who was best qualified to teach and write about black history and who would be the gatekeepers of this newly sanctioned field, debates that resurfaced three decades later in the pages of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the Organization of American Historians' *Perspectives on History* magazine during the "culture wars" of the 1990s. Ultimately, it did lead to the field's later expansion and fuller integration into the mainstream US historical profession and altered conceptualizations of American history.

Nearly two centuries ago, African Americans led the way in documenting and writing about the African American historical experience. During the antebellum era, numerous black intellectuals - abolitionists, journalists, leaders, ministers, and educators - authored historical accounts that declared that blacks did indeed possess a rich history worthy of study. These non-professionally trained amateur historians challenged the prevailing notion of black inferiority that was used to bolster the US institution of slavery from 1789 until 1865 and subsequent forms of black oppression during Reconstruction (1865-77), "the nadir" (1877-1901), and the era of Jim Crow segregation (1896-1954).¹⁴

In 1882, self-taught historian George Washington Williams (1849-91) published his two-volume *A History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880*, the first major historical narrative of black America. "I became convinced that a history of the colored people in America was required," Williams proclaimed, "because such a history would give the world more correct ideas of Colored people,

and invite the latter to greater effort in the struggle of citizenship and manhood. The single reason that there was no history of the Negro race would have been a sufficient reason for writing one.”¹⁵ Unlike his antebellum-era predecessors, Williams tracked down and analyzed a range of primary source documents, incorporated oral history, sought feedback from established professionally trained American historians, scrutinized his primary sources, and embraced objectivity. Williams' *History of the Negro Race* was positively reviewed by white scholars and encouraged Carter G. Woodson to write *The Negro in Our History* (1922) and John Hope Franklin to write *From Slavery to Freedom* (1947), the two most important comprehensive narratives of the African American historical experience published during the first half of the twentieth century.

After becoming the first African American to earn a Ph.D. in history from Harvard in 1895, W. E. B. Du Bois became black America's towering historian. Though truly multidisciplinary in his intellectual approach, “it was along history's pathway that he made his literary route to the present and the future.”¹⁶ Du Bois's 1891 MA thesis was published in the annual report of the American Historical Association (AHA) as “The Enforcement of the Slave Trade Laws.” In the same year, he became the first African American to participate in an AHA convention. In 1896, he published his dissertation as *The Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*. From 1897 until 1914, Du Bois taught economics and history at Atlanta University and coordinated the annual Atlanta University Studies and Conferences and edited its publications, all of which incorporated historical analyses. In 1899, Du Bois published *The Philadelphia Negro* in which he historicized black Philadelphians' contemporary status and problems. Du Bois's interdisciplinary opus *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) is by far his most famous and

celebrated book to this day. Historical analyses loom large in this crowning achievement, particularly in dealing with the Freedman's Bureau and the evolution of black education, black leadership, and southern race relations.

After *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois wrote a historical biography of John Brown, one of his favorite books that sold less than 700 copies. In 1909, Du Bois delivered his second presentation at the AHA and was the only African American to present a paper at an AHA conference until the World War II era. In the *American Historical Review*, Du Bois challenged US historians' interpretations of Reconstruction in "Reconstruction and Its Benefits" (1910). This article, which laid the foundations for his exhaustive *Black Reconstruction* (1935), was the only article by a black historian to appear in the *American Historical Review* until 1979.¹⁷ From 1910 through 1934, as Director of Publishing and Research for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Du Bois served as editor of *Crisis* and he routinely interrogated issues relating to Afro-diasporic histories in this widely circulated magazine. Though other black activists and scholars wrote books on black history during the Progressive era of the 1890s-1920s (mainly uplift narratives), Du Bois was clearly the preeminent historian of black America from the mid-1890s until 1915.

Recognizing the pitfalls of "Great Man" history, it is not an exaggeration to say that Carter G. Woodson is the most important figure when considering the study of African American history during the first half of the twentieth century. Woodson's life and work have been the subject of several full-length intellectual biographies. What follows, therefore, is a summary of his most important contributions to African American history.