

Foreword to “Race and Achievement in Mathematics: A Historical Perspective”

By Jacqueline Leonard

W. E. B. Du Bois stated “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.¹” More than 400 years since Blacks’ feet touched American shores, the color-line still defines Black life in the United States. Education has been and continues to be inherently unequal. This chapter begins with the landmark case of *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* and the obscure story of the Clinton 12—twelve high school students’ battle against segregation in Tennessee. The achievement gap is also discussed from the perspective of parents, teachers, and students. Measuring academic achievement solely by test scores has been used far too long to justify de jure and de facto segregated schools (Ogbu, 2003). As a result, a knee has been placed on the neck of Black children’s educational opportunity for generations. To broaden educational opportunity, Carter G. Woodson² advocated that Black children should be taught more mathematics. Ideas for culturally specific lesson plans are included in this chapter. Lessons range from finding geometric patterns in sculpture, prints, and paintings to hair braiding, designer haircuts, and sculptured nails. Students should not have to leave their racial or cultural identity at the schoolhouse door, rather their background and experience should be celebrated. Teachers of mathematics should use Black history and culture to engage in culturally specific and asset-based teaching strategies, which allow Black children to see themselves and their communities in the mathematics curriculum in positive ways. Teaching is a political act (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and now, more than ever, it is time to listen, teach, and act for social justice and liberation.

¹ Du Bois, W.E.B. (1903). *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 1.

² Woodson, C. G. (1933). *The Mis-Education of the Negro*.