COMMUNITY & VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE
BLACK HISTORY MONTH
AMERICA REFRAMED ON THE WORLD CHANNEL
IT REMAINS A CRUCIAL TIME FOR CRAFTING THE FULLNESS OF THE AMERICAN STORY.

Historians describe the years roughly between 1877-1920 as the “Nadir,” a period in which the relationship between Blacks and Whites in America was at its lowest and most turbulent, where strict policies and cultural rules that delineated racial caste were violently enforced.

As African Americans fashioned free and prosperous lives for themselves in the years after slavery—forming towns, businesses, and representation in the political process from local to federal—White society fomented a fierce backlash that sacked and burned those newly formed towns and communities, murdered thousands by lynching, and worked tenaciously to enforce laws that subjugated their fellow citizens. In the summer of 1917, East St. Louis was home to one of the worst race riots in the nation, when White mobs burned and destroyed Black neighborhoods, and killed as many as 150 African Americans.

African Americans’ modest success was met with backlash during the Nadir, all the while Black Americans worked to uncover hidden histories of a much maligned and hated people. Some dreamed and reconstructed complete Black selves, unearthing stories, creating poetry and art, and memorializing photography. They kept diaries of their private thoughts and strivings. They became journalists, doctors, historians, and teachers. They worked mills and tanneries. They persevered.

History is as much context as it is a study of patterns that reveal answers to questions both new and old. And there is a strange-ish parallel to that time in the Nadir and now...

In the year after the presidency of the nation’s first African American elected to that office, the culture wars have fulminated to a point where racist ideologues have been given audience and succor in some quarters. During the past year, the nation has witnessed how deeply the fissures along the color line have endured into the 21st century.

Ignorance of the lives and contributions of African Americans continues to astonish those who have taken the opportunity to learn about the rich history and contributions of Black Americans. To wit, Black History Month offers a modest opportunity for learning and inclusion...

Carter G. Woodson, born in 1875, was his ancestors’ wildest dream fulfilled; he got an education, earning degrees in history from first the University of Chicago and later Harvard University, where he received his doctorate, and would later be known as the father of Black History Month.

Woodson in 1915, along with fellow scholar Jesse Moorland, formed the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and began the hard work of uncovering the stories of a people who’s origins had
been scrubbed from the nation’s consciousness, as well as from books and grade school lesson plans.

Woodson quickly realized that there was something missing in the construction of these lessons for Black school children, how their concept of self wilted under lessons that negated their identities and confined them solely to the horror of human bondage.

“They do not like to hear such expressions as “Negro literature,” “Negro poetry,” “African art,” or “thinking Black,”” Woodson wrote in his 1933 book The Mis-Education of the Negro. The children of these new, free Negroes had been taught a singular narrative of their American identities, one that presented them as inferior and invisible.

In 1926, Woodson created Negro History Week. Woodson selected the week in February that coincided with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. The scholar, Alain Locke, edited a volume just the year before entitled The Mis-Education of the Negro. The children of these new, free Negroes had been taught a singular narrative of their American identities, one that presented them as inferior and invisible.

In these early years of the 21st century, it may seem a bit retrograde to dedicate a month to celebrate the legacies and explore Black lives in American life. However, against a painful resurgence of White nationalism, the question of “why Black History Month?” seems moot...

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There’s a battle raging for the narrative over the “real America” in the 21st century, and if it’s to be won by justice and fairness then it must begin with recognizing the paradox of American identity, by facing the facts of our shared histories. It is not an either/or proposition. “Aren’t we all Americans?” Woodson once wrote, “Then, whatever is American is as much the heritage of the Negro as of any other group in.” Black History is American History. It is inextricable to the great American story, for without us, there’d be no America. This yearly ritual to specifically honor African Americans is a necessary one and encourages us to resist the chronic disremembering of who we are as a people complete.
**GENTLEMEN OF VISION**
Follow a year in the life of coach, counselor, and founder, Marlon Wharton, and his class of young Black males as he strives to rewrite future prospects for his students. Witness a brotherhood of young men as they support each other and chase their ultimate dreams: to maintain their position as national step champions and to be accepted into college. **PREMIERES FEBRUARY 6, 2018 AT 8/7C. AVAILABLE TO VIEW ONLINE HERE.**

**FOR AHKEEM**
Expelled from high school, Daje Shelton is only 17 years old when she is sentenced by a judge—not to prison, but to the Innovative Concept Academy. It offers Daje one last chance to earn a high school diploma. **For Ahkeem** is an unvarnished exploration of a complex web of juvenile justice, education, poverty and race in America today. **PREMIERES FEBRUARY 13, 2018 AT 8/7C. AVAILABLE TO VIEW ONLINE HERE.**

**AGENTS OF CHANGE**
*Agents of Change* examines the racial conditions on college campuses across the U. S. in the late 1960s, focusing on student demands at two seminal protests: San Francisco State in 1968 and Cornell University in 1969. Many of the same demands are surfacing in campus protests today, revealing the intersections America continues to face. **PREMIERES FEBRUARY 20, 2018 AT 8/7 C. AVAILABLE TO VIEW ONLINE HERE.**

**BADDDDD SONIA SANCHEZ**
The personal is political. **BadDDD Sonia Sanchez** is a portrait of the artist, revealing her uncompromising life as she raised her voice in the name of black culture, civil rights, women’s liberation, and world peace. The film captures Sanchez’s commitment to cultural specificity while connecting history and humanities to the mainstream. **PREMIERES FEBRUARY 27, 2018 AT 8/7. AVAILABLE TO VIEW ONLINE HERE.**
Engage in meaningful dialogue after viewing Black History Month films on the WORLD Channel using this discussion guide. You might adapt these questions to a post-screening conversation with family and friends or for use in a classroom environment.

**SELF DETERMINATION, SELF ADVOCACY, AND SELF EXPRESSION**

The America ReFramed films show us the incredible power of the human spirit — especially the spirit of Black Americans who have struggled for change. The following questions provide a starting point for discussion with the films Agents of Change, Gentlemen of Vision, For Ahkeem, and BaddDDD Sonia Sanchez, through the lens of self determination, self advocacy and self expression.

1. In *Agents of Change*, the strikes at San Francisco State University and the take-over of Cornell University pushed their respective educational institutions to recognize and fund Black studies departments. What tactics did the students use to forward their agenda through self-determination, self-advocacy, and self-expression?

2. In the film *BaddDDD Sonia Sanchez*, the poet said, “Blacks had to invent Black English for themselves to survive slavery, to survive discrimination, to survive living in the ghettos... they knew their language was taken away.” What did she mean by this?

3. Sonia Sanchez is a female leader who fiercely identifies not only as Black, but also as a strong woman. This intersectionality of identity formed her alliances, allegiances, and how she communicated her message through poetry. What are your intersecting identities and how do you express them?

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**LEARNING MORE**

**Equality:** treating everyone the same or equally

**Equity:** treating everyone in a way that ensures a fair and just outcome

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**FURTHER RESOURCES TO EXPLORE EQUITY VS. EQUALITY:**


[Short Article, Racial Equality or Racial Equity? The Difference it Makes](http://viablefuturescenter.org/racemattersinstitute/2014/04/02/racial-equality-or-racial-equity-the-difference-it-makes/)

[Short Video, Ensuring Educational Equity for All Students (1:55 min)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjrFnmeGtL8)

[Short Video, Radical Healing with Dr. Shawn Ginwright (4:27 min)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxbRQx_8TUA)

[Further Racial Equity Tools](https://www.racialequitytools.org/home)
4. Many of the young men in *Gentlemen of Vision* discuss either the absence of their fathers or the problematic role modeling their fathers offered. Why is it so powerful for the young men to have a family of other Black men through G.O.V.? What are they able to express in this space that they may not be able to in other contexts?

5. In *For Ahkeem*, we watch as Daje sees the protest in Ferguson, Missouri break out after the killing of Michael Brown. How are today’s protests influenced by protests during the 1960’s and ‘70s? What has changed in the way they are formed? Are today’s protests as effective as those of the 1960’s, ‘70s and earlier periods?

The following questions provide a discussion starting point for the films *Agents of Change, Gentlemen of Vision, For Ahkeem* and *BaddDDD Sonia Sanchez*, framed through the lens of equity vs. equality.

### I. EQUITY VS. EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

1. Do you agree or disagree with the statement: It is important to see your identity reflected in those around you? Why or why not?

2. In the film *Agents of Change*, students at San Francisco State University and Cornell University protest for the implementation of a Black Studies Department. Why was it important for young Black Americans to see themselves reflected in their course content? Why do you think this request felt dangerous to the university leadership?

3. In *Gentlemen of Vision*, one of the young men says, “Racial discrimination is my biggest barrier... people expect a lot less from me.” What does he mean by this?

4. What makes you feel like you belong when in a group of people? How do people treat you when you are welcome? What makes you feel comfortable in a school or work setting? In school, did you have an experience of equality or equity? Or neither? Why?

5. The Civil Rights Movement gained equal rights for Black Americans by changing laws. As a result, in what ways in our society have things changed? In what ways has our society not changed, or in what ways does it remain inequitable?

**LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD: EQUITY VS. EQUALITY**

Equality and equity are terms that are used to define the concept of fairness.

Equality, where everyone is treated the same, infers an assumption that all players are starting on a level playing field, and can only work if everyone begins at the same starting point, and shares the same needs.

Equity aims to level the playing field by responding to need generated by differences such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and class. Many argue that history reveals that equality has not always been enough.
II. EQUITY VS. EQUALITY IN MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

1. In St. Louis, the Black male graduation rate is 65.7%. Gentlemen of Vision has a 100% graduation and college admission/retention rate. What factors might lead to the low graduation rate more generally for Black men in St. Louis, and how does the G.O.V. program target those issues to achieve success?

2. In Gentlemen of Vision, we see team member Ca$h-U struggle with staying out of trouble. He is caught by a police officer, who also serves as his mentor in the G.O.V. program, while attempting to commit robbery. What factors might lead Ca$h-U to remain connected to “street life”? What needs does Ca$h-U have that are not being met?

3. In For Ahkeem, St. Louis is portrayed as a deeply impoverished community. What are some of the issues connected to the experience of poverty that are present for the main characters, Daje and Antonio? How do these issues relate to the concept of a level playing field?

4. Statistics show that Black students are three times more likely than White students to be suspended or expelled under zero-tolerance policies, which dramatically increases the probability of incarceration in the future. This phenomenon is known as the school-to-prison pipeline. How do we see this system at work in the film For Ahkeem — specifically for Daje and Antonio?

5. In For Ahkeem, Daje had survived two instances of gun violence and had lost numerous loved ones to gun violence. Antonio shares with Daje that he fears daily that he will die young. What might it take to break this cycle of violence for Ahkeem?
RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

PBS BLACK CULTURE CONNECTION
Programs, films, resources, and other content
http://www.pbs.org/black-culture/home/

JOHN LEWIS: GET IN THE WAY
PBS film website with discussion guide and curriculum
http://www.pbs.org/program/john-lewis-get-in-the-way/

BLACK PUBLIC MEDIA
Films, programs, and resources
http://www.blackpublicmedia.org

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH
A public website with an event calendar, resources, and more
https://africanamericanhistorymonth.gov

UNPUBLISHED BLACK HISTORY
The New York Times publication with stories about notable figures

BLACK HISTORY MONTH ISN’T MAKING LIFE BETTER FOR BLACK AMERICANS
An Article from The Atlantic

BLACK HISTORY MONTH COLLECTION FROM PBS LEARNINGMEDIA
Standards-aligned lesson plans for educators
https://opb.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/black-history-collection/#.Wm5L-GaZMUQ

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY, ART, AND CULTURE
Smithsonian Institution
https://nmaahc.si.edu