

Carter Godwin Woodson

(1875-1950)

Carter G. Woodson was an African American historian, author, journalist and the founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915. He was one of the first scholars to value and study Black History. He recognized and acted upon the importance of a people having an awareness and knowledge of their contributions to humanity and left behind an impressive legacy. Founder and editor of the *Journal of Negro History* in 1916, Dr. Woodson is known as the Father of Black History. He was a member of the first black fraternity Sigma Pi Phi and a member of Omega Psi Phi. Among the works for which he is best known, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933), is still in print 75 years later.

Woodson was born on Dec. 19, 1875, in New Canton, Va., and was the son of former slaves. As a young man, he moved to Kentucky to work in the coal mines, and was able to devote only a few months a year to school. In 1895, at age 20, he entered Douglass High School in Fayette County, Ky., where he earned his diploma in less than two years. From 1897 to 1900, he taught at the school, and in 1900, he became its principal. In 1903, he earned a bachelor's of Literature degree with honors from Berea College, the first school in the South to admit students of every race and both genders on an equal basis. The school was founded in 1855 by abolitionist John Gregg Fee, a Kentucky slaveholder's son. In 1908, Woodson went on to earn a master's degree in European history from the University of Chicago and, in 1912, he earned a doctorate from Harvard University. He was the second African American, after W. E. Du Bois, to earn a doctorate in history from Harvard and the first person of enslaved parents to receive a PhD in America.

He studied at the Sorbonne in Paris. He served as dean of Howard University's School of Liberal Arts (1919-20), and West Virginia Collegiate Institute West Virginia State College (1920-22). He founded and was president of Associated Publishers to produce books on black culture. He published many books and articles during his lifetime including *The Negro in History*. In 1984, he was commemorated on a U.S. postage stamp.

Woodson is most known for his association with Black History Month, which derived from Negro History Week, so named by his fraternity Omega Psi Phi. The group selected a week in February dedicated to celebrate the achievements of blacks. Through Woodson's promotion of the celebration, its observance gained in popularity. In the 1960s, what was once a week of recognizing outstanding achievements of black Americans to science, literature, and the arts was stretched into a month. In 1976, it officially became "U.S. Black History Month."

The Carter G. Woodson Institute for Afro-American and African American Studies at the University of Virginia was named in his honor. His hope was that widespread knowledge and the appreciation of history would help alleviate racial and economic discrimination. He dedicated his life to that cause. The unique legacy of the historical backdrop of Berea, Kentucky's imprint on Woodson's life and the enduring importance Berea College places on Woodson is reflected in the form of its Carter G. Woodson Math and Science Institute, the Carter G. Woodson Professorship, and the Carter G. Woodson Student Service Award, which honors students for their commitment to academic excellence, service and interracial education. Dr. Woodson died in Washington, D. C., on April 3, 1950.



Woodson's home at 1538 9th Street, NW in Washington, DC., from 1922 until his death in 1950. It is owned by the National Parks Dept.

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No. 48

Printed with State Funds 1/10

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