

Carter Godwin Woodson

(1875-1950)

Carter G. Woodson is known as the Father of Black History. He was an African American historian, author, educator, and journalist. He founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915. Known currently as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, the organization continues to operate. Woodson founded the *Journal of Negro History* in 1916. 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. As a result, he left behind an impressive legacy. He was a member of the first black fraternity Sigma Pi Phi and a member of Omega Psi Phi.

Woodson was born on Dec. 19, 1875, in New Canton, Va., and was the son of former slaves. As a young man, he worked in the coal mines and was able to devote only a few months a year to school. In 1895, at age 20, he entered a West Virginia high school where he earned his diploma in less than two years. In 1903, he earned a bachelor's degree in Literature 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 earned 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 Ph.D. in America. He also studied at the Sorbonne in Paris.

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

Woodson is most known for his leadership concerning the creation of Black History Month. It was derived from Negro History Week, a recognition established by he and his fraternity, Omega Psi Phi, in 1926. Through Woodson's promotion, its observance gained in popularity. In the 1960s, what was once a week of recognizing outstanding achievements of black Americans in science, literature, and the arts was expanded to the month of February. 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. The Association for the Study of African American Life and History continued to operate there until about 1970. It is owned by the National Parks Dept.

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