

Carter Woodson: Father Of Black History Month In U.S.

(Editor's Note: Today marks the beginning of Black History Month, which continues through Feb. 29. In observance of this period, we think it appropriate to begin by running this article by Howard James Jones, who writes a column entitled, "Black Folk In American Civilization," which runs in the Daily World.)

February is celebrated as Black History Month. It received this designation as a result of the dream of one man who was able to work with a number of other persons to make this dream a reality. This seer was Carter G. Woodson.

According to Dr. Woodson, "Not to know what one's race has done in former times is to continue always a child." "If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated."

Carter Godwin Woodson, who expressed the above thoughts, was born in New Canton in Buckingham County, Virginia on December 19, 1875. He was the son of former slaves, James Woodson and Annie Eliza Riddle Woodson. His family was large and poor, and he, consequently was unable to attend the local school during much of its five-month term because he was needed by his parents to work on the farm. However, by the age



CARTER G. WOODSON

of seventeen, he had by self instruction mastered the basics of common school subjects. It was also during this year that he moved with his family to Huntington, west Virginia. Here he went to work as a miner in the coal fields.

In personality, Dr. Woodson has been characterized as having been a lone-wolf who was persistent and almost dogmatic. This is understandable when one recalls that here was a man with a mission.

At the age of twenty, he entered Douglas High School of Huntington, West Virginia, and in less than two years completed his courses. He went on to earn both a baccalaureate and Master of Arts degree from the University of Chicago. The next year, he began studying at Harvard University. So

that he could do research for his dissertation at the Library of Congress, in 1909, he began teaching French, Spanish, English and History in the public schools of the District of Columbia. In 1912, his dissertation, "The Disruption of Virginia," was accepted by Harvard and he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Afterwards, he served as Dean of the School of Liberal Arts at Howard University, but left because he did not agree with certain administration policies. He, eventually, gave up teaching altogether for this same reason.

MAJOR CONTRIBUTION

One of Dr. Woodson's major contributions to the historical profession came in 1915. Dr. Woodson met with four other persons in the office of the Executive Secretary of the Chicago Y.M.C.A and organized the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. It was incorporated on Oct. 3, 1915, under the laws of the District of Columbia. The Association was organized to "treat the records of race scientifically and to publish findings to the world." On January 1, 1916, Woodson published the first issue of the "Journal of Negro History," the official organ of the association. The cost of this first issue was about \$400 which was per-

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sonally financed by Dr. Woodson. During his tenure as editor of the journal, it never missed a single issue.

Dr. Woodson was also responsible for the establishment of "Negro History Week." Working with the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., he launched this annual celebration in 1926. Out of this venture grew the need for a popular periodical on black history. He met this need by beginning the publication of the "Negro History Bulletin" on October of 1937.

Dr. Charles Wesley eulogized Carter Godwin Woodson by saying, "here was a man who was a scholar but he was more than this. He was a discoverer, a contributor, an organizer, a disseminator, and a defender, all in the cause of truth." Even being all of these, he still died without realizing his life ambition of writing an "Encyclopedia Africana." Perhaps he had foreseen this when he wrote, "...a man has but so much energy to spend in this life. If he has to work always against handicaps he must finally fall short of his possibilities, and the country which hampers him for the apparent benefit of the

privileged class is hanging a mill stone about its neck."

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