



Carter G. Woodson, Founder of Negro History Week

Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950), the Father of Black History, is best known for starting Negro History Week in the US, which by the 1970s had led to Black History Month and African American Studies. He is also known for writing “The Mis-Education of the Negro” (1933) about how education in the US serves White interests not Black interests.

Education: His mother as a slave secretly taught herself to read and write and passed that knowledge onto him. By day he was a coal miner, hearing the stories of Black men who had fought in the Civil War. By night he studied Latin and English classics so he could get a high school education. By 1912 he had a PhD in history, the second Black American ever to get a PhD at Harvard. W.E.B. Du Bois was the first.

Ignorance and racism: Woodson discovered that even highly educated Blacks and Whites knew little about Black history. And what little they did know was often wrong. That made it next to impossible for Blacks to overcome racism, both from Whites and from within.

In 1915, to help set that right, he founded the **Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH)**. Its aim was to put Black history on a sound scholarly footing and make its findings widely known. He raised money for research, put out the *Journal of Negro History*, and published books no one else would.

In 1922 he wrote “**The Negro in Our History**”. It was the book he was best known for in his own time, the one Malcolm X learned Black history from when he was in prison. It was the best book on Black history till John Hope Franklin’s “From Slavery to Freedom” (1947).

In 1926 Woodson started **Negro History Week** to help spread knowledge of Black history. It was the second week of February when Blacks were already celebrating the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (12th) and Frederick Douglass (14th). It proved to be a hit: he could not keep up with the demand for material by schoolteachers and Negro History Clubs. He dreamed of the week becoming a year. It was already a month in West Virginia by the time of his death.

Day job: Before the ASNLH could raise enough money to support him full-time, he was a schoolteacher and sometimes a principal, in West Virginia, the Philippines, and especially Washington, DC. In time he was a professor of history and a dean at Howard University.

Research: He liked Washington, DC because of its huge Library of Congress where he could do research. He wrote the first thorough history of the Black church and was one of the first historians to look at slavery from the slave's point of view.

In 1933 he wrote "**The Mis-Education of the Negro**", his essays (rants) about Black education and his answer to Du Bois's idea of the Talented Tenth. It was not just history that needed to be Blacker. So did literature, philosophy, political science, music, art, law, medicine, religion, and sociology.