



*"I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word."*—Martin Luther King, Jr.

## Carter G. Woodson: The Man Behind Black History Month



Carter Godwin Woodson was born on December 19, 1875, in New Canton, Virginia, to Anna Eliza Riddle Woodson and James Woodson. The fourth of seven children, young Woodson worked as a sharecropper and a miner to

help his family. He began high school in his late teens and proved to be an excellent student, completing a four-year course of study in less than two years.

After attending Berea College in Kentucky, Woodson worked for the U.S. government as an education superintendent in the Philippines. He undertook more travels before returning stateside to continue his studies, earning his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Chicago. Woodson went on to receive a doctorate from Harvard University in 1912, becoming the second African American to earn a Ph.D. from the prestigious institution, after W.E.B Du Bois.

After finishing his education, Woodson dedicated himself to the fields of African American history and education. He served as principal of the Armstrong Manual Training School in Washington, D.C., before becoming a dean at Howard University and the West Virginia Collegiate Institute.

## The Origin of Black History Month

In February 1926, Woodson sent out a press release announcing the first Negro History Week. He chose February because the month contained the birthdays of both Abraham

Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, two prominent men whose historic achievements African Americans already celebrated.

As schools and other organizations across the country quickly embraced Woodson's initiative, he and his colleagues struggled to meet the demand for course materials and other resources. The Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) formed branches all over the country, though its national headquarters remained centered in Woodson's home in Washington D.C.

As early as the 1940s, efforts began to expand the week of public celebration of African American heritage and achievements into a longer event. This shift had already begun in some locations by 1950, when Woodson died of a heart attack at home in Washington.

With the rise of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in the 1960s, younger members of the ASALH advocated for organizational changes in policy, including the official shift to a month-long celebration of black history. In 1976, on the 50th anniversary of the first Negro History Week, the Association officially made the shift to Black History Month.

## Honoring our African American Students

As our nation acknowledges and celebrates the history of African Americans this month, please remember, the truest form of honor lies within cultivating a culture that respects the brilliance, fortitude, ingenuity, language, and diversity of ALL students regardless of their demography. When our students, especially our black students, experience that sense of belonging, they thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. In other words, it is not the black history month programs or research projects that evokes messages of worth for our African American students. It is however, the daily celebration of their humanity that shows them they are valued in your classrooms and schools.

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