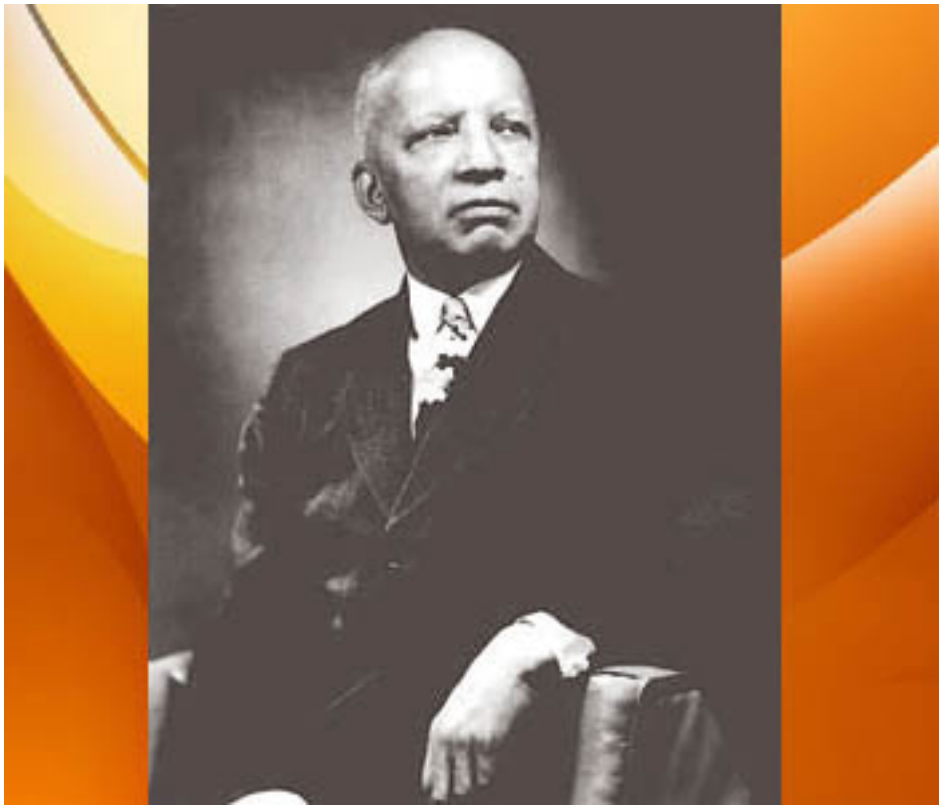

Woodson's conviction of Blacks’ getting a good education was key and as he stated it in his book “*The Mis-Education of the Negro*,” he writes: "*When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions.*

By BOB FERGUSON

Contributing Writer

This month as we celebrate Black history let us first reflect on the who, what, why and where this observance began.

It is paramount that we not only review the history of our contributions to America, but also recognize the significance that we have played in contributing to the world. Our inventions are wide-ranging and stretch from the hair products of Madam C.J. Walker and the traffic signal invented by Clevelander Garret Morgan, to some of the latest automobile designs and engineering by Chrysler, Ford and General Motors.

In 1926 the first efforts began with Dr. Carter Godwin Woodson initiating the celebration of Negro History Week, which corresponded in mid- February with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. Later, the observance was expanded to the entire month.

Woodson was born Dec. 19, 1875, in New Canton, Virginia, the son of former slaves James and Elizae Riddle Woodson. His father helped Union soldiers during the Civil War and later moved his family to
Huntington
,
West Virginia
when he heard that they were building a high school for Negroes. Coming from a large, poor family, Carter could not regularly attend school because he had to help out with his family's needs and food. Through self-instruction, Woodson mastered the fundamentals of common school subjects by age 17.

Wanting more education, Woodson went to Fayette County and devoted only a few months a year to his education while earning a living as a miner in the coal fields.

In 1895, at age 20, Woodson entered Fredrick Douglass High School, where he received his diploma in less than two years. From 1897 to 1900, Woodson taught in the
Fayette County
school system and in 1900 he was selected as the principal of
Fredric Douglass High School
. Still in pursuit of a greater education in 1901 he enrolled in
Berea College
, a liberal arts college in
Berea, Kentucky
and began taking classes part-time and earned his Bachelor of Literature degree in 1903. At that time
Berea
was
the only racially integrated college in Kentucky and in the South that would accept Negroes.

Several years later Woodson was admitted to the prestigious Harvard University and in 1912, he completed his Ph.D. in history where he was the second African-American on record of that school after W.E.B. DuBois to earn a doctorate.

Perhaps it was because of these two outstanding Black students that many years later another scholarly African American student was admitted to Harvard, Barack Obama, the 44th president of the United States of America.

Dr. Woodson who is known as the, "Father of Black History Month" was a strong proponent and had a firm belief that if the Negro secured a good education they would overcome many of the atrocities they suffered due to the lack of a good education. If Woodson were here today he would be devastated because of the staggering high school dropout rate which is more than 50% among African American students nationally.

Seemingly today's drop-out's tend disregard the struggle to place "Afro-American History" and distortion of the facts concerning Negroes in most history books, which deprived Black children and the whole race of a heritage, and relegated them to nothingness and nobodyness.

Woodson's conviction of Blacks' getting a good education was key and as he stated it in his book "*The Mis-Education of the Negro*," he writes: "*When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.* "

Although Woodson died on April 3, 1950, he had donated his collection of 5,000 items from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries to the Library of Congress.

His Washington, D.C. home has been preserved and designated the Carter G. Woodson Home National Historic Site . He can rest in peace knowing that his work continues on, and every February, students around the United States spend time learning about the subject that was closest to his heart – African American history.

May God bless his works, now and forevermore. Lets’ celebrate throughout this month.

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