



THE ORIGINS OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH

CARTER G. WOODSON (1875-1950) was born to parents who had been slaves. Neither his Mother nor Father could read or write. Mr. Woodson had to work to earn money for the family and did not start school until later than most children. But, his motto was it is "never to late to learn." He became a high school teacher; and was sad to discover that none of the schools taught the history of Black Americans. He started the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History to study the important things Black people had accomplished and on February 19, 1926 Woodson established "Negro History Week".

A full appreciation of the celebration of Black History Month requires a review and a reassessment of the social and academic climate that prevailed in the Western world and especially in North America before 1926 when Black History Month was established. It is important to recall that between 1619 and 1926, African Americans and other peoples of African descent were classified as a race that had not made any contribution to human civilization. Within the public and private sector, African Americans and other peoples of African descent were continually dehumanized and relegated to the position of non-citizens and often defined as fractions of humans. It is estimated that between 1890 and 1925, an African American was lynched every two and a half days.

The academic and intellectual community was no different from the bulk of mainstream America. Peoples of African descent were visibly absent in any scholarship or intellectual discourse that dealt with human civilization. African Americans were so dehumanized and their history so distorted in academia that "slavery, peonage, segregation, and lynching" were considered justifiable conditions. Under Woodson's direction and contributions from other African American and white scholars, the "Negro History Week" was launched on a serious platform in 1926 to neutralize the apparent ignorance and deliberate distortion of Black History.

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