

Huntington

Quarterly

*By James E. Casto
Photos by Rick Lee
Summer 2017*

Carter G. Woodson, a graduate of Huntington's old all-black Douglass High School who went on to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University, is widely recognized as the "Father of Black History Month."

Woodson was born in 1875 in Buckingham County, Virginia. As jobs opened up in West Virginia's coal mines and railroads, many black families migrated across the mountains from Virginia. Young Woodson's family was among them. At age 19, he enrolled at Douglass High. He finished the four-year course in two years, and then he went on to earn a degree from Berea College in Kentucky. In 1900, he returned to Huntington and became principal at Douglass.



He earned another bachelor's degree and master's degree from the University of Chicago and in 1912 became the second black man to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard. (William E. Dubois was the first).

In 1915, Woodson organized the Association for the Study of Negro Life, where he served as director, researcher, editor and janitor. The next year, he founded the influential Journal of Negro History. Today's observance of Black History Month can be traced directly to his pioneering efforts. He spent his later years in Washington, D.C., where he died in 1950.

Woodson's fame has spread over the years. In 1984, the U.S. Postal Service issued a stamp in his honor — a fitting tribute to him and his influential legacy. Yet, he long went virtually unremembered and unacknowledged in his adopted hometown of Huntington.

Today, fortunately, that has changed. A statue of the famed black educator stands at the Carter G. Woodson Apartments on Huntington's Hal Greer Boulevard. And the Woodson Memorial Foundation, which dedicated the statue September 29, 1995, is continuing its efforts to keep his memory alive.

The statue's creator, James Lykins, of Elkview, West Virginia, said he didn't know who Woodson was until he entered the competition to sculpt his likeness.

"At first, it was just a job," he said. "Then, I got into the character. He's an inspiration."

In a sense, Woodson's statue honors not just one man but the many black citizens of vision and accomplishment who helped build Huntington into the community it is today.