

Carter G. Woodson was a visionary

He founded 'Negro History Week' and documented black achievement

■ Columnist reflects on scholar's continued impact.

Long before Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous speech, "I Have A Dream," there lived another Dreamer: African-American Carter G. Woodson, born just ten years after the Civil War, December 19, 1875, in Buckingham County, Virginia.

Carter G. Woodson's "dream" as a young man and until his death at age 74, in 1950, was to collect sociological and historical data on African-Americans and publish major works as "The Negro In Our History" and "The Journal of the Negro History" for "The promotion of harmony between the races by acquainting the one with the other."

Woodson believed that the achievements of African-Americans when properly set forth reveal early as well as modern con-

tributions to civilization.

On February 7, 1926, Woodson organized Negro History Week which was expanded in the 1960's to Black History Month.

I greatly admire Woodson for pioneering the unexplored, undocumented history of people of African descent. His scholarly work on 16 books and valuable documents, and the scholars he inspired to follow in his footsteps, made my teaching of black history at my church in New Castle, Ind., a piece of cake.

For a decade beginning in 1973, my Sunday job was to present a black history lesson to Sunday school attenders during the special time between Sunday school dismissal and the start-up of the worship hour. In those ten years, my learners and I gained a broad, proud vision of who we were and what we could become. We celebrated the accomplishments of African-Americans as explorers, missionaries, inventors, cowboys,

**DOROTHY
WORD**

**TRIBUNE
COLUMNIST**



soldiers, astronauts and other "greats." I purposely omitted sports heroes knowing that media coverage "over-hypes" those personalities to the neglect of equally talented, low-profile African-Americans.

Of the hundreds of African-Americans I highlighted in those ten years — the charismatic, oratorically gifted stood out as skilled "talkers" who take standard English to a higher level, be they politicians, performers, preachers or poets.

Using Paul Laurence Dunbar's "Oak and Ivy" and "Majors and Minors," my learners and I memorized and recited Dunbar's poems of standard English and honest black dialect. I found it enlightening that Dunbar admired the

British poets who wrote in their dialect; that he enjoyed James Whitcomb Riley's poems in "Hoosier dialect," and that Dunbar even wrote a poem or two in the German dialect.

When my black history session focused on African-Americans in opera, my autographed program booklet from a Marian Anderson Concert at Goshen College was a real hands-on "plus." At that concert, many years ago at Goshen College, Marian Anderson sang in Italian, German, French, Standard English and black dialect. Every song was so beautifully presented, I doubt if any listener knew or cared.

Carter G. Woodson could not have "dreamed" that his influence on the teaching of black history would reach all the way to a New Castle, Indiana church for a decade of Sunday mornings, or to a newspaper writer who still salutes him today in 1997.

But then again, you can never tell about a dreamer.

(Dorothy Word is a retired school teacher from Evansville and currently lives in Kokomo.)