



Miners at Nuttallburg Mine.



A one-time miner in the New River Gorge, Carter Woodson created the forerunner to Black History Month.



For Immediate Release

## Black History Month's Connections to Southern West Virginia's New River Gorge

FAYETTEVILLE, W. Va., January 25, 2022 - Before groundbreaking historian and scholar [Dr. Carter G. Woodson](#) founded Negro History Week, the precursor to [Black History Month](#), the noted scholar, historian and "Father of Black History" shoveled coal in the Nuttallburg and Kaymoor mines in Southern West Virginia's [New River Gorge](#).

Woodson was among thousands of African Americans from Southern and Mid-Atlantic States who settled in the region beginning in the late 1800s to work in the region's booming coal mines and on the burgeoning Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad (C&O). Many of the workers, like Woodson, were born to parents who were freed slaves. The National Park Service estimates that more than [one-quarter of the mine workers](#) in West Virginia between the booming years of 1870 and 1930 were African American.

It was backbreaking, dangerous and often-deadly work, but it was one of the best opportunities for unskilled African Americans to earn a decent living. Miners who managed to load an average of five tons of hand-picked coal daily could earn as much as \$5 per day. For Woodson and many others, saving those hard-earned pennies allowed them to eventually pursue other career goals and establish more comfortable lives for their families.

### About Dr. Carter G. Woodson

Born in Virginia to former slaves, [Woodson](#) and his brothers traveled to Southern West Virginia in 1892 to work alongside other Black Americans in the mines. Although he was literate - he'd taught himself to read the

The John Henry memorial in Talcott, W.Va.



Lodging is 50 percent off throughout Black History Month at Adventures on the Gorge, an adventure resort adjacent to New River Gorge National Park and Preserve.

family Bible when he was growing up - Woodson focused on improving his reading and math skills during his years as a coal miner, successfully socking away his pay so he could attend high school. When he wasn't picking and mining coal, Woodson socialized with a growing group of other self-educated and thoughtful miners while honing the research and writing skills that would become the foundation of his career success.

After graduating from Douglass High School in Huntington, W. Va. - one of the few black high schools in the region - Woodson enrolled in Berea College in Kentucky, earning a Bachelor of Literature three years later. Woodson funded his college classes teaching classes in a school for the children of Black miners in a small New River town called Winona. He would continue to teach and study his entire life.

After concluding a teaching post in the Philippines and traveling the world, he returned to the U.S. to further his studies, ultimately earning a doctorate from Harvard University in 1912. Woodson published his first book, "The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861," in 1915, and shortly after formed an association called the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) to promote the study of Black American history and culture. He spent the following years expanding the reach and focus of ASNLH while continuing to teach and publish scholarly books.

In 1926, Woodson founded the first Negro History Week, designed to devote a week to the celebration of achievements by Black Americans. The idea caught on nationwide and was promoted for decades. History teachers around the country began to mark the week by teaching Black American history in their classrooms. Woodson died in 1950, but Negro History Week continued. In 1976, President Gerald Ford expanded it to Black History Month.

#### **How to Observe Black History Month in the New River Gorge**

The National Park Service along with several partners including [Visit Southern West Virginia](#) and the [New River Gorge Regional Development Authority](#), has developed an audio driving tour with stops at 17 historic sites that showcase the heritage of the African Americans in the New River Gorge. Free CDs can be obtained at the [NPS Canyon Rim Visitor Center](#) near Fayetteville, W. Va. Stops on the tour include:

- [Quinnimont Missionary Baptist Church](#) - Churches like Quinnimont Missionary Baptist Church served the spiritual needs of the growing African American community.
- [Camp Washington-Carver](#) - Built by the Civilian Conservation Corp, Camp Washington-Carver was the first 4-H camp for African American youth. The camp continues to provide the venue for events such as the Appalachian String Band Festival and Heritage Arts Camp.
- [Hawks Nest Workers Memorial and Grave Site](#). The devastating Hawks Nest Tunnel disaster killed 764 tunnel workers, many of them African American, who were stricken with silicosis, an incurable disease caused by exposure to silica dust. The Hawks Nest disaster is one of the worst industrial tragedies in United States history.
- [John Henry Park](#) - John Henry worked as a steel driver on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway in the 1870s at about the time the automated steam drill was introduced to speed up the drilling process. When Henry set out to prove that man was faster than machine, his powerful efforts eventually were retold as [The Legend of John Henry](#), a story celebrated in [ballads](#) and during [John Henry Days](#), staged the second week of July in Talcott, W. Va., home to John Henry Park.

- [Stratton High School](#) - Opened in 1919 when education was still segregated, Stratton was the region's first all-black high school. The school continued to operate until 1967.
- [Hinton Depot](#) - Many African Americans arriving in W. Va. first passed through the historic Hinton Depot.

#### **About Modern-Day New River Gorge**

The region became home to the country's newest national park when the New River Gorge National River was designated a national park - [New River Gorge National Park and Preserve](#). The celebrated destination is known for its exquisite scenery, rafting and other adventures like those available at nearby [Adventures on the Gorge](#) and cultural sites such as the preserved town of [Thurmond](#), the mostly intact [Nuttalburg site](#), and the architecturally stunning [New River Gorge Bridge](#).

The destination has received widespread worldwide [media coverage](#) this year, and excitement about the destination continues to build. [Frommers.com](#) recently named the New River Gorge one of the top 10 best places to go in 2022. The region was also named one of the top family-friendly destinations to visit by [USA Today](#); top travel region by [Lonely Planet](#); and one of the best places to go by [Conde Nast Traveler](#). Additionally, [Time](#) named the New River Gorge one of the world's greatest places.

#### **Where to Stay and What Else to Do**

Throughout Black History Month, Adventures on the Gorge is offering [50 percent off lodging prices](#) for accommodations in its freestanding [deluxe](#) and [mountain](#) cabins. The adventure resort is situated adjacent to the boundaries of New River Gorge National Park and Preserve.

Winter adventures include [TreeTops Canopy Tour](#) and [TimberTrek Aerial Adventure Park](#). The resort is located about three miles from the National Park Service Canyon Rim Visitor Center and the historic and charming town of Fayetteville, which offers a selection of year-round restaurants and stores.

#### **About Adventures on the Gorge**

Named one of the top six adventure resorts in the country by [U.S. News & World Report](#), Adventures on the Gorge is located on more than 250 acres along the rim of the majestic New River Gorge near Fayetteville, W.Va. The resort provides an array of outdoor experiences including whitewater rafting on the New and Gauley Rivers, aerial adventures, rock climbing, rappelling, kayaking, stand up paddle boarding, fishing, mountain biking and hiking. There are also restaurants, bars and shops as well as a small-group conference center. Visitors can choose from a variety of [accommodations](#) and [vacation packages](#).

#### **Media Links (please credit Adventures on the Gorge)**

##### **Video:**

[Scenic spring summer](#)  
[Scenic fall winter](#)  
[Rafting](#)  
[Adventures on the Gorge](#)  
[New River Gorge Bridge](#)

##### **Photos:**

[360 Tours](#)  
[Rafting](#)  
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