

# National Park Service gets Carter Woodson home

By Sheryl P. Simons  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The creator of Black History Month made history himself this year — albeit posthumously. In ceremonies held at Washington, D.C.'s Shiloh Baptist Church, on January 28, Woodson's home became a part of the National Park Services' treasury of registered historic sites. No small feat and, indeed, as it took some heavy financial and political lifting for this great day to occur.

The Shaw neighborhood where Dr. Woodson lived and worked for 35 years had faced decades of neglect and decline after a heyday where notables, such as Duke Ellington and Chita Rivera, once called it home. Offices for the Association for the Study of African American Life and History or ASALH, founded by Woodson, were located at 1538 9th Street, NW, Washington, D.C., on the first two floors while Dr. Woodson maintained living quarters on the third floor.

Dr. Woodson, the son of slaves, worked in the coal mines of West Virginia before being allowed to attend high school, which he finished in two years. He obtained a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1912, the second Black to do so; W.E.B. DuBois was the first in 1895.

As the years passed, the brick house, built in the 1890s, fell into disrepair. So did the surrounding neighborhood; they began calling the local middle school "Shameful Shaw." In a June 25, 2001, article in the *Washington Post*, it was reported that Edward Smith, history professor at American University, made sure that the decrepit premises remained on his Black History tours in the city. He was quoted as saying, "They've seen the Frederick Douglass House and the Bethune House, and then I say the next destina-



Photo special to the Sentinel-Voice by Irene C. Kellogg  
Mr. and Mrs. William H. Simons (left) and daughters, Sheryl and Wilma Simons.

tion is the Woodson house, and they expect Woodson to be in the same excellent condition. They are always shocked."

The historic significance of the site was not lost on a group of present and former Shaw residents. Coalescing under the name "Friends of Carter G. Woodson," it began to hold numerous fundraisers in 1987 to keep the financial wolves at bay. Squatters, who lit matches for indoor grilling, were moved to safe quarters.

Once the premises were protectively sealed and the deed firmly in the hands of its owners, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, efforts turned to securing a future of which Dr. Woodson would be proud. By 2001, the home would enter into the National Trust for Historic Preservation as endangered historic properties.

With a goal of preservation firmly in mind, William H. Simons, former history teacher and treasurer of ASALH, placed a call to a former pupil, Eleanor

Holmes Norton, delegate from the District of Columbia. Thus, began the multi-year tasks of scholarly inquiries as to the sites' significance, feasibility studies, financial studies, and all manner of federal government bureaucratic checklists.

During her keynote address before an audience of more than 300, Norton recalled the fateful day that her former teacher, called her office requesting a meeting. Norton recalled, "I recognized that voice immediately. I didn't defy Mr. Simons in the seventh grade and I am certainly not going to defy him now!"

As the District's representative, Norton certainly knows the National Park Service and further challenged them not to "drag their feet" on this restoration project. Moreover, she noted that this site was the place where Dr. Woodson dedicated his life to correcting the untruths put forth about the Negro.

"This house has been given as a gift to America," she said. The audience responded with thunderous ap-

plause.

Rounding out the ceremonies were the presentation of United States colors by the National Park Service Honor Guard; a recalling of Dr. Woodson's life and work by Kyle Jones, Howard University Drama Student; songs including "Lift Every Voice and Sing" from Professor Kehembe V. Eichelberger; and remarks by Shelia

Flemming-Hunter, president of ASALH; Don Murphy, Deputy Director of the National Park Service and Wallace Charles Smith, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church. Prior to the transfer of the ceremonial key to the home, libations were offered. Seated in the front row were Marion Jackson Pryde, one of Woodson's cousins and William H. Simons and his family.

Today, ASALH strives to

continue the work of Dr. Woodson. It publishes the *Journal of African American History*, the *Black History Bulletin*, the Black History Month Learning Package, as well as seminars and its annual conferences.

Donations can be made to the Carter G. Woodson Housing Fund, 535 Bryant Street, N.W. Suite C 142, Washington, D.C., 20059, or call 202-863-0053. The informational website is [www.asalh.org](http://www.asalh.org).

## Shooting

(Continued from Page 4)

its commitment to continue in the reform of the LAPD," Villaraigosa said, adding, "Additional training will also take place in order to reduce the possibility of similar situations in the future."

Upon hearing of the commission's decision, activist Najee Ali, who had followed the case since its beginning, said he was "shocked and amazed."

"Over the years, I've seen previous commissions cave in to previous police chiefs over controversial shootings," Ali said.

Nevertheless, the commission's decision drew disapproval from Bob Baker, president of the Police Protective League, the union representing police officers.

"We are angered and dismayed that the Police Commission bowed to the community pressure and used hindsight to punish Officer Garcia," Baker said. "The lesson that should be learned from that night is that at 4:00 a.m., kids like Devin Brown need to be safely home in bed."

Gene Johnson Jr. writes for the WAVE Newspapers.

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