

# Carter G. Woodson and the Collection of Source Materials for Afro-American History

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**Abstract:** Until recently, white libraries and archives generally showed no interest in collecting primary source materials that dealt specifically with black culture. J. Franklin Jameson, chief of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress during the late 1920s, recognized the need to acquire these sources and assisted Afro-American historian Carter G. Woodson in his endeavor to collect them. With only a small amount of grant funds and a great deal of enthusiastic support from the black community, Woodson collected over five thousand documents which now comprise the "Carter G. Woodson Collection of Negro Materials" in the Manuscript Division.

*About the author:* Jacqueline Goggin is coeditor of the J. Franklin Jameson Papers, a recently established documentary editing project cosponsored by the American Historical Association, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives. This article is a revised chapter of her Ph.D. thesis (University of Rochester, 1983). She is presently completing a full length biography of Woodson to be titled, *In Pursuit of Truth: Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History*, which will be published by Louisiana State University Press. She is grateful to Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese for their comments on an earlier version of the manuscript.

UNTIL VERY RECENTLY WHITE LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES generally showed no interest in collecting primary source materials that dealt specifically with black culture. In the early part of this century, state archives and libraries in the South collected plantation records, diaries, and letters of white planters because of encouragement and support from the American Historical Association and white historians of the South; however, this documentation did not adequately reflect the black perspective.<sup>1</sup>

J. Franklin Jameson (1859–1937), chief of the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress, recognized the need to acquire black primary source materials and assisted Afro-American historian Carter G. Woodson in his endeavor to collect sources and place them in the Manuscript Division. Harvard-educated Woodson (1875–1950) was the second black to receive a Ph.D. in history in the United States. In 1915 he founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, and the following year he began editing and publishing the *Journal of Negro History*.<sup>2</sup>

Through the formation and direction of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Woodson vigorously promoted the collection and preservation of documents that related to the black experience in the United States, Latin America, Europe, and Africa. The collec-

tion of historical documents and sociological data on contemporary Afro-Americans was an essential component of Woodson's program to research, write, and publish a history that accurately reflected the black experience. Much of the work published by Woodson and his assistants during the 1920s and early 1930s was based on research in previously unused primary sources—letters, diaries, birth and death certificates, wills, inventories of estates, speeches, folklore, and oral histories.<sup>3</sup> By 1925 the *Journal of Negro History* devoted at least one-quarter of its space to the publication of transcripts of primary source materials and thereby encouraged their use by scholars who otherwise would not have known about them.<sup>4</sup>

Since the collection of source materials was an important part of Woodson's program to promote the study of black history, he seized every opportunity to educate the general public and Afro-American scholars about the need to preserve and collect sources that accurately reflected the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of Afro-Americans; they especially needed primary source materials written by blacks. Much of what white scholars published on Afro-American history was biased because their research did not usually include an examination of source materials written by blacks.<sup>5</sup> Manuscripts from many black

<sup>1</sup>See, John David Smith, "'Keep 'em in a fire-proof vault'—Pioneer Southern Historians Discover Plantation Records," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 78 (Summer 1979): 376–391.

<sup>2</sup>See Jacqueline Goggin, "Carter G. Woodson and the Movement to Promote Black History," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Rochester, 1983), and August Meier and Elliott M. Rudwick, "J. Franklin Jameson, Carter G. Woodson, and the Foundations of Black Historiography," *American Historical Review* 89 (October 1984): 1005–1015.

<sup>3</sup>Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1919); Woodson, *The Negro in Our History* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1922); Woodson, *Free Negro Heads of Families in the United States in 1830* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1925); Woodson, *The Rural Negro* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1930); and Lorenzo J. Greene and Woodson, *The Negro Wage Earner* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1930).

<sup>4</sup>Woodson, "Ten Years of Collecting and Publishing the Records of the Negro," *Journal of Negro History* 10 (October 1925): 598–606 (hereafter cited as *JNH*).

<sup>5</sup>Charles Wesley, "Creating and Maintaining an Historical Tradition," *JNH* 49 (January 1964): 13–33.

sources were uncollected, and Woodson maintained that they were in danger of destruction so long as they remained in the possession of people who probably did not recognize their value. In 1916 he reported that:

We [the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History] are directing our attention to transcribing or making available local documents scattered throughout the country among white and colored people . . . letters, pamphlets and the like. We hope to prosecute this work vigorously as many of these documents are being thrown away and if we do not soon do something to preserve them, they will be lost to history.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the years that Woodson directed the Association, he corresponded with black and white scholars, white philanthropists and philanthropic organizations, black professionals, and black school teachers in an effort to obtain their assistance for his crusade to preserve primary source materials. He received a strong, positive response and frequently acquired documents, or transcripts of documents, from individuals who shared his concern that the history of the race would not be accurately documented if source materials remained unavailable to scholars.<sup>7</sup> In 1929 Woodson also succeeded in obtaining financial support from white philanthropists for a collecting project that became the nucleus for the "Carter G. Woodson Collection of Negro Materials" at the Library of Congress.

The majority of the documents in the collection were, however, gathered through the voluntary cooperation Woodson received from blacks, for he received no further funding from philanthropists. He recognized that blacks would need to undertake the collection of their own sources.

Prior to the 1940s black scholars had difficulty gaining access to the limited black history materials in Southern libraries because of segregation policies.<sup>8</sup> The Library of Congress did not practice segregation and admitted black scholars to its research facilities. Hence, Woodson decided to place his collection there.

Woodson would not have succeeded in collecting source materials without the cooperation of interested individuals. From 1916 through the 1940s he maintained regular correspondence with people who had valuable primary source materials. On many occasions he gained support and encouragement from white historians who enthusiastically endorsed his efforts and frequently wrote letters of recommendation for him when he appealed to white individuals and organizations for financial assistance.<sup>9</sup> Sentiment aside, Afro-Americans had special reasons for saving bills of sale, manumission papers, deeds to property, receipts, and other documents—they needed to retain them to preserve their status and protect their rights. Thus, Woodson focused his attention on the black community. He used their existing institutions, especially churches, schools, and

<sup>6</sup>Woodson to J. Franklin Jameson, 18 May 1916, Jameson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., (hereafter cited as LC).

<sup>7</sup>Hosea S. Ballou to Woodson, 3 March 1918; E. P. Southall to Woodson, 7 September 1920; Henry A. Wallace to Woodson, 26 March 1922; J. C. Hartzell to Woodson, 24 December 1924; and Anna Bustill Smith to Woodson, 24 July 1925, all Woodson Collection, LC.

<sup>8</sup>John Hope Franklin, "The Dilemma of the American Negro Scholar," in *Soon One Morning*, ed. Herbert Hill, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pp. 60–76.

<sup>9</sup>Jameson to William C. Graves, 20 December 1917, Jameson Papers, LC; Edward Channing to Woodson, 30 March 1920, Arthur B. Spingarn Papers, LC; C. H. Van Tyne to Woodson, 3 April 1920, Spingarn Papers, LC; and Jameson to E. E. Day, 13 May 1929, Jameson Papers, LC.

professional organizations, to facilitate collection.<sup>10</sup>

Through publications and special celebrations, Woodson educated scholars and the general public to an awareness of the importance of saving and collecting primary source materials. He effectively used the *Journal of Negro History* as one forum. In advertisements and appeals to *Journal* readers Woodson noted that, without primary sources, scholars would be unable to write articles on the black past, and he encouraged them to send materials to him.<sup>11</sup> He sent sample copies of the *Journal* to black and white scholars, professionals, white philanthropists, and philanthropic organizations, and urged them to assist him in the collection of source materials.<sup>12</sup> Negro History Week celebrations included exhibits of primary source materials to encourage the general public to make additional documents available for future generations.<sup>13</sup>

Until the 1920s Woodson failed to obtain financial support for his collection efforts from white individuals or institutions. In 1916 he wrote to J. Franklin Jameson, then director of historical research for the Carnegie Institution in Washington, to propose a project to col-

lect and transcribe sources. The Carnegie Institution would not fund the project, but Jameson encouraged Woodson to proceed with it if he received the necessary funds elsewhere. Jameson already had plans for a project to collect documents on the slave trade, and he felt that Woodson could be more effective in gaining entry into the black community to gather sources.<sup>14</sup> When the United States entered World War I, Woodson recognized that the perspectives of black soldiers would be ignored unless steps were taken to document their experiences. In 1918 he began an appeal for financial assistance to collect documents and oral histories. He planned to write a monograph from the information collected, but he never received funding.<sup>15</sup> To transcribe and make available information on slaves contained in eighteenth-century newspapers, Woodson solicited funds from the General Education Board which expressed no interest and offered no funds.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in 1925 Woodson was unsuccessful in raising money from the Guggenheim Foundation to collect folklore from the French West Indies for a sociological study of religious practices and customs. The American Folklore Society did, however,

<sup>10</sup>See Woodson's Annual Reports of the Association, published annually in the October issue of the *JNH* during the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>11</sup>See advertisements in the *JNH* during 1919 and 1921. Advertisements were also submitted to the American Council of Learned Societies for its survey of learned societies, American Council of Learned Societies Records, LC (hereafter cited as ACLSR).

<sup>12</sup>Edward Channing to Woodson, 31 January 1916, Woodson Collection, LC; Woodson to Joel E. Spingarn, 23 May 1916, Joel E. Spingarn Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University (hereafter cited as MS/HU); Woodson to Archibald Grimke, 11 March 1918, Grimke Papers, MS/HU; Woodson to George Foster Peabody, 19 July 1920, Peabody Papers, LC; Woodson to Arthur B. Spingarn, 26 July 1920, Spingarn Papers, LC; Woodson to William Allen White, 24 April 1928, White Papers, LC.

<sup>13</sup>See Woodson's reports on Negro History Week, published annually in the April issue of *JNH*, 1926-1939.

<sup>14</sup>Jameson to Woodson, 17 May 1916; Woodson to Jameson, 18 May 1916; and Jameson to Woodson, 24 June 1916, all Jameson Papers, LC.

<sup>15</sup>Woodson to Arthur B. Spingarn, 28 October 1918, A.B. Spingarn Papers, MS/HU; and Howard Sutherland to Woodson, 29 January 1920, Woodson Collection, LC.

<sup>16</sup>Woodson to E. C. Sage, 27 February 1923, Records of the General Education Board, Rockefeller Archive Center (hereafter cited as GEBC and RAC); Sage to Woodson, 15 March 1923, GEBC.

contribute \$200 towards a less ambitious project to collect Southern black folklore.<sup>17</sup>

Prior to 1929 when he received a grant from the Social Science Research Council, Woodson collected source materials through the efforts of volunteers, most of whom were black. In correspondence with numerous individuals he pleaded for the preservation of letters, diaries, and other source materials that would illuminate aspects of the Afro-American past. Many individuals cooperated, willingly turning over information and important documents in their possession.<sup>18</sup>

In 1921 Woodson sent out a survey to elicit information on slavery from those who may have been former slaves or who had relatives that had been slaves. He collected data on treatment—food, clothing, housing, work conditions, punishments, and rewards—and data on free blacks as well. Following the survey, he interviewed elderly Afro-Americans who had childhood memories of their slave experiences.<sup>19</sup> In 1925 Woodson solicited letters written by blacks before the Civil War, since they would be “valuable in studying the mind of the Negro during that period.” Without this documentation, Woodson maintained, scholars would have to “depend upon the testimony of observers who saw the race only from afar and misunderstood most of what they saw.”<sup>20</sup> The letter he re-

ceived from Janie Porter Barrett, superintendent of the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls, was typical of the cooperation he obtained. Barrett wrote:

I am sending the enclosed letter in respon[se] to your appeal for letters written by ex-slaves. I don't know that you had in mind our most distinguished ex-slave but I am sending it and shall be glad to have you keep it if it is what you want. We have always valued it very highly in our family because it was given to Mr. Barrett by Gen[erall] Armstrong with a copy of [Frederick] Douglas[s]' life when he was in school at Hampton Institute.<sup>21</sup>

When black and white scholars discovered valuable uncollected source materials while conducting research, they frequently made them available to Woodson. Annie Abel-Henderson and Frank Klingberg turned over to Woodson transcripts of correspondence of the abolitionist Tappan brothers that they found in the course of research in the records of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. They hoped to publish these documents in the *American Historical Review*, but J. Franklin Jameson urged them to consider the *Journal of Negro History* as a more appropriate place for publication. The documents were published in the *Journal* in 1927 as “A Sidelight on Anglo-

<sup>17</sup>Woodson to Waldo Leland, 5 June 1925, and enclosure, “Outline for the Study of the Negro in the French West Indies”; Leland to Woodson, 26 June 1925; and Leland to the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, 26 June 1925, all Leland Papers, LC. Also see Woodson's annual report, *JNH* 10 (October 1925): 596.

<sup>18</sup>T.A. McDermot to Woodson, 28 June 1923; Sir Harry Johnston to Woodson, 26 August 1925; and Anna Bustill Smith to Woodson, 3 October 1925, all Woodson Collection, LC.

<sup>19</sup>Woodson to Archibald Grimke, 29 July 1921, and enclosure, Grimke Papers, MS/HU; and Woodson to John R. Lynch, 30 July 1921, Woodson Collection, LC.

<sup>20</sup>Woodson to Arthur B. Spingarn, 20 July 1925, Spingarn Papers, MS/HU; Abigail Richardson to Woodson, 2 June 1924, Woodson Collection, LC; Woodson to Joel E. Spingarn, 9 June 1925, Joel E. Spingarn Papers; Woodson to E. C. Sage, 5 July 1925, GEHR; Sage to Woodson, 24 July 1925, GEHR.

<sup>21</sup>Barrett to Woodson, 4 September 1925, Woodson Collection, LC.

American Relations 1839–1861.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, other white scholars cooperated and sent Woodson documentary source materials that were published in the *Journal*. Waldemar Westergaard provided Woodson with documents that detailed a slave revolt in the Danish West Indies. Documents on blacks in Canada were contributed by Fred Landon and William R. Riddell. N. Andrew Cleven gave Woodson some diplomatic records that chronicled European disputes over the control of the slave trade.<sup>23</sup>

Black scholars enthusiastically shared the fruits of laborious research and provided Woodson with copies of documents that were previously inaccessible to scholars. Emmett J. Scott turned over letters written by black migrants during the period 1916–1918, which formed the basis of the research conducted for his 1920 publication of *Negro Migration During the War*.<sup>24</sup> James Hugo Johnston and Luther P. Jackson contributed documentary sources on slaves and free blacks in Virginia.<sup>25</sup>

White men and women who were in-

terested in Woodson's efforts also provided source materials and information on other potential donors. Harry L. Davis urged Woodson to obtain copies of materials on the Prince Hall Masons, since the organization had an archives and saved some early organizational records. They were in poor physical condition, however, and needed to be transcribed before they were lost.<sup>26</sup> Arthur Spingarn donated letters of abolitionists and one Frederick Douglass letter that he had collected.<sup>27</sup> Letters written by former slaves who lived in Liberia during the nineteenth century were given to Woodson by Edward S. Major, the grandson of the slaves' former master.<sup>28</sup> Annie Rogers Knowlton turned over her father's collection of letters and songs written by Negro soldiers during the Civil War.<sup>29</sup> Woodson received a bill of sale for a slave sold in New York in 1813 from Louis P. De Boer who noted that Woodson may have collected “similar documents of earlier as well as later date for southern states, but not one exactly of this nature and contents.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Frank J. Klingberg to Jameson, 14 April 1926; Jameson to Klingberg, 28 April 1926; Woodson to Klingberg, 30 April 1926; Jameson to Klingberg, 30 April 1926; and Jameson to Klingberg, 1 May 1926, all Jameson Papers, LC; and Annie Heloise Abel-Henderson and Frank J. Klingberg, “A Sidelight on Anglo-American Relations, 1839–1861,” *JNH* 12 (April 1927): 128–178. Klingberg was a professor of history at the University of California-Los Angeles; Abel-Henderson taught at Smith College.

<sup>23</sup>Westergaard to Woodson, 27 October 1925, Woodson Collection, LC; Fred Landon, “Records Illustrating the Condition of Refugees from Slavery in Upper Canada before 1860,” *JNH* 13 (April 1928): 199–206; William R. Riddell, “An Early Canadian Slavery Transaction,” *JNH* 13 (April 1928): 207; N. Andrew Cleven, “The Convention Between Spain and Holland Regulating the Return of Deserters and Fugitive Slaves in their American Colonies,” *JNH* 14 (July 1929): 341–344. Fred Landon was a librarian at the Public Library in London, Ontario, Canada; William Renwick Riddell was justice of the Supreme Court of Ontario; N. Andrew Cleven was a professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh; and Waldemar Westergaard was a professor of history at UCLA.

<sup>24</sup>Emmett J. Scott, *Negro Migration During the War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920).

<sup>25</sup>Jackson to Woodson, 8 August 1926, Woodson Collection, LC; James Hugo Johnston, “Antislavery Petitions Presented to the Virginia Legislature by Citizens of Various Counties,” *JNH* 12 (October 1927): 670–691; and Luther P. Jackson, “Manumission Papers of Free People of Color of Petersburg, Virginia,” *JNH* 13 (October 1928): 534–538.

<sup>26</sup>Davis to Woodson, 10 July 1924 and Davis to Woodson, 30 April 1928, Woodson Collection, LC.

<sup>27</sup>Rayford Logan to Arthur B. Spingarn, 20 September 1932; Woodson to Spingarn, 11 October 1932; Woodson to Spingarn, 28 June 1940; and Woodson to Spingarn, 7 July 1940, all Spingarn Papers, MS/HU.

<sup>28</sup>Edward S. Major to Woodson, 15 July 1929, Woodson Collection, LC.

<sup>29</sup>Accessions list, Woodson Collection, LC.

<sup>30</sup>Louis P. de Boer to Woodson, 11 September 1931, Woodson Collection, LC.



By the mid-1920s Woodson had made significant progress in assembling a substantial collection of source materials at the library housed at association headquarters. In 1926 he reported that:

Probably the most valuable part of the library is the rapidly growing collection of manuscripts. Realizing the value of the abundant manuscript materials now scattered in the homes of various Negroes and whites throughout the country, persons interested in the preservation of these records are inducing them to give them to the Association where they may be preserved in its archives.<sup>31</sup>

When Woodson applied for a grant from the Social Science Research Council in 1928, he promoted his past success in gathering a substantial collection totally through voluntary support. If such a tremendous amount could be collected without funding, Woodson argued, even more could be accomplished if paid field workers were sent into the rural South to collect sociological data and historical documents. Receiving substantial support from the Carnegie Foundation and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund for other association projects, Woodson had proved himself to be an able and creative administrator. He had published the *Journal* for twelve years, written several books, and received the endorsement of a number of important white historians—J. Franklin Jameson and Arthur M. Schlesinger among them. Woodson's proposal for "An Exploratory Effort to Collect Manuscript Materials among Negroes" was also en-

dorsed by the American Historical Association. In 1929 the Social Science Research Council awarded him a one-year grant of \$4,000.<sup>32</sup>

That year Woodson succeeded in collecting more than twenty-five hundred manuscripts which he placed in the Library of Congress to be consulted by "a host of serious investigators from all parts of the world."<sup>33</sup> In an extensive report on the project, Woodson pleaded for additional funds to continue because uncollected materials were in danger of destruction.<sup>34</sup>

The Social Science Research Council did not renew the grant, and in 1930 Woodson submitted a more ambitious proposal to John D. Rockefeller and the Rockefeller Foundation. He requested \$50,000 for a period of three years to continue the employment of field agents to collect materials in the rural South. Once again Woodson pleaded for funds to preserve materials for future generations of scholars.<sup>35</sup>

The project was to be directed by a committee of three: Woodson, Arthur M. Schlesinger, and J. Franklin Jameson. Schlesinger enthusiastically endorsed the project and felt that the Social Science Research Council funds had been well spent. He agreed to serve on the committee and wrote a letter of recommendation to John D. Rockefeller.<sup>36</sup> Jameson's endorsement was essential to Woodson since he was at that time the chief of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. Jameson also endorsed the project and wrote a letter of recommendation to Rockefeller.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Woodson, Annual Report for 1926, *JNH* 11 (October 1926): 554.

<sup>32</sup>Woodson, Annual Report for 1929, *JNH* 14 (October 1929): 363-369.

<sup>33</sup>Woodson to the General Education Board, 6 January 1934, GEHR.

<sup>34</sup>Woodson, "Report on the Exploratory Effort to Collect Manuscript Materials Among Negroes," 1930, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund Records, RAC (hereafter cited as LSRMFR).

<sup>35</sup>Woodson, "The Collection of Hand-Written Materials Bearing on the Past of the Negro," 1930, Woodson Papers, MS/HU.

<sup>36</sup>Schlesinger to Woodson, 13 January 1930, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RAC (hereafter cited as RFR); Schlesinger to Woodson, 25 March 1930, RFR.

<sup>37</sup>Woodson to Jameson, 20 March 1930; and Jameson to John D. Rockefeller, 1 April 1930, Jameson Papers, LC.

Woodson never received a personal reply from Rockefeller, but the Rockefeller Foundation, noting his previous success, did seriously consider the proposal. Foundation officials wanted additional information and evidence that this was the most appropriate collecting project to fund. For advice they turned to the Social Science Research Council, which referred the proposal to the Joint Committee on Materials for Research, in which the American Council of Learned Societies also participated.<sup>38</sup> In 1930 the Joint Committee on Materials for Research, chaired by Robert C. Binkley, professor of history at Western Reserve University, evaluated Woodson's proposal and made its recommendation to the Social Science Research Council. Other committee members were: Solon J. Buck, director of the Minnesota Historical Society; Henry M. Lydenberg, assistant director of the New York Public Library; and Waldo Gifford Leland, from the American Council of Learned Societies.<sup>39</sup>

The committee was charged with estimating the value of and need for the project. Recognizing the need to collect black source materials, Binkley expressed interest in the project and endorsed it. In a memorandum to committee members he wrote:

That part of the project which involves the securing of originals or copies of manuscripts from negro families seems to me to be of highest importance, because this is

the material most likely to be lost, and because an effort in this direction may have permanent after effects in stimulating further enterprises of collection by the negroes themselves.<sup>40</sup>

Other members also endorsed the project, but with reservations. Lydenberg felt that the Schomburg Library, a branch of the New York Public Library, would be a more appropriate place for such a collection, and he expressed some reservations about Woodson's control over the project. Although the committee recommended that the project be funded, it was reluctant to endorse it as the most important project of manuscript collecting to be funded at \$50,000. The Rockefeller Foundation did not award any money, and Woodson never received further funding from white foundations.<sup>41</sup>

The collection of sources by Woodson and his assistants continued, albeit at a slower pace. Still, in 1931 five hundred manuscripts had been collected and placed in the Library of Congress. Woodson hoped that he would eventually receive funding for a collecting project.

In the next four years Woodson continued to add manuscript materials gathered through voluntary efforts to the collection at the Library of Congress.<sup>42</sup> In 1935 he tried once more to solicit funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. He wanted Jameson's personal endorsement and an official endorsement from the Library of Congress for the project.

<sup>38</sup>E. B. Wilson (from Social Science Research Council) to Solon J. Buck, 19 June 1930, Joint Committee on Materials for Research Records, LC (hereafter cited as JCMR Records).

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Binkley, memorandum to committee members, 18 July 1930, JCMR Records.

<sup>41</sup>Binkley to the Social Science Research Council, 2 December 1930, JCMR Records. In 1939 the American Council of Learned Societies formed a Committee on Negro Studies. Melville Herskovits chaired the committee and other members included Lawrence Reddick, Sterling Brown, Ralph Bunche, and Lorenzo Dow Turner. In existence until 1950, the Committee obtained a grant, supervised the microfilming of black newspapers, and published a guide to black source materials at the National Archives. See Robert L. Harris, Jr., "Segregation and Scholarship," *Journal of Black Studies* 12 (March 1982): 315-331.

<sup>42</sup>See Woodson's Annual Reports for 1932-1935 in the *JNH*.



Jameson wrote a letter of recommendation for the project but told Woodson not to expect an official endorsement from the Library of Congress. Although Jameson promised to speak to Herbert Putnam, the Librarian of Congress, discussions apparently went no further, and Woodson did not receive funding.<sup>43</sup>

Woodson continued to collect materials and used the annual celebration of Negro History Week to educate the general public about the importance of saving documents. In 1939 he brought an exhibit of documents with him when he spoke at a Negro History Week celebration in the District of Columbia public schools. He reported that:

Letters written by teachers and their students in private schools before the Civil War and record books showing their appreciation were brought into evidence to remind the public also of their humble beginnings before the system had public support.<sup>44</sup>

Woodson's efforts stimulated blacks to turn over valuable documents in their possession, and by 1941 he collected five thousand manuscripts which he placed in the Library of Congress.

When he turned documents over to the Library of Congress, Woodson included notes on each one, giving as much information as possible on the donor and author, who frequently were different persons. He provided names, occupations or status, and summaries of the contents of items. This detailed accessions list is included in the collection.<sup>45</sup> Woodson gathered a variety of docu-

ments that illustrate many facets of the black experience. He noted that:

These materials are valuable for various kinds of studies whether historical, economic, social, psychological, or anthropological. In them are found just the things the investigator needs to understand a large neglected element of this country.<sup>46</sup>

The "Carter G. Woodson Collection of Negro Papers" is divided into six series with the bulk of the papers dating from 1830 to 1927. The series consist of the Whitfield McKinlay Papers, the Benjamin Tucker Tanner Papers, the John T. Clark Papers, the Carter G. Woodson Papers, additional manuscripts, and legal documents including speeches, letters, certificates, deeds, diaries, petitions, broadsides, bills of sale, and newspaper clippings. The collection documents a variety of subjects: Woodson's efforts to establish the association, publish the *Journal*, and collect manuscripts; appointments of Negroes to federal office; race relations, slavery, and racial discrimination; employment opportunities; local and national politics; religion; and economics and business affairs.

Woodson persuaded Whitfield McKinlay, a Washington, D.C., real estate broker, to donate his papers to the collection. McKinlay was active in local politics, and in 1907 Theodore Roosevelt appointed him to the Washington, D.C., housing commission. Booker T. Washington, McKinlay's close friend, relied on him for advice when recommending

<sup>43</sup>Woodson to Jameson, 29 April 1935; and Woodson to Rockefeller, 29 April 1935; Jameson to Woodson, 30 April 1935; and Jameson to Rockefeller, 30 April 1935, all Jameson Papers, LC. The Works Progress Administration had begun the Historical Records Survey to collect and survey local records in county court houses, churches, and town halls, and interviewers were hired to interview former slaves. This project may have deterred Woodson from obtaining grant funds from private sources.

<sup>44</sup>Woodson, "Negro History Week The Fourteenth Year," *JNH* 24 (April 1939): 142.

<sup>45</sup>Accessions List, Woodson Collection, LC.

<sup>46</sup>Woodson, "Report on the Exploratory Effort to Collect Manuscript Materials Among Negroes," 1930, LSRMFR.

blacks for appointments to federal office. His papers include almost two hundred letters written by Washington that document the relationship between Washington and Roosevelt. In his notes on these materials Woodson wrote:

This correspondence of Mr. Washington and Mr. McKinlay covers a critical period of the Negro in politics from about 1900 to 1915 and gives an excellent picture of the influence of the Negro in national politics during that time.<sup>47</sup>

The Benjamin Tucker Tanner papers include a diary from 1851 to 1868, deeds, and certificates. Tanner kept the diary while attending Avery College and Western Theological Seminary. In 1860 he was ordained as a deacon in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and in 1868 he began editing the *Christian Recorder*.

At Woodson's suggestion John T. Clark, executive secretary of the Urban League in Pittsburgh, donated letters to the league from southern blacks who had been seeking employment in Pittsburgh. Barely-literate blacks from Mississippi, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Kansas wrote more than five hundred letters which Clark donated.

Woodson's own papers chronicle his efforts to collect manuscripts, his struggle to raise money for other association activities, his editorship of the *Journal of Negro History*, and his promotion of scholarship in black history.

Among the two additional series of manuscripts included in the collection are family papers, church records, poems, diaries, scrapbooks, speeches, petitions, and materials documenting slavery, including correspondence from blacks and whites. One of the most prominent docu-

ments is a bill of sale for a slave owned by Thomas Jefferson and sold to James Madison when Madison succeeded Jefferson as president in 1809. The donor of this document is believed to be the great-granddaughter of the slave.<sup>48</sup> Letters from black and white abolitionists, including Arthur and Lewis Tappan, Gerritt Smith, Frederick Douglass, and William Grant Still, are part of the collection as are letters from black politicians, P.B.S. Pinchback, Hiram Revels, and Robert Smalls. Twenty-eight poems and two unpublished manuscripts of poet Paul Laurence Dunbar were donated by his widow, Alice Dunbar-Nelson.<sup>49</sup> Twentieth-century experiences of blacks are also documented. Annual reports of black protest and social welfare organizations, and materials donated by authors Emmett J. Scott and Charles S. Johnson on the black migration to Detroit, complement the correspondence in the John T. Clark papers.

Of all Woodson's contributions in promoting the study of Afro-American history, only his impact upon scholarship through the collection of sources can be truly measured. Although Woodson placed his collection in the Library of Congress years earlier, it was not processed and ready for readers' use until 1968. In 1976 the entire collection was microfilmed and thereby made available through the interlibrary loan system.<sup>50</sup> The Manuscript Division's Reference and Reader Services Section began keeping statistics on collection usage in 1968. (Table 1 gives figures on usage for the period 1968-1981.) Compared with other black collections held by the library, the Woodson collection was consulted extensively by scholars from 1968 until 1977

<sup>47</sup>Accessions list, Woodson Collection, LC.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Carter G. Woodson Collection register.

**TABLE 1**  
STATISTICS ON THE USE OF THE CARTER G. WOODSON COLLECTION

	CALLS <sup>a</sup>	UNITS CALLED FOR <sup>b</sup>
1968	53	299
1969	43	176
1970	92	341
1971	168	621
1972	60	203
1973	115	394
1974	82	204
1975	53	180
1976	50	124
1977	27	56
1978	37	152
1979	16	40
1980	19	50
1981	6	14

SOURCE: Data is taken from Reading Room Statistics, Reference and Reader Services Section, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

NOTE: Statistics for 1977-1981 include use of the microfilm through interlibrary loan.

a. Represents each call for the collection, not the number of patrons requesting the collection. (One reader could call for the collection ten times, for example.)

b. Represents the number of boxes or number of microfilm reels requested. (There are fourteen boxes in the collection; on microfilm, the collection comprises ten reels.)

when its use decreased. The year of greatest use was 1971.

Woodson was far ahead of his contemporaries in recognizing the need to collect source materials to document accurately the black experience. Through his activities in promoting the preservation of manuscript materials he educated a

general audience and Afro-American scholars, and he rescued many valuable sources that would have been lost. Without his efforts, present-day scholars would face extraordinary difficulties. The use of the collection by so many scholars constitutes a tribute to Woodson's efforts.