

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert Woodson

PERSON

Woodson, Robert L.

Alternative Names: Robert Woodson;

Life Dates: April 8, 1937-

Place of Birth: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Residence: Silver Spring, MD

Work: Washington, D.C.

Occupations: Social Activist; Community
Development Chief Executive

Biographical Note

Community activist Robert L. "Bob" Woodson has devoted his career to helping low-income people transcend their impoverished conditions. Born in Philadelphia on April 8, 1937, Woodson has used his own rise from poverty to assist him as the founder and president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (NCNE).

Woodson spent his early years in South Philadelphia before his father relocated their family to West Philadelphia in 1946. Shortly thereafter, his father died and Woodson's mother was overwhelmed by the task of being a single parent. Woodson became estranged from his mother, lost his self-confidence and dropped out of high school. At age seventeen, he joined the Air Force and turned his life around. Woodson earned his G.E.D. while in the service, going on to study mathematics at Cheyney University. Woodson then took a job at a juvenile jail and, as he began to identify with the kids in the jail, dedicated himself to helping them. He decided to go into social work, attending the University of Pennsylvania, where he earned an M.S.W.

Woodson, however, grew disenchanted with the bureaucratic restrictions and regulations of liberal anti-poverty programs. After working for the National Urban League, Woodson became a research fellow with the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), where he learned effective techniques for self-empowerment. Because AEI emphasized theory more than direct action, Woodson left in 1981 to create NCNE, a grassroots research and demonstration program emphasizing the importance of empowerment and self-management as effective approaches for ending poverty.

For his contributions, Woodson received a prestigious "Genius Grant" from the MacArthur Foundation in 1990. He sits on the boards of the American Association of Enterprise Zones, the Commission on National and Community Service, and the Commonwealth Foundation. Woodson has also written extensively on issues of poverty and empowerment, including *The Triumphs of Joseph: How Today's Community Healers are Reviving Our Streets and Neighborhoods*. Woodson and his wife, Ellen, live in Silver Spring, Maryland. They have three children.

Related Entries

George Brooke [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Shoemaker Junior High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Overbrook High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Cheyney University of Pennsylvania [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.S. Mathematics

University of Pennsylvania [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Master's of Social Work

National Urban League (NUL) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 19700101 to 19770101]

Program Director

American Enterprise Institute [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 19770101 to 19810101]

Resident Fellow

National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise
[EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 19810102 to ?]

CEO (Founder)

J.W. Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

Department of Housing and Urban Development
[MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Advisory Council

National Advisory Council on Drug Abuse [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Advisory Council

Workforce Innovation Networks [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Advisory Council

Empowerment Network [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

National Co-chair

Commonwealth Foundation [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Advisory Council

American Association of Enterprise Zones [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Board of Directors

National Center on Institutions and Alternatives

[MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Member

Corporation for Enterprise Development [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Member

National Institute for the Study of Minority

Enterprise [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Member

Urban Family Institute [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Advisory Council

Chad School Foundation [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member