

News

Dr. William Couch, Reed's First Black Professor, Dead at 101

Dr. William Couch, Jr., distinguished African American academic, musician and military officer, died at the age of 101 on May 6, 2016 in Weston, Florida. He was a prominent African American who lived an extraordinary life that touched many people around the globe.

He was born one of five children in Morganville, Kentucky on Dec. 7, 1914. His father was an orphan adopted by a White dentist in Indiana shortly before the turn of the 19th century. When Dr. Couch was about three years old, his father lost his business and the family moved to Chicago.

In Chicago, Dr. Couch was a musical prodigy whose conspicuous intellect attracted the attention of Inez Cunningham Stark, a wealthy Chicagoan who discovered the Pulitzer Prize poet (and friend of Dr. Couch), Gwendolyn Brooks. Cunningham created a stir in Dr. Couch's south Chicago neighborhood when she picked him up at his home in her private limousine to introduce him



Prof. Couch early in his career

to her poetry circles.

Dr. Couch became a professional jazz musician in his teens and was befriended by Louis Armstrong, who invited him and his trumpet to play at several leading Chicago jazz clubs. Dr. Couch was studying music at Roosevelt College (now university) but took a break to pursue music professionally when Nat King Cole hired him to play in his band. During his time in the music business he met many famous black musicians and performers including Cab Calloway, Ethel Waters, Dorothy Do-



Prof. Couch with colleagues Cecilia Tenney [French 1921-63], Vera Krivoshein [Russian 1949-72], & Alan Logan [German 1953-60]

negan and his first wife Lillian Cowan, who is perhaps best known for performing on Broadway in Gershwin's Porgy and Bess.

After Dr. Couch and Ms. Cowan were married, he completed his B.A. degree at Roosevelt. Their marriage ended when Dr. Couch joined the Army soon after his 27th birthday on December 7, 1941.

Dr. Couch graduated from Officer Candidate

School and became one of the first black combat infantry officers in the nation's history, eventually commanding a military police battalion on

a White woman. From 1948-51 he taught English at Jackson State Teachers College in Mississippi and soon after, entered the University of Chicago's doctoral program in English literature on a Rockefeller fellowship.

After Dr. Couch received his Ph.D., in 1953 he was appointed to the Literature and Languages department at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, where he became the school's first African-American faculty member. Reed recruited him only because he insisted that the University of Chicago send his resume to other than Black colleges. That resume, evidently, did not identify him as African American, which may explain the surprise of some of his new colleagues when

important contribution to society teaching Black kids in the South than White kids at an elite college in the North.

In fact, Dr. Couch spent the rest of his pioneering 40-year academic career at historically Black colleges and universities, including West Virginia State College, Jackson State College, Bennett College, Southern University, North Carolina Central University, Federal City College (now the University of the District of Columbia), Howard University, and Bowie State. He was a senior administrator at Federal City College where he co-founded the Lorton Prison College Program with his distinguished colleague Dr. Andrew Taylor.

During his academic

“That resume, evidently, did not identify him as African American, which may explain the surprise of some of his new colleagues when he arrived for his first faculty meeting

Iwo Jima.

After the war, Dr Couch lived in New York where he participated in its literary circles and became a best friend of Ralph Ellison.

Dr. Couch was offered a teaching position at a prestigious white northern college but its president rescinded the offer because he suspected Dr. Couch was dating

he arrived for his first faculty meeting. When Dr. Couch left Reed, president Frank Loxely Griffin presented him with his own University of Chicago Ph.D hood.

He was influenced to leave by a representative of Bennett College in Greensboro, N.C. who visited Portland to recruit him and suggested he could make a more


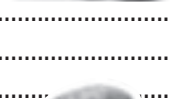

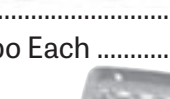

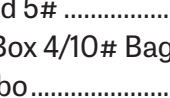
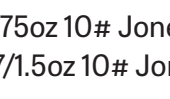
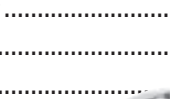

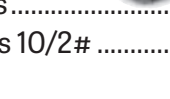





career, Dr. Couch published scholarly articles and an important book, *New Black Playwrights, An Anthology* (Louisiana State University Press, 1968) which he dedicated to W.E.B. DuBois.

He married Ola Criss, D.Ed, who soon began a 20 year career in the State Department.

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CIDER-BRINED PORTERHOUSE PORK CHOPS

INGREDIENTS

- 4 porterhouse (bone-in loin) pork chops, about 3/4-inch thick
- 1/3 cup table salt, OR sea salt
- 1/3 cup plus 1/4 cup maple syrup
- 2 teaspoons dried thyme, OR 2 tablespoon fresh thyme
- 1 1/2 cups chilled hard apple cider, (1 12-oz bottle) OR apple cider
- 1 1/2 cups ice water
- 2 teaspoons red hot pepper sauce, such as Tabasco, divided



RECIPE(S) AND PHOTO(S) COURTESY OF NATIONAL PORK BOARD. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PORK, VISIT PORKBEINSPIRED.COM.

COOKING DIRECTIONS

In a small saucepan, stir 1 cup water with salt, 1/3 cup of maple syrup, and dried thyme over medium heat until salt dissolves and water is hot, but not boiling.

Remove from heat. Add cider, ice water and 1 teaspoon hot sauce and stir until ice dissolves to create brine.

Put chops in a self-sealing plastic bag, pour in brine, and seal bag. Refrigerate 1 to 2 hours, no longer. In small bowl, mix remaining 1/4 cup syrup and 1 teaspoon hot sauce; set aside.

Prepare a grill to medium-high heat (about 450 degrees F.). Remove chops from brine and pat dry with paper towels. Grill chops over direct heat until the internal temperature reaches between 145 degrees F. (medium rare) and 160 degrees F. (medium), on a meat thermometer, 4 to 5 minutes per side. During the last 2 minutes, brush chops on both sides with remaining syrup mixture. Remove chops from the grill and let rest for 3 minutes.

Serves 4

SERVING SUGGESTIONS

If you like, you can substitute dried rosemary or sage for thyme, or combine all three. You can also substitute 3/4 cup each apple juice and dry white wine or apple cider for hard apple cider. A sweet potato salad and fresh succotash would be nice side dishes for these chops.