

Teaching Giants and Other Mentors of the Howard University: College of Medicine Class of 1952

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Abstract: During the two decades following World War II, rapid changes occurred in medicine and in society as a whole in the United States including the establishment of the National Institutes of Health and the civil rights movement. This article profiles the teaching faculty of the Howard University College of Medicine that prepared the Class of 1952 for the decades that were to follow.

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The medical faculty picture taken in the spring of 1952 for the Howard University yearbook included the likenesses of many of the College of Medicine faculty pillars who had some responsibility for the quality of the graduating class. At the time of class enrollment in the fall of 1948, the city of Washington, D.C., the Nation's Capitol, was as segregated as the rest of the solid south and by graduation time fundamental change had not occurred. What had occurred, however, was the opportunity to observe, absorb and reserve for later reflection some of the background, struggles, talents and fortitude that had helped to shape the remarkable careers of those who were the class mentors.

The members of the class of 1952 had their individual struggles gaining admittance to the Medical School, but shared the main reality—that the opportunity to study medicine, in practical terms, was limited to application to either Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee or to Howard University. Only a handful of African Americans were granted admittance to all the other schools across the country combined. Howard and Meharry were the sole minority medical school survivors of the quality control motivated purge of schools of medical education in the wake of the Flexner report of 1910. The mentors of the class of 1952, therefore, had endured their own struggles for admission to training programs and for opportunities to gain training in their unique areas of specialization. Each of their stories is remarkable and a brief description of each will attest to the uniqueness of the collective.

Joseph L. Johnson, M.D., Ph.D., Dean of the College of Medicine, was also Professor and Chairman of Physiology and gave several basic lectures in Physiology during the course of Year I. He was the third African-American Dean of the School of Medicine and received his B.S. from

Penn State '19, his M.D. and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in '31 in Medicine and Physiology. Small of stature, he was courteous, scholarly and kind. He received the Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Chicago in 1952. He was assisted by William "Bill" Hewitt, Caucasian junior faculty member, and later joined by Edward Hawthorne, M.D., recently returned with a Ph.D. in Physiology from the University of Illinois who later succeeded Johnson as department head in 1951.

W. Montague Cobb, M.D., Ph.D. Professor and Chair of Anatomy, gave many lectures of gross anatomy during Year I. His M.D. was from Howard ('29) and his Ph.D. in Anthropology was from Case Western Reserve under T. Wingate Todd. Cobb was the first African American Ph.D. Anthropologist and was an expert in cranio-facial union and a profile writer, eventually having 1100 total publications. Courty and meticulous, he quoted liberally from science, great literature, music (he played the violin late in the day in his office at the rear of the Gross Anatomy Lab), current events and history to the delight of most and the frustration – annoyance of some. A political activist, he was a leader simultaneously in the local chapter and a national officer of the National Medical Association (predominantly African American) and the NAACP (national president '76–82). He was outspoken against the fact that he and other faculty members could not join the local chapter of the A.M.A. (which honored the local segregation customs) as well as the social and economic improprieties of the time. (The N.M.A. endorsed President Truman's National Health Insurance Plan influenced by Cobb).

Roscoe (Shorty) McKinney Ph.D., received his doctorate in Anatomy from the University of Chicago. He had previously served as Anatomy Department head and Vice Dean of the College of Medicine, and was currently professor of Anatomy and head of Microanatomy. A skilled lecturer and meticulous observer, Dr. McKinney was particularly adept at relating anatomy and micro-anatomy to organ function and physiology. He gave long hours to individual student needs. 'The eyes are the windows of the soul' was a favorite quotation as he dissected the structure of the orbit.

Ruth Lloyd, Ph.D., received her advanced degree in Anatomy from Western Reserve '41. Fair of skin and dark of hair, she gave little time to vanity as she reigned as the titular queen of the gross anatomy laboratory. What Grey's Anatomy laid out in pictures and Dr. Cobb described in his multicolored chalk layer by layer revelations in the lecture hall, Ruth Lloyd deftly revealed on the dissecting table with judicious use of scapular and retractor. She was just as rhythmic in her forays through a region of anatomy to reveal the hidden ligament or nerve as 'Monty' Cobb was with his violin.

Roscoe Wharton 'Mose' Young, M.D. Howard U ('30), Ph.D., University of Michigan ('34) was head of Neuro-anatomy and took great delight in revealing his comprehensive knowledge of the nervous system and his lectures were filled with detailed revelations of structure and function. Clearly competitive with his Department Chief, Doctor Cobb, he also delighted in the turn of phrase and apt quotation from philosophy. "Locate the cells and trace the fibers" was his mantra. He was dedicated to finding the functional and anatomical key to baldness and the possessor of a receding hairline. To some students he was god-like.

Ruth [Mother] Moore, head of Bacteriology, received her B.S., M.S. and Ph.D. from Ohio State University ('33). The first black female Ph.D. in Bacteriology, her matronly appearance was both reassuring and the cover for a stern task master. She was a commanding lecturer and left little to the imagination as to what one was required to know, understand and regurgitate at examination time. A favorite with successive classes, she was equally at home in the classroom and the laboratory.

Robert S. Jason, M.D., Howard ('28) Ph.D., (U of Chicago '32) Professor of Pathology, was the first African American to earn a Ph.D. in Pathology. Born in Puerto Rico, tall with a full head of dark but graying hair, he had a commanding appearance, exuded self-confidence, and was automatically rewarded with the respect of student and faculty. He spoke with the clipped phrasing of Caribbean cadence. He lectured with clarity, at once reserved and accessible. His knowledge of pathology was global. He was slated to become the next Dean of the College of Medicine. He was Consultant to NIH, AID, and other governmental agencies.

Lloyd H. (Blondie) Newman, Ph.D., Head of Biochemistry, received his M.D. ('23) and Ph.D. from Howard U ('30) and was well versed in intermediate metabolism. Newman's elaborate facial expressions kept attention focused upon him during his lectures which introduced subject after subject requiring individuals to scour the textbooks to keep up. Newman was assisted by one of the few Caucasian faculty members (Dr. Friedberg)

who hailed from eastern Europe, and added his own unique manner of speaking (and accent) to the biochemical mix. Doctor Lawrence Marshall, Ph.D., reserved and precise, was the third member of the Department.

Pharmacology was headed by Dr. Arnold H. Maloney who received his Ph.D. from the U of Wisconsin ('31) and was well respected for discovering the antidote for barbiturate poisoning and was sometimes referred to as 'old picrotoxin.' His able second-in-command was Walter Booker, a Morehouse College graduate who received his M.S. from the U of Iowa ('32) and his Ph.D. from the U of Chicago ('32). He was embarking on a very active period of research related to autonomic receptors and mechanisms of hypertension and would later collaborate with J. B. Johnson and Edward Hawthorne, in various aspects of control of the circulation, and succeed Dr. Maloney as Chairman.

A close associate of Dr. Booker was James R. Tureman, Ph.D., who assisted in teaching duties but whose main activity was to co-direct the very active research laboratory that was a major focus of Dr. Booker, heavily tilted toward unraveling the mechanisms of hypertension and the specific influence of autonomic receptors, catecholamines and pharmacologic agents.

Paul B. Cornelly M.D., Ph.D., Chair of Public Health, received his M.D. from the French West Indies in 1931 and his doctorate in Public Health from the University of Michigan (34), after internship at Lincoln Hospital in Durham, NC. He already had a reputation outside of Howard University as a very well-qualified public health expert in addition to being Medical Director of Freedmen's Hospital. His lectures were well informed and delivered in a very professional manner, while he encouraged questions. He was outspoken in favor of the BCG for tuberculosis control which was offered to the class of '52 in the first two years of matriculation.

B. Hildrus Poindexter, M.D., received his M.D. from Howard ('29) and Ph.D. ('32) and M.P.H. ('37) from Columbia University where he also served an internship and residency. After joining the Howard faculty, he served with distinction in the Public Health Service for several years before rejoining the faculty in Public Health. He rarely lectured but would meet with student groups and individuals regularly. He had previously been chair of Public Health at Howard.

Harold Whitted, M.D., Howard ('36), interned at Freedmen's Hospital before serving in public health programs in Alabama and Louisiana and obtained a M.P.H. at Harvard ('41) before returning to Howard as a member of the Department of Public Health. He was an effective lecturer.

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