Samuel Lee Kountz Jr, M.D., 1930-1981

Dr. Kountz was born in Lexa, Arkansas in 1930. He was the first African American to be admitted to the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. In 1961, along with Dr. Roy Cohn, he performed the first successful kidney transplantation between individuals who weren’t identical twins at the Stanford Medical Center. He made important contributions to the understanding of organ rejection and the practice of using methylprednisolone to prevent it.

In 1967, he left Stanford to become chief of the Kidney Transplant Service at the University of California, San Francisco, where he pioneered innovations in organ preservation. Later on, as chair of surgery at Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, he transformed the inner city hospital into a leading transplantation center, and actively fought for underserved populations’ access to treatment of end stage renal disease.
Jane Cooke Wright, M.D., 1919-2013
Born in 1919 to a family with a strong history of fighting racial bias for medical education, Jane C. Wright graduated New York Medical College in 1945. She joined her father at the Cancer Research Foundation at Harlem hospital, where they demonstrated how chemotherapy, with nitrogen-mustard agents or more notoriously folic acid antagonists, could yield life changing results for cancer treatment. Methotrexate, an antifolate, is still today one of the main chemotherapy drugs. Dr. Wright pioneered research in combinatorial and personalized drug treatments for individual patients.

In 1964, the only woman among seven physicians, she participated in founding the American Society of Clinical Oncology. Dr. Wright became in 1971 the first woman elected president of the New York Cancer Society. She passed away in 2013, leaving behind a legacy that revolutionized cancer research and treatment.
Harold Amos, M.D., Ph.D., 1918-2003

Harold Amos was a world renowned microbiologist and cancer immunologist. A native of Pennsauken, New Jersey, he graduated from Springfield College with a baccalaureate in 1941. In the fall of 1946, he enrolled in the biological sciences graduate program at Harvard Medical School, earning an MA in 1947 and graduated with a PhD from Harvard Medical School in 1952.

Dr. Amos joined the Harvard Medical School faculty in 1954. He was the first African-American department chair at Harvard Medical School. He was a presidential advisor to Richard Nixon, and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Institute of Medicine, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Dr. Amos was awarded the National Academy of Sciences' Public Welfare Medal in 1995 and the Harvard Centennial Medal in 2000.

Dr. Amos made high profile discoveries in his discipline including finding the 5-methylcytosine in E. coli RNA and using bacterial RNA to program the synthesis of higher cell proteins.
James Durham, 1762-1802

James Durham is widely acknowledged as the first African American physician in the United States. Durham was born into slavery, and by working as a nurse, bought his freedom in 1786. He was the first to characterize Diphtheria, laying the foundation for later vaccine work.

As of May 1789, Dr. Durham practiced in New Orleans and enjoyed prosperity. Some of his patients were among the city’s prominent residents and he treated a variety of illnesses. When outbreaks of yellow fever occurred in the late eighteenth century, he worked day and night attending to the stricken. In 1789, he wrote a description of an outbreak of putrid sore throat (Diphtheria) and the method he used to treat it. He sent a copy of the description to Benjamin Rush who read it before the College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

"I conversed with him on medicine and surgery and found him learned. I thought I could give him information concerning the treatment of disease, but I learned more from him than he could expect from me." -- Dr. Benjamin Rush, medical pioneer and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, on James Durham

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Percy Lavon Julian, Ph.D., 1899-1975

Percy Lavon Julian was born in Montgomery, Alabama. He earned his bachelor’s degree at DePauw University, and wanted to obtain his doctorate in chemistry, but learned it would be difficult for an African-American to do so. Instead he obtained a position as a chemistry instructor at Fisk University. In 1923, he received an Austin Fellowship in Chemistry, which allowed him to attend Harvard University to obtain his M.S. In 1929, while an instructor at Howard University, Julian received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship to continue his graduate work at the University of Vienna, where he earned his Ph.D. in 1931.

Dr. Julian was lauded for his synthesis of cortisone, which was used in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. He also synthesized physostigmine for treatment of glaucoma. He founded his own research firm in 1953, Julian Laboratories, which he sold in 1961 for $2.3 million (equivalent to $19 million today). In 1964, Julian founded Julian Associates and Julian Research Institute, which he managed for the rest of his life.
Georgia M. Dunston, Ph.D.

Dr. Dunston was born in Norfolk, Virginia in 1944. She earned her M.S. degree in Biology at Tuskegee University and her PhD in Human Genetics at the University of Michigan, Ann Harbor in 1972. In 1994, she became the associate director of the Division of Basic Sciences at Howard University Cancer Center. In 2001, in partnership with Howard University and the NIH Office of Research on Minority Health, she founded and directed the National Human Genome Center.

In the 1990’s Dr. Dunston joined the Visiting Investigator’s Program at the National Human Genome Research Institute. There she collaborated with Dr. Francis Collins, leader of the Human Genome Project, and published work detailing the genetics of type 2 diabetes in West Africa. As a full professor at Howard University, Dr. Dunston’s research focuses on the genetics of diseases common in African Americans and other African Diaspora populations.

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Carolyn B. Brooks, Ph.D.

Dr. Brooks was born in Richmond, Virginia in 1946. She received her Ph.D. from Ohio State University in 1977, studying how T-cells destroy microbes. In 1981, Dr. Brooks accepted a research and mentorship position at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES). In 1994, she became the Dean of the School of Agriculture and Natural Sciences at UMES. In 1997, she became the Executive Director to the Present and Chief of Staff of UMES. Dr. Brooks’ research focuses on agricultural productivity, including, increasing plant resistance to predators.

In 1984-85, Dr. Brooks traveled to Togo and Senegal in West Africa where she researched methods to increase the productivity of the African groundnut. Her findings eventually led to the increased productivity of many food crops in West Africa. Since July 2007, Dr. Books has served as the executive director of the Association of 1890 Research Directors (ARD). The ARD is composed of the research administrators in the food and agricultural sciences at 18 historically black, land-grant universities.
Alain LeRoy Locke, Ph.D., 1885-1954

Alain LeRoy Locke, PhD was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1885. A graduate of Harvard University, where he studied English and philosophy, Dr. Locke became the first African-American Rhodes Scholar in 1907. He studied literature, philosophy, Greek, and Latin at Hertford College.

Dr. Locke received an assistant professorship at Howard University in 1912, and returned to Harvard in 1916 to complete his PhD in philosophy. In 1918, he became the chair of the Department of Philosophy at Howard University. Dr. Locke is recognized as the philosophical architect and “Dean” of the Harlem Renaissance. His philosophical writings heralded the importance of black equality and is credited for bringing the black community together in a spirit of solidarity. He passed away in 1954, and is recognized as one of the most influential African Americans of all time.
Yolonda Y. Wilson, Ph.D.

Dr. Yolonda Y. Wilson is currently an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Howard University. She completed her Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Wilson specializes in the intersection of bioethics with social/political philosophy, feminist philosophy, and race.

Dr. Wilson centers her work around “developing an account of justice that articulates specific requirements for racial justice in health care at the end of life.” Dr. Wilson is also actively engaged in bringing diverse voices to the fields of bioethics and philosophy. She regularly contributes to social commentary through interviews and blog posts on topics such as R. Kelly and sexual assault, Jahi McMath and brain death, and Janelle Monae and pansexuality. Dr. Wilson’s prolific work will continue to influence bioethics and philosophy for decades to come.
Marcia Y. Riggs, MDIV, Ph.D.

Dr. Riggs is currently the J. Erskine Love Professor of Christian Ethics and Director of the Master of Theology Program at Columbia Theological Seminary. She holds a Master of Divinity from Yale Divinity School, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Religion (Ethics) from Vanderbilt University.

Dr. Riggs developed a novel ethical theory and practice – Religious Ethical Mediation. This theory and practice focuses on enabling leaders to address “religion, conflict, and violence in a transformative manner.” Dr. Riggs has written numerous books and publications, her most notable being, Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church. Dr. Riggs’ work has been lauded as influential in understanding the Black Church, and in 2017 she won the prestigious Henry Luce III Fellowship in Theology. We are certain her work will continue to influence the work of scholars and leaders for generations to come.
Keisha Ray, Ph.D.

Keisha Ray is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Texas State University. Dr. Ray trained in philosophy at the University of Utah and has held numerous postdoctoral fellowships in ethics.

Dr. Ray’s work focuses on the “ethical and socially just uses of biotechnology to enhance our bodies, minds, morals, and emotions to live the kind of lives that we deem desirable.”. Her work grapples with if advanced technology will be beneficial to socially disadvantaged populations and our moral obligation to provide access to those technologies. Furthermore, Dr. Ray also studies how racial bias in medicine contributes to the health care received by African American patients. Dr. Ray regularly contributes to the American Journal of Bioethics’ online blog on an array of topics, found at bioethics.net.
Patrick Smith, Ph.D.

Patrick Smith is currently Associate Research Professor of Theological Ethics and Bioethics and Senior Fellow at the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University. Dr. Smith earned his MA and Ph.D. in Philosophy from Wayne State University. He is also associate faculty with the Trent Center for Bioethics, Humanities, and History of Medicine at Duke University School of Medicine. Before going to Duke, Dr. Smith was a lecturer at Harvard Medical School through the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine and core faculty for the Master of Bioethics degree program.

Dr. Smith has received numerous awards for his outstanding work in bioethics and sits on the Board of Directors for the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities. Dr. Smith has worked on projects involving moral philosophy, theological bioethics, end-of-life medical ethics, and hospice palliative care. He currently centers his work around elucidating a social ethic that stems from Black Church experiences.

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