

Charles Drew

June 3, 1904 – April 1, 1950

Collaboration



“There is absolutely no scientific basis to indicate any difference in human blood from race to race.” Charles Drew

In 1940, Charles Drew was the first African American to earn a doctorate from *Columbia University*. His dissertation entitled, *Banked Blood: A Study in Blood Preservation*, was the first hint of his remarkable contributions to come. Dr. Drew is best known for his implementation of the standards by which blood and plasma are collected, stored and shipped. As a result of his collaborative work with Dr. John Scudder, mobile blood units were set up to collect blood to meet a growing demand. After WWII, Britain needed blood and plasma for its wounded, an effort which had not been scaled until this time. Dr. Drew and Dr. Scudder together collected more than 14,000 donor blood accounting for 5,000 litres of plasma, to help Britain meet its demand in the *Blood for Britain* project. Later, this would become the basis for blood and plasma collection processes in the United States and globally.

The policy prohibiting collection or requiring segregation of blood from people of African descent was without merit. Dr. Drew documented and professed that there was no scientific basis for the policy. However, it would take many years before that practice was eradicated.

Charles Drew was the oldest of five children born in Washington, D.C., on June 3, 1904. The family moved to Arlington, Virginia, in 1920, providing a middle-class upbringing that maintained

a focus on education, church participation, and civic duties. At the age of 12, Drew became a paper boy. He recognized the value of the **super skill of collaboration** early, as he led six other boys working for him, so that they could cover a wider area distributing newspapers.

After high school graduation, he was able to receive an athletic scholarship to *Amherst College* in Massachusetts. He was recognized for his track and well as football athletic capability. He did not have a vision for the medical profession until his oldest sister died from illness. His Biology class at *Amherst College* helped him identify the specific area of interest to pursue within the practice of medicine.

This Biology class was a catalyst that led to Drew's to follow medicine and blood bank research. Although Drew initially wanted to become a resident at a renowned hospital like *Mayo Clinic*, many patients refused to be treated by a minority doctor. He joined the faculty at *Howard University* college of medicine as a pathology instructor. He progressed to the role of chief surgical resident and Freedmen's Hospital.

Dr. Charles Drew died suddenly in an automobile accident in 1950 at the young age of 46, leaving a legacy of collaboration that has resulted in what is now the Red Cross.

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