

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Legacy of Charles R. Drew

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Charles R. Drew (1904-1950) was an African American doctor, surgeon, medical researcher, and professor. This article is about Drew's legacy; a legacy is the gift that a person gives to future generations through his or her work and accomplishments. Drew's medical breakthroughs helped save thousands of lives among the Allied forces of World War II. As you read, take note of the challenges and discrimination that Drew faced before and after he became a doctor.

[1] Charles R. Drew might have grown up to be an athlete and not a doctor. In elementary school, he won several medals for swimming and played basketball, football, as well as several other sports. After graduating from Dunbar High School, in Washington, D.C., Drew attended Amherst College in Massachusetts on a sports scholarship. At Amherst, Drew distinguished¹ himself on the college track and football teams.

Despite all of his athletic achievements, Drew held onto one dream. He wanted to become a doctor. This was not an easy dream to achieve at the time of his graduation from Amherst College in 1926. At that time, many of the medical schools in the United States barred² African American students from entering their programs and Drew could not afford the high costs that came with attending classes. Medical school can be expensive!

Drew would not let any of this deter³ him. He worked as a biology instructor and coach at Morgan College in Baltimore, Maryland for two years before applying to medical school and enrolling at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Drew was a top student at McGill, graduating second in his class with degrees as both a Doctor of Medicine and Master of Surgery. It was during his residencies⁴ in Canada where Drew, alongside Dr. John Beattie, began to examine the problems regarding blood transfusions⁵ and the storage of blood. Blood transfusions are medical procedures that take place when people donate blood to help others who might have lost blood due to various medical conditions or injuries. Doctors around the world knew how important it was to be able to provide blood to those in need, but at the time it was difficult to store and preserve⁶ blood for long periods of time.



"Portrait of Charles Drew" by The Moorland-Spangarn Research Center is in the public domain.

1. **Distinguish (verb):** to make oneself prominent and worthy of respect through one's achievements
2. **Bar (verb):** to prohibit someone from doing something
3. **Deter (verb):** to discourage someone from doing something
4. Residencies are periods of specialized medical training that take place in a hospital.
5. Transfusion is the medical procedure of transferring donated blood into the bloodstream of another person.

Drew eventually returned to the United States and Washington, D.C. where he became an instructor at Howard University's medical school in 1935. The following year he became a resident⁷ surgeon at Freedmen's Hospital. He had realized his dream of becoming a doctor but he took on a new challenge — how could blood be successfully stored and preserved so that it might help the sick and injured? In 1938, Drew travelled to New York to study at Columbia University and train at Presbyterian Hospital. It was during his time there and his work with another doctor, Dr. John Scudder, that the two men finally discovered how they might better preserve blood for transfusions.

- [5] While blood itself was difficult to preserve, Drew discovered that blood plasma⁸ — the blood without its cells — could last for much longer than whole blood. This meant it could be stored for longer periods of time. Drew left Columbia University having made significant contributions to medical science and having become the first African American to earn a doctorate degree in medicine from the school.

Because of his work and discoveries, Charles Drew was asked to organize the collection, storage and distribution of blood plasma during the World War II. This meant that donated blood could be shipped overseas to Europe where many of the soldiers injured in the war could be treated. Drew's technique saved many lives.

In 1941, Drew also worked with the American Red Cross⁹ to develop “blood banks” for the U.S. military. These blood banks were centers where donated blood could be stored and preserved for later use in transfusions. However, the military refused to accept blood donations from African Americans. The military would then later allow only African American blood donations to be used on African American soldiers. Drew soon resigned from this position with the American Red Cross because of this practice of discrimination. He was upset at what he saw as racist views and stated that there was no scientific basis for the racial segregation of blood.

Drew returned to Washington, D.C. and to Howard University. That same year, he became the Chief Surgeon at Freedman's Hospital. Over the next nine years Drew remained active and highly praised within the medical profession. He won a number of awards for his achievements.

Sadly, on April 1, 1950, while Drew and three other physicians were travelling to an annual free clinic in Tuskegee, Alabama, the car that Drew was driving crashed near Burlington, North Carolina. The other passengers survived but Drew later died in hospital from his injuries. He left behind a wife and four children. He was 45 years old. It was the same year that the American Red Cross announced it would no longer segregate blood donations.

- [10] Drew's legacy lives on today. He has received numerous posthumous¹⁰ awards and was featured in the United States Postal Service's Great American Stamp Series in 1981. His name appears on educational institutions and medical centers across the United States and there is a memorial bridge named after him in his hometown of Washington, D.C.

6. to keep something in its original state

7. A resident is a medical graduate with special training in a particular area, like brain surgery, who works under supervision in a hospital.

8. Plasma is the colorless fluid part of blood from which red or white cells have been removed.

9. an organization that provides emergency assistance, disaster relief, and education in the United States

10. occurring after someone's death

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following statements best describes the central idea of the text? [RI.2]
 - A. Charles Drew did not plan on becoming a doctor in the beginning, but rather an athlete because of his widespread success in sports.
 - B. Charles Drew experienced several challenges as he worked towards his dream, but once he became a doctor he faced fewer obstacles and discrimination.
 - C. Charles Drew dreamed of being a doctor, but his experiences with discrimination and segregation forced him to leave the profession.
 - D. Charles Drew encountered discrimination throughout his life and career as a doctor, but he succeeded despite these challenges.

2. PART B: Which section from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "Charles R. Drew might have grown up to be an athlete and not a doctor. In elementary school, he won several medals for swimming and played basketball, football as well as several other sports." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "Drew would not let any of this deter him. He worked as a biology instructor and coach at Morgan College in Baltimore, Maryland for two years before applying to medical school and enrolling at McGill University in Montreal, Canada." (Paragraph 3)
 - C. "He had realized his dream of becoming a doctor but he took on a new challenge — how could blood be successfully stored and preserved so that it might help the sick and injured?" (Paragraph 4)
 - D. "Drew soon resigned from this position with the American Red Cross because of this practice of discrimination." (Paragraph 7)

3. What does the text mean by "racial segregation of blood" in paragraph 7? [RI.4]
 - A. Blood donations were only ever accepted from white donors.
 - B. Blood transfusions were given to white people over African Americans.
 - C. Research conducted on blood was separated based on the race of the donor.
 - D. Blood donations and transfusions were separated and given on the basis of race.

4. PART B: Which detail from paragraph 7 best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "Drew also worked with the American Red Cross to develop 'blood banks' for the U.S."
 - B. "These blood banks were centers where donated blood could be stored and preserved for later use in transfusions."
 - C. "The military would then later allow only African American blood donations to be used on African American soldiers."
 - D. "Drew soon resigned from this position with the American Red Cross because of this practice of discrimination"

5. How do paragraphs 5-6 contribute to the development of ideas about Drew's legacy? [RI.5]

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. What legacy did Drew leave behind? What kind of legacy do you want to leave behind?
2. In the context of the text, what are the effects of prejudice? How was Drew negatively impacted by prejudice? How would the world have been different if Drew had been kept from becoming a doctor because of the color of his skin? What could have been the impact if blood remained segregated?
3. In the context of the text, how do people overcome adversity? Why was Drew able to succeed in his field despite the obstacles he encountered? What qualities did he possess that made this possible?