

"To Relieve the Suffering of Others"

Histories of Black Women in Medicine

*UF College of Medicine
Disparities in Medicine Lecture Series*

Stephanie Y. Evans, Ph.D.

www.ProfessorEvans.com

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C1-15



*A Life of Service Despite being
"The Last of the Last"*

Dorothy Ferebee, M.D.

*Tufts University School of Medicine,
Class of 1924*

"It was not easy. The medical school had five women out of 137 students. We women were always the last to get assignments in amphitheatres and clinics. **And I? I was the last of the last because not only was I a woman, but a Negro too.**"

Dr. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee

1898 (Norfolk, VA) – **1980** (Washington, D.C.)

- ◆ From family of 8 lawyers--but no physicians
- ◆ Simmons College (Boston, MA); 1924 Tufts University School of Medicine (Medford, MA), Obstetrics and Gynecology
- ◆ 1925 Howard University Medical School faculty
- ◆ 1928 Married Claude Ferebee (Dentist)
- ◆ 1939-1941 Basileus, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated
- ◆ 1949-1953 President, National Council of Negro Women
- ◆ 1949-1968 Director, Howard Health Services
- ◆ International conferences in Germany (US Department of Labor), Africa (Kennedy's Food for Peace), and Geneva, Switzerland (World Health Assembly)

Mississippi Health Project

- ◆ “In 1934 the philanthropic sorority **Alpha Kappa Alpha** ...sponsored the Mississippi Health Project **to bring primary medical care to the rural black population** across the state of Mississippi, who struggled to receive even the most basic health care.”
- ◆ “In the face of hostile, intimidating, and suspicious white plantation owners, project participants launched **smallpox and diphtheria immunization programs** in ramshackle communities of black sharecroppers. They also tackled widespread **malnutrition and venereal disease.**”

National Library of Medicine (Dr. Ferebee biography)

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated ***"Service to All Mankind"***



"Alpha Kappa Alpha financed, designed, and implemented the project...every summer Between 1934-1942"

**15,000 people served
in the Mississippi Delta**



AKA *Ivy Leaf* (1958)
National Library of Medicine

Research Question:

What is the story of Black women in medicine?

- ◆ Question Type
 - Question: Basic Knowledge
 - Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History (University Press of Florida, Feb. 2007)
- ◆ “Disparities in Medicine” vs. *parallel histories*
 - Franklin's assessment of Black history
 - Presence, Contributions, Oppression, Resistance
 - Standpoint social contract: **Black Women's negotiations**
 - Rousseau + Pateman + Mills = Evans



My Approach

- Past & Present
- Medical School & Professional Practice
- Quantitative (numbers) & Qualitative (narratives)
- Context:
 - ◆ Educational Comparisons
 - ◆ National, State, and UF
 - ◆ Types of Medicine
 - ◆ Social Context
 - ◆ Relevance & Implications

Historical Findings

Medical School

Available Resources:

- ◆ **UF Lecture Series:** Health Science Center Library "Changing the Face of Medicine" (Dr. Grier featured on Flyer) & **History of Medicine** Lecture Series
- ◆ **National Library of Medicine**
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/changingthefaceofmedicine/exhibition/sights_racial.html

Click "Physicians," select race: **60 Black Women highlighted**

- 17 D.C.
- 9 New York
- 5 Pennsylvania
- 5 Georgia
- 0 Florida

Early Black Women Medical School Graduates

- ◆ 1864 Dr. Rebecca Lee Crumpler, New England Female Medical College (**Boston**)
- ◆ 1867 Dr. Rebecca C. Cole, Woman's Medical College (**Pennsylvania**)
- ◆ ** 1870 Dr. Susan Smith McKinney Steward **New York** Medical College for Women
- ◆ 1897 Dr. Eliza A. Grier (1890-1897) Woman's Medical College (**Pennsylvania**)

BOOK OF MEDICAL DISCOURSES (1883)

"I early conceived a liking for, and sought every opportunity to relieve the suffering of others."

Dr. Lee Crumpler
1831-1895



Dr. Cole
1846 – 1922



Dr. Steward
1846?-1918



Dr. Grier
???? - 1902

Medical Schools (Numbers) cont.

- ◆ **Women's Medical Colleges**: 19 before 1900 but 11 closed
Women's Medical College (Pennsylvania, chartered 1850)
12 Black women grads by 1850
- ◆ **African American medical schools**: originally 4; by 1914 2
 - Leonard (North Carolina) & Flint (New Orleans)**Howard University** (Washington, D.C., chartered 1868)
552 physician grads (25 women) by 1900
Meharry Medical College (Tennessee, chartered 1876)
1893: first Black women grads
39 women grads by 1920

Practicing Physicians (Numbers)

◆ Some Black women M.D.s before 1900

Dr. Cole (1867)

Dr. Anderson (1878)

Dr. Evans (1897)

Dr. Jones (1888)

Dr. Johnson (1891)

Dr. McKane (1894)

Dr. Brown (1894)

Black women M.D.s

1890: 115

1920: 65

White women M.D.s

1860: 200

1880: 2,423

1900: 7,000

Black men M.D.s

1890: 909

1920: 3,885

Historic Findings (Narratives)

Racism (Whites), Sexism (Black Men) & Distrust (Patients)

- ◆ Dr. Ferebee: “Last of the last”
- ◆ Dr. Bessie Delany (1923, D.D.S Columbia) Having Our Say
- ◆ Dr. May Chin (1926, First woman intern at Harlem Hospital)

On the 3 types of men she encountered: “The first group didn’t believe that a woman should be a doctor, so they pretended that I did not exist. The second group actively discouraged patients from coming to me: ‘What can she do for you that a man cannot do better?’ The third group said they were helping me by sending me on their night calls after midnight” (Hine, 1926)

Reaction from patient: Crying because she felt denied “the best”



Dr. Ferebee's Story in Educational Context

1. **Birth status**

2. **Marriage choice**

3. **Clubwomen**

NACW (1896) & NCNW (1935)

4. **Sororities**

Alpha Kappa Alpha (1908)

Delta Sigma Theta (1913)

Zeta Phi Beta (1920)

Sigma Gamma Rho (1922)

5. **Medical faculty** earlier than university (1960s) or law (1970s)

6. **Administrative positions**

7. **International travel**

8. **Regional attainment and location**

Black Women's Educational History

College Degree Attainment

- ◆ **1850** Diploma "Ladies Course" (Oberlin), Sessions
- ◆ **1862** Bachelor's Degree (B.A.), Patterson
- ◆ **1884** Master's Degree (Oberlin), Cooper & Terrell
- ◆ **1899** Phi Beta Kappa (Middlebury), Anderson
(KEY REPORTER article)
- ◆ **1921** Three Ph.D.s: English, Radcliffe (Dykes); German, U Chicago (Simpson); Economics, U Pennsylvania (Alexander, L.D.)
- ◆ **1925** International Ph.D. (Sorbonne), Cooper

Faculty and Administration (segregated)

- ◆ **1859** (Wilberforce), Early
- ◆ **1880s** (Lincoln, Missouri), Yates
- ◆ **1900s** (Bethune-Cookman), Bethune

M.D.s Today by Race and Gender

◆ Professional Degrees Earned (3 mil by 2005)

- White Male: 1,641,000 (56%)
- White Female: 861,000 (29%)
- Black Male: 77,000 (.026%)
- **Black Female: 71,000 (.024%)**

◆ Employed Physicians and Surgeons (2000)

	Black women	Total number	Percentage
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Source: U.S. Census (Black population: FL 15.7%; US 12.8%)

Present Picture

In Practice and Profession

- ◆ **1950:** Dr. Helen Dickens was the first African American woman admitted to the American College of Surgeons
- ◆ **1970** 1,051 Black women M.D.s
- ◆ **1985:** Dr. Edith Irby Jones **National Medical Association**
- ◆ **1991:** Rosalyn Epps First Black woman president of **American Medical Woman's Association**
- ◆ **Black women Physicians (2000)**

		Total	Percentage
■ Florida	600	40,500	(.015%)
■ Alachua County	25	1,635	(.015%)

Present Picture

2006 Graduate Enrollment (UF & FSUS)

<i>Black Women</i>	UF	FSUS
Law	60	217
Business	24	356
Engineering	22	75
Medicine	167	868

Present Picture

2006 Medical College Enrollment (UF & FSUS)

<i>Black Women Doctorates</i>	UF	FSUS
Dentistry	8	8
M.D.	19	73
Nursing	3	15
RN Training	10	179
Pharmacy	101	691
Pub. Health (Family Counseling)	4	13
Pub. Health (Physical Therapy)	2	58
Veterinary	10	10

Present Picture (Narratives)

◆ UF Medical School's 50th Anniversary

- "1960 First medical school class graduates- first Asian, Latinos, and women are in the graduating class."
- "1970 UF-COM graduates first African American physicians, Dr. Earl Cotman and Dr. Reuben Brigety."

Invisibility of Black women's intersection within narrative

All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave (Smith & Hull 1984)

◆ In Practice

- "Micro-minority": 25 Black women general surgeons nationally in 1999.

Forged by the Knife: The Experience of Surgical Residency from the Perspective of a Woman of Color (Dawson 1999)

So What?

- ◆ Experience impacts education.
(Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 1938)
- ◆ Cultural identity impacts educational experience AND intellectual production.
(Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower*, 2007)
- ◆ Diversity = Excellence NOT “lower standards”
 - Need to address White entitlement: “I’ve worked hard to get where I am” and false assumptions of minority inferiority
 - Diversity offers competitive business edge and stimulating intellectual (albeit uncomfortable) collaboration
 - ◆ Luke Visconti’s Diversity Web, “Ask the White Guy”
 - ◆ But also “Ask the Black Women”

BIRTHING A SLAVE

Motherhood and Medicine
in the Antebellum South



MARIE JENKINS SCHWARTZ

BIRTHING A SLAVE:

Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South

Marie Jenkins Swartz
Harvard U Press (2006)

- Black women & White medicine: 1808 end of slave trade = **BREEDING**
- False claims of Black and women's intellectual inferiority Versus the history of being **KEPT BEHIND**

Now What?

Consider Parallel Histories of Black Women's Perspectives of Medicine

- ◆ Contribution and Creative Resistance:
African Women's Intellectual Production
 - Wangari Maathai (Environmental Biology, Kenya)
The Greenbelt Movement (2003)
 - Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (International Politics, Liberia)
Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building (2002)

***Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954:
An Intellectual History***

(University Press of Florida, February 1, 2007)

Black women's intellectual legacy



Love
Balance
Civil Rights
Human Rights
Humility
Sustainability



Dr. Evans (Ph.D. not M.D.)

- ◆ *Web page*

plaza.ufl.edu/drevans

- ◆ *UF spotlight*

<http://www.ufl.edu/spotlight/evans.html>

- ◆ *Email*

drevans@ufl.edu