

Remarkable Healers on the Pacific Coast: A History of San Diego's Black Medical Community

by Robert Fikes, Jr.

In August 2009, a front-page article in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* announcing the region's history-making paired-donor kidney transplants featured a color photo of Dr. Marquis E. Hart, a former director of the University of California San Diego's Abdominal Transplant Program who, along with another transplant physician, pulled off the feat.¹ That same month Dr. Wilma



Dr. Wilma J. Wooten is Board certified in family medicine with a master's degree in public health. She has been San Diego County Public Health Officer since 2007. Internet photo.

Wooten, San Diego County's Public Health Officer serving 3.1 million residents and often seen on local television, used the media to warn residents to take precautions to prevent the spread of swine flu virus, to inform them of a substantial increase in cases of

whooping cough, and to report a second case of West Nile virus. The rise to prominence of Hart and Wooten, among other notable African-American doctors in the area, is the most recent example of extraordinary achievements against the odds stretching back more than a century with the arrival of the county's first black doctor in 1899.



Dr. Marquis E. Hart performed organ transplants in children and adults in UCSD's Abdominal Transplant Program. Internet photo.

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The Pioneers

Born in Indiana, William A. Burney (1846-1912) was a Civil War veteran who fought in the Union Army's Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Colored Volunteers.² He completed his medical training at the Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn, New York, in 1877 and settled in New Albany, Indiana, where for a while he was the sole black doctor. Respected by the white medical community, Burney served on the Floyd County Board of Health and was briefly president *pro tempore* of the county's medical society. He assisted in establishing New Albany's black newspaper, *The Weekly Review*, in 1882.³ At the pinnacle of his career, in 1888, Burney teamed up with another black physician and their associate just across the Ohio River and co-founded the



Louisville National Medical College, circa 1889. Photo Source: Journal of the National Medical Association, September 1952, page 404.

Louisville National Medical College, one of the nation's fourteen medical schools in the late 1800s specifically committed to producing black physicians.⁴

An instructor of surgery and on the board of trustees, Burney made a valiant effort to rescue the struggling college that ultimately failed before graduating its final class of seventy-five students. In 1899, at age fifty, Burney retired to San Diego where his younger brother had preceded him, living at several addresses in the city over the next thirteen years.⁵ Although almost no evidence survives of his interaction with San Diego's tiny black community of roughly two hundred persons, his reputation as a professional in good standing was confirmed in 1908 when his name appeared on a list of the city's physicians in William E. Smythe's authoritative *History of San Diego, 1542-1908*.⁶ Burney died in 1912, leaving behind a wife who claimed his Civil War pension before moving to Los Angeles, and a legacy of excellence and dedication to improving the health prospects of African Americans everywhere.

By 1900 there was roughly one black doctor per 3,194 African Americans. Most of them practiced in the southern states where the majority of the black population struggled against cruel circumstances in regards to both their physical and mental health. Between 1890 and 1920 the number of black doctors in the United States increased dramatically from 909 to 3,885. Atypically, but like Burney, the next black physician to arrive in San Diego was trained at a northern school and chose to blaze a trail in a far western state. In 1920, Fred Clarence Calvert

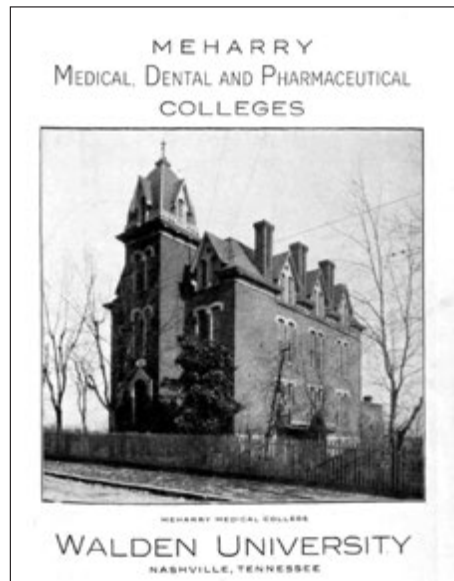
(1883-1941), a handsome, single, thirty-three-year-old doctor who had obtained his medical degree at the University of Michigan and had spent the previous ten years practicing in Atlanta, Georgia, arrived in San Diego and hung his shingle at 636 Market Street. For the next two decades Calvert was the most prominent black medical professional in the county. This civic-minded physician and surgeon was a member of the Elks, Knights of Pythias, Odd Fellows, and the Masons.⁷

By the mid-1920s the city's black population was approaching 2,000—enough, people thought, for Fred T. Moore, a graduate of Meharry Medical College, to compete for patients with Calvert. In 1926, Moore occupied an office several blocks east at 1434 Market Street. He too advertised in the community's *Colored Peoples Business Directory*, but things must not have worked out as he had planned because after just a few years here Moore dropped from sight. The area's first African American dentist, Jesse D. Moses, arrived in 1924 and shared office space with Moore. But Moses suffered a similar fate as Moore and both vacated the building before the onset of the Great Depression.

Business directories and group photos confirm a surprisingly diverse black workforce that joined vibrant civic groups, including some that encouraged social activism and demanded racial equality. The local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), inaugurated in 1919, gleefully announced its first triumph to the national headquarters in New York City, rushing off a telegram on September 7, 1927 that read: "The San Diego Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was victorious in the fight for admittance of colored girls as nurses in the San Diego

County Hospital."⁸ By 1930 the number of blacks in the city had virtually tripled (from 997 in 1920 to 2,839 in 1930). The 1931 edition of the city's *Colored Directory* presented a rather surprising diversity of occupations held by blacks, including that of Elec M. Cochran and J.T. Buchanan, two black chiropractors.

Perhaps the combination of a growing black populace and perfect climate attracted the fourth black physician, Howard University medical school graduate A. Antonio DaCosta (1902-1950). A native of British Guyana, he proved to be an



Historic Meharry College at Walden University 1904. Internet photo.



A. Antonio DaCosta, a highly successful and wealthy physician and entrepreneur, was revered in the African-American, Latino, and Portuguese communities. Dr. DaCosta's demise in 1950 remains one of the area's most publicized murder mysteries. Photo from The San Diego Union, April 18, 1950.

exceptional entrepreneur. Arriving in 1933, DaCosta built a highly successful practice serving the area's Portuguese, Latin American, and African American communities. His offices were located at 2875 Franklin Avenue and at 245 Twenty-Fifth Street in Logan Heights. He invested in several business ventures with the money he earned from his medical practice. A newspaper article disclosed: "DaCosta's estate including numerous rental properties in a section largely populated by Negroes, has been estimated to be worth \$250,000. His holdings include ownership of a Mexican picture theater here and a third interest in one of the largest San Diego-based tuna boats, the *Elena*."⁹

Divorced in 1942, DaCosta lived in a hacienda-style ranch home on fifteen acres located one mile east of Spring Valley on Campo Road. It was in the dining room of his palatial home that the good doctor was shot to death the night of April 16, 1950, his body riddled with four slugs from a .32 caliber revolver. *The San Diego Union* gave the case front-page coverage with follow-up articles over the next fourteen months. With an estate valued at \$422,000 (or \$3.7 million in today's dollars), DaCosta had been the county's most prosperous African American. The newspaper repeatedly reminded its readers of his wealth, a home requiring two caretakers, and delved into his personal life. Rev. C. H. Hampton of Bethel Baptist Church presided over his funeral service. Despite all of the news coverage, what was then one of the region's most sensational crimes eventually became one of its biggest unsolved mysteries as authorities failed to pin the murder on the main suspect—John DaCosta, his sixteen-year-old son.

Forever to DaCosta's credit is the fact that he helped launch the career of the city's most illustrious black health care professional—Jack Johnson Kimbrough (1908-1992). Having hitched a ride all the way from Northern California—bypassing relatively crowded Los Angeles—Johnson alighted on Imperial Avenue in Southeast San Diego in 1935, having finished dental school at the University of California at San Francisco. Soon after his arrival, he was befriended by DaCosta, who offered Kimbrough office space in one of his rental units. In 1939, ignoring threats from some white residents, they paired up in an office on Twenty-Fifth Street. Married to a schoolteacher in 1937, Kimbrough volunteered for, but was denied, military service during World War II. Though he built a thriving practice, destiny pushed this self-assured, kind, and unfailingly gracious man to become

a civil rights pioneer and a standout among his peers in the medical community.

Born in Lexington, Mississippi, Kimbrough had fled the state with his family when confronted with Ku Klux Klan harassment and was taken in by relatives in Alameda, California. Early on, he developed a strong sense of social justice and a deep appreciation for learning and the arts. An incident in which Kimbrough was refused service at a humble downtown snack joint because of his race set in motion a number of civil rights accomplishments that climaxed with his ascendancy as president of the local chapter of the NAACP in 1947. He conceived brilliant strategies to force white restaurant owners—including the posh eatery at the prestigious U.S. Grant Hotel—to serve blacks.

After a string of racial anti-discrimination victories in the late 1940s, Kimbrough co-founded and led the San Diego Urban League as its first president in 1953. His benchmark achievements in the dental profession were his election as the first black president of the San Diego County Dental Society in 1961; his election as the first black president of the California State Board of Dental Examiners in 1968; and his selection as a fellow of the American College of Dentistry.¹⁰ His home in National City, a meeting place and cultural Mecca for the area's black social elite, was filled from floor to ceiling with books on African American history and literature—many were signed first editions—and museum-quality African sculpture and artifacts, many of which he loaned out to exhibitions. In his living room Kimbrough entertained countless distinguished visitors from afar, among them scholars W.E.B. Du Bois and E. Franklin Frazier and blues singer Leadbelly.¹¹ In 1963 President John F. Kennedy invited Kimbrough to visit the White House to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. It was an appropriate gesture and recognition of a life of substance born of service of others.



Dr. Albert E. Richardson, an army colonel, was a skilled expert in prosthetics and gold inlay. His son, Albert Jr., is a dentist in Calexico. Internet photo.



Dr. Jack J. Kimbrough, President of the San Diego NAACP (1947), San Diego Urban League (1953), San Diego County Dental Society (1961), and California State Board of Dental Examiners (1968), was also a noted book and African art collector. Internet photo.

A contemporary of Kimbrough who came to San Diego in the mid-1930s was dentist Albert Exeter Richardson (1911-2008). Born in Houston, Texas, and educated at Howard University, Richardson did his own laboratory work and was a skilled expert in prosthetics and gold

inlay. An Army Lt. Colonel who was called to active duty during the Korean War, he spoke six languages. His son, Albert Jr., one of seven children, inherited a love of his father's profession and today works as a dentist in Calexico.¹² In 1965, the senior Richardson's office was at 128 Twenty-Fifth Street.

Another Houstonian, Cleveland L. Jackson (1897-1962), rose to the rank of Major in the Army Medical Corps during World War I, completed his medical training at Howard University, and had practiced in Radford, Virginia before relocating to San Diego in 1937. He maintained an office at 2754 Imperial Avenue and was on the medical staff of Mercy Hospital. A member of major medical associations, a life member of the NAACP, and a former Exalted Ruler of Clementine McDuff Elks Lodge Inc., Jackson died while vacationing in Phoenix, Arizona.¹³

Another doctor who did yeoman work was Edward Anderson Bailey (1884-1963) from Winchester, Texas. One of only four black physicians in San Diego in the 1940s, Bailey, a Meharry graduate who in 1929 was profiled in *Who's Who In Colored America*, had earlier practiced in Cleveland, where his family was besieged by violent whites who forced them to flee their newly bought home in Shaker Heights.¹⁴ A 32-degree Mason and a member of several medical and fraternal groups, Bailey was president of the San Diego NAACP in 1944. He died in Los Angeles in 1963.

Richardson, Jackson and Bailey were well positioned to administer to the needs of their ethnic base as the city's African American population, better educated and increasingly mobile, grew to 4,143 in 1940, 14,901 in 1950, and 34,435 in 1960.

The Middle Years: 1940 to 1959



Dr. Craig Morris was a dentist, social activist, and an Episcopalian minister. Internet photo.

Disturbingly, from 1900 through the 1940s, the ratio of about one black doctor per 3,300 black Americans stayed fairly constant. Meharry and Howard produced the overwhelming majority of black doctors and dentists. Examples include Virginia native Elbert B. Singleton (1915-1988) who, before starting his practice in San Diego in 1946, had been a ward officer captain during World War II and a flight surgeon for the Tuskegee airmen at the Tuskegee Army Air Field Station Hospital; and Donald M. Cary (1913-1983), from Ohio, who had been an Army



San Diego NAACP chapter president during World War II, Dr. Edward A. Bailey had fled from racial violence in Cleveland, Ohio, in the 1920s. Internet photo.

doctor in Italy before coming to San Diego in 1946 where he co-founded the local Urban League. Cary served on the boards of governmental and social service agencies. After working on the staffs of several hospitals, he headed the Sharp Hospital general practice department before retiring in 1980.

Craig Morris (1893-1977) was somewhat of a rarity on two counts: he finished Creighton University Dental College (a predominately white school) and was an ordained Episcopalian minister. Having been denied a commission in the Dental Reserve Corps in 1917, presumably on account of his race, he returned home to Omaha, Nebraska where he became president of the Nebraska Negro Medical Society.¹⁵ Morris resettled in San Diego in 1945 where he died in 1977 at age 83.

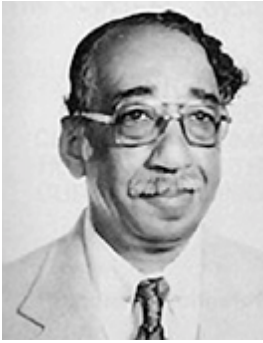
Recognizing the relative poverty of black families and the persistence of flagrant, debilitating racism, in a revealing, often-cited two-part study published in the NAACP's *The Crisis* in the late 1940s, the legendary black physician-anthropologist W. Montague Cobb concluded with these prophetic words: "The health plight of the Negro will be solved as the health plight of the nation is solved. The Negro can no more view himself as a creature apart than he can permit others to do so."¹⁶ In the late 1940s, the reform-minded National Medical Association (NMA), led by Dr. Emory I. Johnson of Los Angeles, took up the fight for national health insurance. The far more powerful, but conservative, American Medical Association (AMA), vigorously opposed this as insidious "socialized medicine."¹⁷ At the half century-mark, only snail's pace progress was being made in raising the number of black physicians in America. On the one hand there were more majority-white medical schools allowing admission to blacks, but fewer blacks were applying to these



John R. Ford. The county's first African-American board certified surgeon, John R. Ford was affiliated with at least a dozen hospitals. Appointed by Gov. Ronald Reagan to the California State Board of Education, he became its president in 1975. Photo from The San Diego Physician, February-March 2002.

schools in this era of pervasive racial segregation and discrimination. More residencies and internships were made available to newly minted black doctors, but there remained the bothersome problem of denial of hospital privileges and black patients favoring white doctors to treat them.

Meharry and Howard—once referred to by Cobb as "the heart of the medical ghetto"—still graduated the bulk of black doctors and dentists in the 1950s. By the end of the decade progress was observed in closing the gap in black-white morbidity and mortality rates and life expectancy, and there was a sharp decline in deaths of blacks due to tuberculosis. Still, in 1951, the NAACP felt it necessary to call attention to the popular "Amos 'n Andy" television show and insisted it be cancelled because it reinforced negative stereotypes of blacks in



Civic-minded Dr. Malvin J. Williams was president of the San Diego chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians. A scholarship fund at the University of California at San Diego honors his memory. Photo from Obituary, San Diego Physician, October 1987.

general and specifically black professionals, among them black doctors who the group claimed were “shown as quacks and thieves.”¹⁸

Laboring to improve the health prospects of black folk in San Diego in the 1950s was John R. Ford (1923-2009), the area’s first African American board-certified surgeon who was affiliated with no fewer than twelve hospitals in the county. Although a lifetime member of the NAACP, he was somewhat politically conservative. Ford was picked by Governor Ronald Reagan to serve on the California State Board of Education and became its president in 1975. A devout Seventh-day Adventist, ironically, he supported sex education in schools but was a leading advocate for requiring the viewpoint of “creationism” in state approved textbooks. Ford taught surgery at Meharry in the early 1950s and later at UC San Diego. He was a board trustee at Andrews University

and Loma Linda University (his alma maters) and predominately black Oakwood College in Alabama.

Malvin J. Williams (1930-1987) was first employed as a physician at the Naval Training Center. A general practitioner, he was team doctor for the Lincoln High School football team, a deacon at Bethel Baptist Church, and became president of the San Diego chapter of Family Physicians and secretary of the California Academy of Family Physicians. Today, the Malvin Williams, M.D., Memorial Scholarship at UCSD for students interested in family medicine honors his career. Raphael Eugene Tisdale (1903-1999), named California Family Physician of the Year in 1983, spent the first half of his career in his native Alabama where he taught biology at Tuskegee Institute and served as a doctor in private practice in Montgomery. The military draft and the Navy brought Tisdale to San Diego in 1954. For twenty-four years he operated the Chollas View Medical Clinic at 4629 Market Street. The venerable Rev. George Walker Smith eulogized Tisdale as a person of “impeccable character” and “just a good, caring, serving man.”¹⁹

In 1958, the first black female doctor appeared: Shirley Jenkins-Phelps, a Wayne State University-trained psychiatrist who worked at the San Diego County Health Department and was once the wife of prominent minister Grandison M. Phelps. The decade closed with the arrival of general practitioner Vell R. Wyatt who completed his residency at the Naval Hospital at Camp Pendleton. Also here in the 1950s was Harold E. Burt (OBGYN); and Herbert A. Holness (1911-2000), born in Panama, who later collaborated with his brother-in-law and fellow African

American physician, Jimmie R. Valentine, as general practitioners.

Essentially unchallenged for generations as his/her community's most esteemed professional, the black medical professional came under increasing scrutiny as the nation moved into the turbulent 1960s and the civil rights revolution. In 1947, Howard University's W. Montagu Cobb sneered at those who seemed more concerned with accumulating and flaunting their wealth and social status than improving the quality of their medical practice. Pioneering black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier in his classic *Black Bourgeoisie* (1955) asserted, "no group in the black bourgeoisie exhibits its conservative outlook more than doctors."²⁰

Writing from the perspective of 2005, medical historian Thomas J. Ward Jr. characterized black physicians—though often prominent as community leaders—as considerably more hesitant than other black professionals in challenging racial segregation and discrimination.²¹ In critiquing Ward's book, *Black Physician in the Jim Crow South*, one reviewer emphasized: "There was no Charles Houston, Thurgood Marshall, or Fred Gray among the physicians. Many accepted and benefited from Jim Crow."²² Nevertheless, wherever black enclaves existed, the black medic—by dint of his advanced education and higher-level social connections—continued to be trusted and sought out for advice on a wide array of nonmedical issues, from politics to finances to marriage to new automobiles.

Self-Assertion and Change: The 1960s and 1970s

In the 1960s, black health care professionals in San Diego engaged in a number of nontraditional pursuits. In 1962, Harold E. Burt, two black attorneys, and an architect—in step with the zeitgeist of an era that challenged authority and tradition—sued for \$31,000 and won an out-of-court settlement and obtained a permanent injunction against the Bonita Golf Club for practicing discrimination "solely on the basis of race and color."²³ In 1965, physicians Malvin J. Williams and Vell R. Wyatt and dentist Charles H. Hammond, among others, intent on devising a tax write-off, pooled their money to start up an indie soul music record label featuring local talent called Musette Records.²⁴ The business produced twenty singles during its three-year run, including the tunes, "I'm No Fool," "You Know How Love Is," and "A Million Tears Ago."



Sister Iberia Hood, 1973. ©SDHC
#91: 18476-1405.

Meanwhile, Joseph W. Joyner and Leon R.



Richard O. Butcher, the youngest president in the history of the Golden State Medical Association, was later elected president of the National Medical Association and the San Diego County Medical Society. Photo from the San Diego Physician, December 2009.

Kelley, the area's first black pediatricians, began their remarkable careers. Former Navy lieutenant Nathaniel W. Burks Jr. (1932-2004), an OBGYN physician who distinguished himself as one of the three co-inventors of the Fetal Heart-Rate Monitoring System and patented a device to prevent child pool drowning, founded five business enterprises and established the Crocker-Burks Scholarship Foundation.²⁵ Family physician Richard O. Butcher also commenced his journey to medical stardom.

The near institutionalization of government and private industry affirmative action and equal opportunity programs in the 1970s coincided with the long-hoped-for and dramatic acceleration in the number of blacks attending and graduating from medical school. Just as impressive, since World War II, the head count of black doctors in California had multiplied ninefold. There was a huge spike in the number of black doctors in San Diego over the course of the decade and their expertise in an expanding list of medical specialties was apparent. Prominent doctors specialized in cardiology (Guy P. Curtis), orthopedic surgery (Harry R. Boffman and Edwin B. Fuller), urology (Francis T. Greene), orthodontics (David D. Wynn), vascular surgery (Edgar L. Guinn), thoracic surgery (Frantz J. Derenoncourt), anesthesiology (Clyde W. Jones), radiology (Charles D. Lee), ophthalmology (Gordon J. Montgomery), neurology (Arthur M. Flippin and William T. Chapman), neurological surgery (Tyrone L. Hardy), pathology (Clarence Curry Jr.), and otolaryngology (Earl M. Simmons).

The influx of so much new talent meant there was now a critical mass to form professional advocacy groups. In 1972 the San Diego chapter of the San Diego Society of the National Medical Association (NMA) was chartered and in 1974, incorporated by Drs. Richard O. Butcher, Vell R. Wyatt, Terry O. Warren (1936-1992), and Harold E. Burt. Similarly, in 1976, Lottie Harris organized a chapter of the National Black Nurses Association and served as the first president of the San Diego Black Nurses Association.

In 1973 the Southeast Medical Center opened at 286 Euclid Avenue as the first medical center in California—and anywhere west of the Mississippi River—to be owned and operated by black doctors. Interestingly, of the eight doctors and two dentists who pulled off this achievement, nine were Meharry alumni. In 2002, when the center completed a \$4 million, 35,000-square-foot building expansion, a reporter for the *San Diego Union-Tribune* interviewed some of the founders,

including managing partner Leon R. Kelley who later said: “If you are poor and live in southeast San Diego you deserve health care as good as if you lived in La Jolla... [The Center] continues to be the focal point for medical care in the South East community.”²⁶ The reporter commented:

[The founders] came with a mission to make people healthier in a community that had a great lack of doctors. A mission to eliminate racial disparities in health care. And despite the struggles—and there were many—they stayed... Which is why he (Dr. Kelley) stayed. And is why he and his partners...have invested even more into their community.²⁷



Dr. Rodney G. Hood graduated from UCSD in 1973 ©SDHC #91:18476-1406.

Rodney G. Hood, once described as the exemplar of the African American leader in medicine, was one of many notables who arrived in the 1970s. A foresighted principal in the venture that brought the Southeast Medical Center to fruition, a co-founder of the Multicultural Primary Care Medical Group that matches minority patients with minority physicians in their communities, and a co-designer of the HMO CompCare Health Plan servicing Medical patients, Hood soon gained the reputation as an articulate voice on matters pertaining to black health care that catapulted him into the national spotlight.²⁸ Richard O. Butcher became

President of the San Diego NMA chapter and the youngest president ever of the Golden State Medical Association. In 1972 the NMA chapter, through the auspices of the national organization, implemented “Project 75”, a program aimed at finding and encouraging students mainly at largely black Lincoln High School to consider careers in health care.

Finally, a noteworthy sidelight comes from an article headline in the April 1973 issue of *Jet* magazine, “Hospitalized Ali’s Wife; Takes Eight to Calm Her,” told how distraught and violently hysterical the wife of boxer Muhammad Ali became when opponent Ken Norton broke the champ’s jaw in a bout in San Diego that Norton won in a split decision. The article



Medical services innovator and sought-after commentator Dr. Rodney G. Hood was elected President of the National Medical Association in 2001. Internet photo.

continued: "It took nearly 20 hours of medical attention provided by a black physician, Dr. Jimmie R. Valentine, at San Diego Mercy Hospital to calm her. Ali, who learned of her condition after undergoing surgery, slipped out of nearby Claremont Hospital and spent the night with his wife."²⁹

Talent and Opportunities Abound: The 1980s and 1990s

Whereas E. Franklin Frazier had portrayed black doctors as conservative, there were others who examined them as a group and found them more liberal and/or progressive in their social and political views than their white counterparts. Historian Carter G. Woodson, the first scholar to produce a study of them in *The Negro Professional Man and the Community* (1934), gave credit where credit was due, recognizing that black doctors and dentists, in particular, had long facilitated the uplift of the race through health education, voicing community concerns, and risking their careers to challenge an oppressive "pigmentocracy."³⁰

Clear proof of a dedicated and resourceful group of medical professionals present in San Diego in the 1980s abounds. Take, for example, La Jolla dentist Lennon Goins, the youngest son of Georgia sharecroppers in a family of fourteen children, who in 1983 created the Black Alumni Fund at UCSD that has disbursed hundreds of thousands of dollars to assist high-potential black students; brilliant laboratory scientist Janis H. Jackson, M.D. (1953-2003), who began in 1985 at the Scripps Research Institute and mentored gifted students and befriended the city's homeless population before her untimely death; and Richard O. Butcher who in 1988 became the first black president of the San Diego County Medical Society.

On the civil rights front, in 1986 a lawsuit filed in federal court by seven local black dentists (Lennon Goins, Robert Robinson, Charlie F. Carmichael, Lois Center-Shabazz, Gene Moore, Jefferson W. Jones, and Charles H. Hammond) alleged that the Veterans Administration bypassed black dentists when making "fee basis" work referrals to private practitioners.³¹

Between 1940 and 1970, the pool of the nation's black doctors grew from only 4,160 to 6,044; stunningly, by 1990 the number had leaped to 13,707. Correspondingly, the number of black dentists had increased from 1,533 in 1945 to about 3,700 in 1990. Following the mitigation of racism in American society and the gradual dismantling of barriers to professional training over generations, the pioneers in San Diego's black medical community were gratified to observe a record of outstanding achievements by their colleagues in the closing years of the century.

The decade got off to an auspicious start with the election of Richard O. Butcher as president-elect of the National Medical Association, then representing almost 15,000 black physicians nationwide. During his tenure as president he reiterated the

organization's stance on national health insurance, assisted the Clinton Administration's fight to approve the appointment of Jocelyn Elders as U.S. Surgeon General, and joined with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in an anti-smoking campaign targeting African Americans.

With an M.D. and a Ph.D. in pharmacology from New York University, Neil J. Clendeninn, a well-published scholar and drug developer, was Vice President for Clinical Affairs at Agouron Pharmaceutical in La Jolla from 1993 to 2000. He retired early, and rich, to Hawaii. The Dr. Neil Clendeninn Prize at Wesleyan University funds the education of promising biology and biochemistry students. In 1992 William T. Chapman was named "Doctor of the Year" at Paradise Valley Hospital, the premier hospital serving the mostly black



Former Director of the San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, currently Dr. Robert K. Ross heads The California Endowment, a multi-billion dollar health foundation. Internet Photo.

and Latino population of Southeast San Diego and bordering communities.



James L. Kyle, A decorated medical officer who served in Yugoslavia, a minister, hospital and university administrator, his personable demeanor made Dr. Kyle a hit as a local television medical analyst. Internet Photo.

George Prioleau (1949-1996) had taught at UC San Francisco School of Medicine before his appointment as Chief of Neurosurgery at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center. This nationally known brain surgeon and pilot was killed in 1996 in a helicopter crash at age forty-seven. Pediatrician Robert K. Ross (M.D., University of Pennsylvania) was director of the San Diego Health and Human Services Agency from 1993 to 2000 when he was selected to head the California Endowment, a \$5 billion health foundation. In the mid-1990s San Diegans were accustomed to seeing the tall, well-groomed James L. Kyle dispensing medical advice on KUSI-TV. The calming, deep-voiced UCLA alumnus continued appearances on other television stations

and became Dean of the Loma Linda University School of Public Health, Vice President for Medical Affairs at St. Mary Hospital in Apple Valley, and senior pastor of the Tamarind Avenue Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Compton.

For black physicians, 1995 turned out to be an interesting year both nationally and locally. It was the year when San Pablo, California, internist Lonnie R. Bristow took over as the first black president of the AMA. The shocking announcement

of a not-guilty verdict in the O.J. Simpson murder case on October 3, 1995, sent reporters to the door of psychiatrist William H. Grier, co-author of the bestseller *Black Rage* (1968), who had moved from San Francisco to San Diego, to get a black point of view on the so-called "Trial of the Century." Grier obliged and commented: "I think that really well-intentioned people think that blacks were exaggerating. The important thing is that for once a black guy was able to turn the tables on the authorities."³² Also in 1995, Joseph S. Freitas made the front page of the *San Diego Union-Tribune* when he did an emergency Caesarian section on a deceased woman and saved her twin girls. He commented: "I listened to her abdomen, heard faint fetal heart activity, determined they looked viable in size and told the nurse, 'Let's get these babies out now. Give me a scalpel and towels.'"³³



Dr. Donna Baytop, member USD Board of Trustees. Photo courtesy University of San Diego.

In September 1997 the \$23 million Jack Kimbrough Elementary School, christened in memory of the city's first black dentist, opened its doors in the Sherman Heights-Golden Hill area. Hailed as a "Woman of Distinction" in 1992 by the San Diego Regional Conference for Women, OBGYN specialist Carolle Jean-Murat branched out into motivational speaking, media appearances, and medical journalism with two books, *Menopause Made Easy* (1999) and *Natural Pregnancy A-Z* (2000).



Perennially voted as one of the city's "Top Doctors," nephrologist Theodore S. Thomas is Chief of Staff at Scripps Mercy Hospital and Medical Director at Gateway Easy Dialysis Center. His private practice is at the Balboa Nephrology Medical Group. Internet Photo.

Rampant Optimism in the Twenty-First Century

The trend toward specialization was even more apparent in the initial decade of the new century. Among today's practicing African-American specialists are Marquis E. Hart (transplant surgery), Cheryl Wright (rheumatology), Daniel J. Brown (plastic surgery), Cynthia Ann Coles and Donna M. Mills (psychiatry), Kevin B. Calhoun (laser and cosmetic surgery), John M. Carethers and Roderick Rapier (gastroenterology), William Meade Jr. (emergency medicine), Donna M. Baytop (preventive/occupational medicine), Theodore S. Thomas (nephrology), Amilcar A. Exume (pediatric

surgery), Brenton D. Wynn (pain and sports medicine), and Fern P. Nelson (dermatology).

Despite considerable progress made in advancing racial tolerance and the wide acceptance of the notion of equal opportunity and diversity, evidence of a still-imperfect society was confirmed in a published study in 2001 that found 12 percent of black doctors and 15 percent of Latino doctors “reported difficulty



The second African American president of the San Diego County Medical Society, Edgar D. Canada, President of the California Society of Anesthesiologists in 2006, works in pediatric anesthesiology at Rady Children's Hospital. Internet photo.

getting specialty referrals of their patients, compared to 8 percent of white doctors.”³⁴ A survey of 2,500 doctors by a University of Washington professor concluded that: “The majority of doctors in all ethnic and racial groups showed an implicit preference for white Americans compared with black Americans, except for black doctors who typically did not have a preference either way.”³⁵ In a bittersweet victory of sorts, in 2008, after a review of past history and practices, the AMA apologized for “excluding Black doctors from its ranks and for not challenging legislations that could have contributed to the end of racial discrimination within the organization.”³⁶

Racial attitudes and equal opportunity matters aside, there remain a number of problems common to many black physicians such as cutbacks and reformulations of government subsidized health programs and competition with managed care organizations. These issues are carefully analyzed in *Against the Odds: Blacks in the Profession of Medicine in the United States* (1999) and in

a chapter on the black health care crisis in volume two of *An American Health Dilemma* (2000).³⁷ A report released in 2008 by the Center for California Health Workforce Studies at UC San Francisco revealed that in San Diego and Imperial Counties, the disparity of practicing physicians compared to the population of blacks was greater than in the state as a whole. The residents of these counties stood at 5.7 percent, but only 2 percent of physicians were black, compared to California’s black population of 6.7 percent. Blacks represent 3.7 percent of the state’s physicians.³⁸

If one hundred years ago William A. Burney or Fred C. Calvert could have gazed into a crystal ball and seen the varied accomplishments of their



Cited in 2002 as one of “America’s Top Ophthalmologists” by the Consumer’s Research Council of America, the work of Charles W. Flowers Jr. has earned him numerous awards. Internet photo.



After his services as a decorated military officer, James Colbert became a UCSD dean and professor, was president of the San Diego Society of Health-System Pharmacists and honored as the group's "Pharmacist of the Year" in 2000. Internet Photo.

successors in the black medical community, their spirits would indeed have been lifted. On January 1, 2000, Arthur M. Flippin assumed the position San Diego Area Medical Director of the Southern California Permanente Medical Group and, the following year, Nora M. Faine (M.D. and M.P.H.) was chosen Vice President and Chief Medical Officer of Sharp Health Plan. Rodney G. Hood began his tenure as the second physician from San Diego to be tapped President of the National Medical Association in 2001. In 2002, decorated former military officer James Colbert who earned his pharmacy doctorate at UC San Francisco, currently an assistant dean and clinical professor at UCSD, was proclaimed a "Health Hero" by the local chapter of the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America. A past president of the San Diego Society of Health-System Pharmacists (SDSHP), Colbert was

the recipient of the group's "Pharmacist of the Year" award in 2000. Charles W. Flowers, Jr., was named one of "America's Top Ophthalmologists" in 2002 by the Consumer's Research Council of America, an honor reinforcing his reputation as one of the city's "Top Doctors" listed in *San Diego Magazine* in 2004.

In 2003, surgeon Tracy Downs, a specialist in urologic oncology who did his residency at the Harvard Medical School, joined the faculty at UCSD. In 2004, Rev. Mark Reeves, a hero to the rescue in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, became the first staff chaplain at the UCSD Medical Center. Edgar D. Canada became the second African American to assume the helm of the San Diego County Medical Society and, in 2006, was President of the California Society of Anesthesiologists. Also in 2006, surgeon James A. Johnson became President/CEO of Meals-on-Wheels Greater San Diego, Inc.

Pediatrician Sandra Daley was made Associate Chancellor and Chief Diversity Officer at UC San Diego in 2007; while Donna M. Baytop, Medical Director for Solar Turbines and a member of the University of San Diego Board of Trustees, was given the Rutherford T. Johnstone Award for superior service in occupational



Pediatrician and clinical professor Gail R. Knight is Chief of Neonatology at Rady Children's Hospital, one of the nation's premier treatment facilities for critically ill newborns. She earned her medical degree at UCSD. Internet photo.

medicine by the Western Occupational & Environmental Medical Association (WOEMA). In 2008, Kenneth H. Schell (Pharm.D.), Vice President for Compliance and Quality Assurance for Prescription Solutions and formerly an administrator at Sharp and Kaiser Permanente hospitals, was appointed President of the California State Board of Pharmacy.

General practitioner Suzanne E. Afflalo and internist Robert Felder were listed among San Diego's "Top Doctors" in *San Diego Magazine*. Voted to this exclusive list in 2009 were Theodore S. Thomas (nephrology) and Leon Kelley (pediatrics), and in 2010 Oyewale O. Abidoye (hematology/oncology) and Gail R. Knight (pediatrics) who that same year was named Division Chief of Neonatology Rady Children's Hospital. At a dinner in January 2009, Dr. Thomas was toasted as the new Chief of Staff of Scripps Mercy Hospital, overseeing 3,000 employees and 1,300 doctors. More recently, Michael Owens, an M.D. and M.P.H. from Yale University and founder of Imhoptep Health Systems Inc., was made Regional Director of Molina Healthcare of California, an HMO. At its Thirty-Third Annual Awards Event, the San Diego Black Nurses Association gave five local nursing students scholarships totaling \$6,250.

It was announced in August 2009 that John M. Carethers, Chief of the Division of Gastroenterology at UCSD, would leave to become Chairman of the Department of Internal Medicine at the University of Michigan. Also in 2009, Richard O. Butcher received the Gary F. Krieger Speaker's Recognition award from the California Medical Association for his decades of medical leadership. In 2011, Rodney Hood, Butcher's long-time colleague and business partner, received the Pride in the Profession Award from the AMA at a ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Perhaps Drs. Burney and Calvert would not have been overly surprised to learn of all the high professional achievements and civic work mentioned herein, because they would have understood that, like themselves, many of their successors were just as bold, ambitious, and optimistic enough to take a chance on building a career in a place far off the beaten path, and in the shadow of that seemingly irresistible magnet and mega-metropolis to the north known as Los Angeles. A combination of San Diego's sunny, mild climate, underserved population, and access to advanced education and research may have attracted them but, undoubtedly, valued personal relationships, dedication to and leadership in local community and professional groups, and perceived appreciation of their good work persuaded most of them to stay and prosper.

NOTES

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4. See Dorothy C. Rush, "Louisville National Medical College," in *Encyclopedia of Kentucky*, ed. John E. Kleber (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992); Eugene H. Conner, "Medicine," in *Encyclopedia of Louisville*, 606; and Thomas J. Ward Jr., *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 14.
5. Robert L. Carlton, "Blacks in San Diego County, 1850-1900" (master's thesis, San Diego State University, 1977), 90.
6. William E. Smythe, *History of San Diego, 1542-1908: An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Pioneer Settlement on the Pacific Coast of the United States* (San Diego: History Co., 1908), 608.
7. See Eugene Lucas, *Colored Directory 1931-32* (San Diego: E. Lucas, 1932), 87; and Richard L. Carrico and Stacey Jordan, *Centre City Development Corporation Downtown San Diego African-American Heritage Study* (San Diego: Centre City Development Corporation, 2004), V55.
8. Sondra K. Wilson, *In Search of Democracy: The NAACP Writing of James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, and Roy Wilkins (1920-1977)* (New York: Oxford University, 1999), 83.
9. "Gun, Motive Missing in Ranch Death," *San Diego Union*, April 18, 1950, 3.
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18. Robin R. M. Coleman, *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor* (New York: Garland Pub., 1998), 65.
19. Obituary of Ralph E. Tisbury, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, November 21, 1999, B-7.

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21. Thomas J. Ward Jr., *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 235.
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