

## Celebrating Cultural Diversity at the Medical School

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By: Ron Sims, Special Collections Librarian (now retired)

In this article, we take a look at a selection of the Medical School's black graduates who went on to illustrious careers.

### Ulysses Grant Dailey, MD, ScD, LLD, FACS, FICS



Ulysses Grant Dailey overcame financial and racial obstacles to become an internationally respected surgeon. More than a surgeon, Dr. Dailey was a teacher, training physicians who later became leaders and role models; he was an editor, shaping a forward-looking editorial style, reflecting his ideals and passion for medicine through the *Journal of the National Medical Association*; he was an administrator, founding a hospital which offered training positions to young physicians and treatment for patients regardless of race; lastly, he was an ambassador of American medicine, traveling to countries around the globe, assisting in studying and shaping health care systems.

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Born in Donaldsonville, Louisiana on August 3, 1885, Dailey grew up in Ft. Worth, Texas and Louisiana. Under the guidance of his grandmother and mother, he became an avid reader, and studied French and piano. Early on, he had chosen a career as a pianist and he graduated from the preparatory academy at Straight College (now Dillard University) in New Orleans. While a student in Fort Worth, Dailey became the office assistant for Ernest L. Stephens, a practicing physician and professor of *materia medica* in the medical department of Fort Worth University. Impressed by Dailey's seriousness, Stephens encouraged the young man's wide reading. When a typhoid epidemic struck the city, Stephens assigned Dailey to visit his homebound patients to take temperatures and do similar tasks. With his increasing experience in medicine, Dailey resolved to pursue this profession rather than music.

Dailey was accepted at Northwestern University Medical School after several conversations with the dean, and enrolled in the fall of 1902. He supported himself through a variety of jobs, including playing piano in bars and taverns. Dr. Peter Burns, director of the anatomical laboratory, hired him as an assistant and instructor for two years. Dailey received an MD in June 1906.

Dailey was denied the opportunity, because of his race, to spend two weeks at Mercy Hospital in Chicago doing obstetrics in the charity ward. In 1907, Provident Hospital appointed Dailey gynecologist to their dispensary. In 1910, he became an associate surgeon, and from 1912 to 1926, he held the title of attending surgeon.

The major turning point in Dailey's medical career came in 1908 when Dr. Daniel Hale Williams\* of Provident Hospital invited Dailey to be his surgical assistant. Remaining in this capacity until 1912, Dailey learned much in the way of surgical technique from Williams. From 1916 to 1918, he also served as an instructor in clinical surgery at Northwestern, and from 1920 to 1926, he was an attending surgeon at Fort Dearborn Hospital. In 1912 and 1925, Dailey took two trips of several months each to Europe for postgraduate studies on surgical subjects.

In February 1916, Dailey married Eleanor Curtis, sister of Dr. Austin M. Curtis\* of Washington, D.C. Shortly after this, Dailey suffered an almost fatal attack of tuberculosis and was ill for several months. The couple adopted five-year-old twins in 1924.

In 1926, Dailey purchased two large houses at Michigan Boulevard and Thirty-seventh Street and had them remodeled into the Dailey Hospital and Sanitarium, free from racial restrictions. Unhappily, one of his patients there was Daniel Hale Williams, for whom Dailey had to make a terminal diagnosis. The economic depression forced Dailey to close this institution in 1932. During its existence the hospital had provided affiliations for young black specialists and excellent care for black patients.

From Williams, Dailey had learned the importance of surgical clinics and educational lectures for black surgeons in the South. He frequently organized and took part in such endeavors at Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, the John A. Andrew Clinical Society in Tuskegee, Alabama, and other southern locations as well as in Washington, D.C., and New York.

In 1945, the American College of Surgeons elected Dailey a member (along with three other black surgeons). The only previous African-American members had been Dailey's mentor, Williams in 1913, and Louis Tompkins Wright in 1943.

Dailey became a member of the National Medical Association in 1908 and remained a member for fifty-three years. Active at the annual meetings as a speaker and discussant, he served as chairman of the Surgical Section in 1914 and gave the Oration in Surgery in 1940. From 1928-1932 he was chairman of the National Program Committee, and in 1932 presented one of the association's first scientific exhibits (on sixty operations for goiter). As president of the association in 1915-1916, Dailey was the youngest president up to that time and the first from Chicago. However, his primary activity was with the *Journal of the National Medical Association*, for which he served as a member of the editorial board (1910-1943), associate editor (1943-1948), and editor (1948-1950). In 1950, he was named consulting editor. He also wrote several columns for the journal, alternating reviews of the literature with reports of his own work. The association honored him with its Distinguished Service Award in 1949.



In 1935, Dailey became a charter member of the International College of Surgeons. He served on the board of trustees and the editorial board. His major efforts for the college consisted of several extended trips to Pakistan, India, Japan, and other countries, during which he gave frequent surgical lectures and clinics and promoted local efforts for undergraduate and graduate medical education. A high point of his travels was a five-day visit with Albert Schweitzer in 1953 at Schweitzer's Forest Hospital in Lambaréné, Gabon.

In 1952, Dailey retired from his position as chief of the surgical staff at Provident Hospital, and four years later he retired from active practice. He and his wife purchased a house near Port-au-Prince in Haiti, a country they had often visited and for which he had served as honorary consul in Chicago for several years.

Northwestern University awarded Dr. Dailey an honorary Doctor of Laws degree in 1955. He died in Chicago in 1961.

His biography was written by Donald Preston and published in 1966: *The scholar and the scalpel: the life story of Ulysses Grant Dailey* (Chicago, Afro-Am Pub. Co.) [Galter Library WZ 100 D133P 1966]

[\\*Celebrating African-American Graduates of the Medical School](#)

**Theodore Kenneth Lawless, MD**



**Dr. Lawless received the  
NCAAP Springarn Medal in 1954**

Theodore Lawless was born on December 6, 1892 in Thibodeaux, Louisiana, to Alfred Lawless Jr. and Harriet Dunn Lawless. Shortly after, the family moved to New Orleans. Known by his friends as "T. K.," Lawless attended Straight College. He received an A. B. degree at Talladega College in Alabama in 1914. Lawless attended the University of Kansas medical school, earned a MD from Northwestern University in 1919 and a MS in 1920. After a one-year fellowship in dermatology and syphilology at Massachusetts General Hospital, Lawless completed his postgraduate training at the University of Paris.

In 1924, he started his practice in a predominantly black neighborhood in Chicago. In the same year, he began teaching dermatology at Northwestern University Medical School where he served until 1941. As an instructor and researcher, Lawless made a number of contributions to the field of dermatology. His research was published in such scholarly publications as American Journal of Dermatology, Journal of Laboratory and Clinical Medicine, and the Journal of the American Medical Association. He worked to find a cure for leprosy and made several strides in the treatment of both leprosy and syphilis. As a physician,

Lawless was often consulted by other doctors and he was noted for his equal treatment of patients regardless of class or race.

He also donated funds for a research laboratory, equipped with the latest technology, at Provident Hospital in Chicago. In addition, he supported several Jewish-related causes in appreciation of the support he received from Jewish physicians when he sought letters of reference to study in Europe: of the 12 references he received, 11 were from Jewish physicians. He created the Lawless Department of Dermatology in Beilison Hospital, Tel-Aviv, Israel; the T. K. Lawless Student Summer Program at the Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovoth, Israel; the Lawless Clinical and Research Laboratory in Dermatology of the Hebrew Medical School, Jerusalem; Roosevelt University's Chemical Laboratory and Lecture Auditorium, Chicago; and Lawless Memorial Chapel, Dillard University, New Orleans. The chapel was built in honor of his father.

Lawless was a shrewd businessman: he was a director of the Supreme Life Insurance Company and the Marina City Bank as well as a charter member, president, and associate founder of Service Federal Savings and Loan Association in Chicago. He received honorary degrees from Talladega College, Howard University, Bethune-Cookman College, Virginia State University, and the University of Illinois. Among his prestigious honors were the NAACP Spingarn Medal for 1954, and the Golden Torch Award of the City of Hope.

Dr. Lawless died in Chicago on May 1, 1971, after a long illness.

**Alfred Bitini Xuma, MD, PhD**



Alfred B. Xuma was born in 1893 into an aristocratic Xhosa family in the Transkei of South Africa, and rose from humble beginnings to the position of President of the African National Congress (ANC).

After completing his primary school education, Xuma went on to study teaching at the Pietermaritzburg Training Institute and then taught at various schools in the Eastern Cape before leaving South Africa in 1913 to study agriculture in the United States.

Financing for his American odyssey was supposed to be supported by the missionary branch of the Methodist Episcopal (ME) and the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Churches. Upon arriving in New York in September 1913, he and two companions accessed train transport to Alabama and the Tuskegee Institute in the blacks only railroad car—his first experience with American segregation. The Church support never arrived. Founder Booker T. Washington arranged for night classes, knowing that most of the students were self-supporting.

After completing his course of studies in animal husbandry, agronomy and dairy farming, he was encouraged by Nelson Ricks, one of his instructors, to continue his studies at the University of Minnesota. Traveling to St. Paul in summer 1916, another America was introduced to him. The small black community did not enjoy full social or economic equality; however, their lot still seemed privileged compared to blacks in other large American cities.

Financing was a problem, but his experience at Tuskegee helped him to realize his potential for self-support. With assistance from the YMCA, YWCA and other Christian organizations, he completed his bachelor degree in 1920.

Sometime during this period he decided on a medical career and was accepted at Minnesota's medical department. The curriculum was more difficult than expected and he was granted an 'honorable dismissal.' He traveled to Chicago in hopes of earning a living and a medical degree. After some frustration, the situation greatly improved through his association with the ME Church and the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. Classes at Chicago's Lewis Institute helped prepare him for further studies in chemistry and anatomy. He reapplied to Minnesota, but was denied; a second choice was Marquette in Milwaukee, where he was accepted in 1921. His academic record approached 90 by his second year. Again, he was supported by the YMCA and the ME Church. At Marquette he was a founding member of chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha. Money was still a problem, however, and he was encouraged by the Church to transfer to Northwestern, as it was affiliated with the ME Church at that time. He was accepted as a junior in the fall of 1923, fulfilling his requirements of 3 more years including an internship at City Hospital in St. Louis. The MD was awarded to him in 1926.

After completing his medical studies in Chicago, he decided to continue his education in the United Kingdom, where he became the first black South African to graduate with a PhD from the London School of Tropical Medicine. Xuma returned to South Africa in 1928 to practice as a physician in Johannesburg, but he soon became involved in political activities.

These activities led to his election as Vice-President of the All-African Convention (AAC) in 1935 and as President of the ANC in 1940. He inherited an organization in disarray and set out to rebuild the ANC against great opposition. Under his leadership, the ANC constitution was revised and the organization became more efficient and centralized, thus attracting a wider following.

In 1943, Xuma and the ANC's Atlantic Charter Committee produced a politically significant document entitled African Claims, which charted the path to racial equality in South Africa that they hoped would follow the conclusion of the Second World War. In 1946, Xuma travelled to New York as an unofficial delegate to the United Nations, where he lobbied successfully against the South African Government's plans to incorporate South West Africa (Namibia) into the Union.

In conjunction with his efforts to revitalize the ANC, Xuma strove towards unity among the various protest groups and organizations against apartheid. Essentially a moderate and a conservative, Xuma found himself more and more under pressure from the militant element within the ANC – and the ANC Youth League in particular – who demanded radical action and a closer association with the South African Communist Party (SACP). Following the National Party's 1948 election victory, the pressure turned into mutiny and Xuma was ousted as ANC President and replaced by Dr. J.S. Moroka.

Dr. Xuma died at Baragwanath Hospital, Johannesburg, in 1962.

A biography of Dr. Xuma was published in 2000, written by Steven D. Gish, Alfred B. Xuma, African, American, South African (New York University Press): Galter Library WZ 100 X86G 2000

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