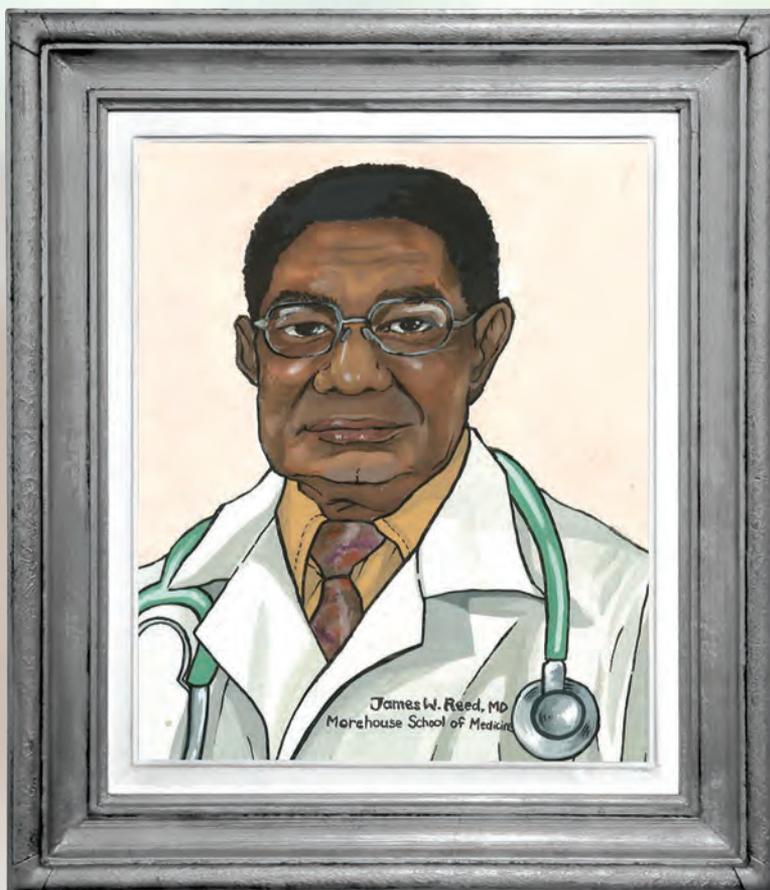


Standing on the shoulders of giants:



The life and times of Dr. James W. Reed

Illustration by Claire Gilmore

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Editor's note: The following article was written in 2019 and selected as the 2019 Robert H. Moser Award recipient. Dr. Reed passed away January 11, 2020. However, before his death, Dr. Bradley was able to notify him of her receipt of this award for her essay written about him, and his accomplishments and contributions to medicine.

At the Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM) it is recognized that as physicians we stand on the shoulders of giants. One such giant is Dr. James Whitfield Reed (AQA, Howard University College of Medicine, 2002, Alumnus).

James was born in a migratory labor camp in Pahokee, Florida in 1933. He was the second child of Thomas and Chineater Reed. Pahokee is a small community located on the shore of Lake Okeechobee. Known for its rich fertile soil, the community was referred to as "The Muck." In the 1930s, it was also known as the Winter Vegetable Capital of the World.¹

Along with thousands of others, the Reeds worked as farm hands at a labor camp. His mother was originally from Valdosta, Georgia, and his father was from a small Georgia/Florida border town. When James was six-months-old his father died from rheumatic heart disease.

Due to the grueling nature of the work and the long hours, James was primarily raised by his grandmother's younger sister, Idella Head Johnson, in St. Petersburg, Florida. Though he was always a gifted student, he credits his Aunt Idella for instilling in him the value of higher education and for teaching him "everything he could know" prior to starting elementary school.

After excelling in elementary school James continued on to Gibbs High School in St. Petersburg. The school was named for Jonathan Clarkson Gibbs, an African American man who was Superintendent of Public Instruction and Secretary of State in Florida during the Reconstruction era.² Gibbs was a segregated high school, with G. W. Perkins as principal. During his time at Gibbs High School, James took numerous science and math classes, two years of Latin, and a year of Spanish. He also was required to take a trade class and chose tailoring since, as he would say, it would keep him "out of the hot sun." Throughout high school, James and his good friend, Paul Moore, traveled with the basketball and football teams as the teams' tutors.

Though his Aunt Idella only had an eighth grade education, she raised James to understand that education was one of the most important things in life.

James graduated from high school in 1949 and matriculated to West Virginia State University (WVSU) that same year.

At WVSU, an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), James majored in biology and mathematics. Not only did he love math, but, as he explained, it was an "easy way of getting an A."

In addition to his academic studies, James was voted president of the student body and president of the student council. He was also the first student to sit on the university's Academic Policy Council. In 1954, James graduated *summa cum laude* from WVSU. He was the only student in his graduating class to attain this level of excellence.

At WVSU, James also participated in ROTC. He was designated a distinguished military graduate, and upon graduation was commissioned as an artillery army officer, but soon transitioned to the medical corps. Since he was only 19-years-old when he graduated college, he was too young to be a commissioned officer in the army. As a result, he decided to continue his education and go to Howard University School of Medicine (HUSOM) in Washington, DC.

At HUSOM, James first became interested in endocrinology as a subspecialty. He credits faculty member Dr. Walter Lester Henry (AQA, Howard University College of Medicine, 1970, Faculty), who would become Chair of the Department of Medicine at HUSOM, as a catalyst for his interest. He describes Dr. Henry, an endocrinologist, as "one brilliant and fantastic gentleman."

A budding career and family

After finishing medical school Dr. Reed completed an internal medicine residency at Madigan Army Hospital in Tacoma, Washington. He then went on to do an endocrinology fellowship at the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF). Having spent two years in San Francisco, Dr. Reed was known to agree with the saying commonly attributed to Mark Twain, the "coldest winter I ever knew was a summer in San Francisco."

At UCSF Dr. Reed worked with Dr. Peter H. Forsham, a pioneer in the field of Type 1 diabetes mellitus. Dr. Forsham directed the Metabolic Research Unit from 1952 until his retirement in 1984.³

During his senior year in medical school, Dr. Reed married Edna D. Stone. Edna was completing her PhD in clinical psychology at the Catholic University in Washington, DC. They would have four children, David, Robert, Mary, and Katherine.

Upon completion of his fellowship, and still needing to complete his military commission, Dr. Reed was sent back to Madigan Army Medical Center where he was appointed Chief of Endocrinology, Director of the Clinical Research Center, and Director of the Endocrinology Fellowship Program. Through each of the appointments he was able to pursue his research interests in diabetes and hypertension.

In 1975, Dr. Reed's last military assignment was at Eisenhower Medical Center in Augusta, Georgia, where he started an Internal Medicine Residency Program that continues to thrive today.

After retiring from the army in 1980, Dr. Reed was offered a position as an Internal Medicine faculty member in the Division of Endocrinology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas. After having been there for several years, he was offered a chair position at Texas Tech but declined stating he "didn't like Texas much."

At that same time a two-year medical school in Atlanta was looking for someone to help build their graduate medical education programs so that they could transition to a four-year medical school. Dr. Reed jumped at the opportunity, and moved his family back to Georgia and the Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM).

Dr. Reed was recruited to MSM, by Dr. Louis W. Sullivan (AΩA, Boston University School of Medicine, 1957), who was then President of MSM, and would later become the Secretary of Health and Human Services under President George H.W. Bush. In the process of transitioning from a two-year medical school to a four-year medical school, Dr. Sullivan needed someone to help build the internal medicine department. Dr. Reed was the founding Program Director of the MSM Internal Medicine Residency Program, and Chair of the Department of Internal Medicine and Family Medicine. He is one of only a few leaders in medicine with the distinction of founding two internal medicine residency programs. Dr. Reed humbly states, “I guess I was just in the right place at the right time.”

Improving the health and life expectancy of ethnic minorities

During his early days at MSM, Dr. Reed and colleagues at the Emory School of Medicine in Atlanta, Dr. W. Dallas Hall, Dr. Neil Shulman (AΩA, Emory University School of Medicine, 1994, Alumnus), and Dr. Elijah Saunders, from the University of Maryland, established and developed the International Society for Hypertension in Blacks (ISHIB). ISHIB’s mission is to “improve the health and life expectancy of ethnic minority populations around the world.”⁴ In addition to serving as ISHIB president for five years, Dr. Reed was also the editor of the *Journal of Ethnicity and Disease*. According to former ISHIB CEO, Kermit Payne, “The journal became the benchmark of scholarly research on population differences in disease patterns of vulnerable and underserved minority populations.”

Dr. Reed chaired and participated in ISHIB’s international meetings in Nairobi, Kenya, London, England, Zambia, Cameroon, and Brazil. During the meetings, scientists and clinicians from around the world came together to share their research on hypertension, establish research protocols, and to develop clinical guidelines.

Dr. Reed also participated in developing hypertension guidelines as a member of Joint National Committee on Hypertension.⁴ He published numerous academic papers and helped establish hypertension and diabetes guidelines. He also authored three books including: *The Black Man’s Guide to Good Health*, with Dr. Neil Shulman,⁵ a book to help black men and their families take ownership of their health. The book takes a holistic approach to health and includes lifestyle change, prevention, and instructions on how to monitor one’s health.

An accomplished career

Dr. Reed was named a Master of the American College of Physicians (MACP) in 2004, and served as an international ambassador to the Middle East for the American College of Physicians. He has a named annual lectureship in the Department of Medicine at the MSM, and was presented the Legion of Merit by the United States Army for establishing a residency program with a 100 percent board pass rate.

Dr. Reed’s 34-year career at MSM solidified the school’s role as a premier medical school for those interested in caring for underserved and vulnerable populations. Through its mission to lead in the creation and advancement of health equity, MSM has played a key role in increasing the number of underrepresented minorities practicing medicine in the state of Georgia and beyond.

Through his pioneering work in hypertension, diabetes, and medical education, Dr. Reed blazed a trail few can match. His work is world renowned and continues to advance health equity in the United States and abroad.

Dr. Reed has mentored a multitude of young people of all races and ethnicities, instilling in each the words by which has lived his life and become a giant upon whose shoulders many stand, “You can’t change the circumstances of your birth—what you make of it is up to you.”

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