

**A Change Is Going To Come:**  
*The History of Dr. Roland Thomas Smoot*  
*At The Johns Hopkins Institutions*

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**History of African Americans at Johns Hopkins University Project**

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"Every man should at some time in his life take a look about him, and try to right the wrongs that he sees. One man can make the difference, and every man should try."

- *John F. Kennedy*

## **I. Introduction**

Over the course of 20th century, the United States of America saw a distinctive change in the racial make-up of physicians and specialists. Gradually, Blacks began to account for a large number of physicians in the United States of America. They found ways to educate themselves in their own institutions and rise above America's societal oppressions in order to acquire excellent education. Blacks ventured forth into the medical profession and excelled in each of its fields despite the Jim Crow segregation of the earlier part of the century that presented itself in their everyday lives. During the late 1940s and 1950s, hundreds of young Black men and women were taking flight from their country and city dwellings to head for Howard and Meharry Medical Colleges. There, they would receive the education and training that they needed in order to care for people, especially those from their own cultural background. One such exemplary individual was Dr. Roland Thomas Smoot. He, like thousands of other Black physicians, dedicated his life's work not only to providing new answers for the dilemma of inadequate Black health care, but also to providing quality health care for people of all colors.

Dr. Roland Thomas Smoot began to practice as a physician at a time when the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions as well as the United States of America was developing a change in attitude towards the admittance of Black physicians into the medical workforce. Dr. Smoot's career, in addition to the careers of many Black physicians, illustrates this change in the attitudes that Hopkins and America had which allowed for thousands of Black physicians to advance in the medical field. Dr. Roland Thomas Smoot, in particular, furthered and advanced the education and health care treatment of Blacks with the aid of numerous medical, hospital, and societal appointments.

## **II. In The Beginning**

Dr. Smoot was born to James Harvey Smoot of Foggy Bottom, Washington, D.C. and Beatrice Ward of Ironsides, MD on February 12, 1927, at 1429 Duncan Street, Northeast in Washington, D.C. James Harvey Smoot was a postal worker, and after Roland Thomas Smoot began elementary school, his mother sought employment as a domestic worker. Neither James Harvey nor Beatrice Smoot made much money. Although they were poor, they never let that limit them or their son. They worked hard to make sure that Roland was well fed, properly clothed, and that he never strayed from his academics.

James Harvey and Beatrice did not have any more children. As an only child, Roland Thomas grew to be a good listener and learned to play on his own. However, there was not much time for play in the Smoot residence. Every day, Roland would attend school, come straight home, and spend a healthy amount of time preparing his homework for the next day. Unless Roland was extremely sick, he never missed a day of school. Although Roland Thomas was very studious, as a young child, Roland wanted to be a garbage man. Faced with the perils of Jim Crow segregation and poverty, many Black children readily accepted and believed that striving for manual labor professions was a norm.

## **III. Early Education**

Like Roland, almost any Black child growing up in the District of Columbia (D.C.) in the 1930s and 1940s learned how to deal with "America's chronic disease": racism. Roland recounts what it was like growing up under Jim Crow segregation: "It was just something that we had to deal with and I just dealt with whatever I could. I really wasn't concerned about it so much." Many children like Roland had to travel considerable distances to get to a Black school and, in doing so, passed one or more White schools. Even in the nation's capital (Washington, D.C.), Blacks were still forced to live in separated communities strictly among each other. Roland walked five blocks past Kingman Park Elementary (all White) to go to Lovejoy Elementary, which was a Black elementary school. Despite the dismays of racism and segregation in D.C. and the "separate but [un] equal" school system, the Smoots continued to fight not only for their economic survival, but also for the best education their son could have.

Although society seemed to hint at the idea that Black children would grow up to acquire their highest potential, employment-wise, as industrialists, domestics, and farmers without adequate high school and college educations; Roland as well as his parents had every intention of his seeking an above standard high school and college education. Roland knew

early on that he was not destined for such a path.

One important thing that must be taken into account in order to understand why higher education was more difficult for Blacks to attain in Washington, D.C. during the first five decades of the 20th century was the fact that there were only 3 Black high schools in D.C. at that time. There was Dunbar (Academic) High School on one block and, right across the street, Armstrong (Technical) High School. The third high school, which was six or seven blocks away, was Cardozo (Business) High School. James Harvey had attended Armstrong High School but had not been accepted to Teacher's College. He wanted differently for his son, so he adamantly insisted that Roland Thomas go to Dunbar (Academic) High School.

Dunbar, itself, was one of the few places in D.C. where young Blacks could receive a quality education. It was the best Black high school, academically, in D.C. Several members of the Dunbar faculty had PhD degrees and chose to teach at the high school level because the salary was better than that at the Black college's level. A number of Dunbar's graduates went on to study at Ivy League Schools and other prestigious colleges in the country. Of the first six or seven Blacks to graduate from West Point Military Academy at least five were Dunbar graduates. The first Black to graduate from the Naval Academy was Wesley Brown, a classmate of Roland at Dunbar High School.

Roland, in particular, was an exceptional student in the areas of math and science. For this reason and because he was inspired by his physics and chemistry teachers, Roland ventured forth into medicine. To Roland, medicine was one of the four professions (i.e. medicine, education, law, or ministry) offered to Blacks at that time. Without hesitation, Roland quickly took leave of his childhood desires to be a garbage man and became steadfast and determined to complete all the necessary courses to prepare for a future in medicine. Roland also found time to become a captain in his high school ROTC program, like his father had done years prior.

Two weeks before Roland was to graduate from Dunbar High School in the late spring of 1944, he enrolled in Howard University's summer session as a premed student. On registration day for Howard's summer session, Roland's father accompanied him and attempted to pay for his tuition but Roland insisted on paying for it himself. Also during this summer session, Roland applied for and was granted a work scholarship that would begin later that fall.

#### **IV. Embarking On a Medical Journey**

As Roland began his undergraduate experience with the ranks of other Blacks at Howard (in hopes to immediately continue on to medical school), WWII was coming to an end in the outside world. Young men were being drafted from all walks of life, including those in or out of school. During early 1945, Roland talked to his Draft Board regarding deferment from the draft in the event that he was accepted to medical school in the fall of 1945. As a result, the Draft Board agreed that under the circumstances of medical school acceptance he would be deferred.

Thus, Roland applied to the College of Medicine of Howard University during the early part of 1945. But instead of a simple acceptance or rejection letter, Roland was summoned to meet with the Dean of the Medical School who informed him that he would not be accepted to medical school on the grounds that Roland was too young. Although the College of Medicine of Howard University would not allow Roland admission, Roland went on to complete his premedical requirements by the end of the summer session of 1945; earning the status of a college junior at the age of 18.

Because Howard's College of Medicine refused to accept Roland at such a young age, he was drafted into the US Army. Drafting of the nation's men for the Armed Services began once the United States entered World War II on December 7, 1941 and continued for several months after the war had officially ended. Roland, drafted one month after the war was over, served his country for 15 months (Sept. 24, 1945 – Dec. 9, 1946) and received a GI Bill that would later enable him to pay for his entire medical school education. In essence, Dr. Roland Thomas Smoot never paid a dime for his medical education.

Upon returning to Howard University in January of 1947 (the beginning of the winter quarter), the requirements for admission to Howard's College of Medicine had been changed such that a bachelor's degree was an added requirement. Roland made no mention of the fact that he had been in the military service and requested a tuition scholarship based on

the grades he had made at Howard prior to his leave of absence. He was granted the tuition scholarship, which funded his education until he completed his undergraduate degree in June of 1948: "I got my Bachelors of Science in 1948. So, in a sense, really, I was right on time. I finished high school in 1944 and I finished college in 1948. Then, I went to medical school that fall." Now an experienced, worldly, and educated man, Roland set out to take the transitional steps that would take him from an aspiring premedical student to a doctor seeking to establish better health care and health care education for Black people.

It must be noted that Howard's College of Medicine, like Meharry Medical College, was one of the various professional institutions, which illustrated how Blacks had begun to empower and educate themselves in their own institutions in order to better the health care and higher education of their own. Howard's College of Medicine, the first institution "established for the training of Negro doctors" opened its doors on November 9, 1868. Over the course of the next century and a half, it produced the largest number of Black physicians in the nation. With its well-educated and innovative professors, deans and presidents, Howard's College of Medicine would become a comforting and welcoming environment as well as an academic challenge to all those who sought its degrees.

Roland registered as a student of Howard's College of Medicine in the fall of 1948 and began his medical education along with dozens of other young Black men and women. Roland took on the academic challenges of Howard's College of Medicine and earned his medical degree in May of 1952. Dr. Roland Thomas Smoot, ready to take on whatever the practicing world had in store for him, promised himself that he would, one day, with this title, help change the face of Black health care and education.

On July 1, 1952, Dr. Smoot began his postgraduate training, known as a rotating internship, at the Kate Bitting Reynolds Hospital (Black City Hospital) in Winston Salem, N.C. This rotating internship was a one-year program, which involved practical training through rotations in medical, surgical, pediatric, OB GYN, and emergency room services.

On July 1, 1953, Dr. Smoot continued his postgraduate training at the Kate Bitting Reynolds Memorial Hospital as a first year resident in internal medicine. During that year, he spent six months on general medicine and six months on pediatrics. During his six months of pediatric training, the chief resident on Pediatrics at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine supervised him. Dr. Smoot also attended lectures and Grand Rounds on Pediatrics at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine while he was on the six-month pediatric rotation at the Kate Bitting Reynolds Memorial Hospital.

In July 1954, Dr. Smoot moved to the Tuskegee Hospital for Disabled Negro Veterans in Tuskegee, Alabama for additional postgraduate training in internal medicine and there he completed his second and third year medical residencies. At the time of his arrival in Tuskegee, the VA Hospital had an in-patient census of approximately 1800, which consisted of 1200 neuropsychiatric patients and 600 general medicine and surgery patients. This VA Hospital served all the Black veterans from Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Louisiana.

The VA Hospital in Tuskegee, Alabama was a historical institution incredibly significant to Black health care. It was erected in 1921 after endless debate from the Tuskegee Institute and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The Tuskegee Institute and the NAACP debated with White administrators that they felt that there was a serious need to have "an all-Negro staff to a publicly supported, all-Negro veteran's hospital." Thus, the Veteran's Bureau and the Tuskegee Institute agreed on the matter and put forth \$2.5 million to construct a hospital facility covering 300 acres of land. They decided that the hospital would belong to the Institute. The Tuskegee Veteran's Hospital, "consisting of six hundred beds in twenty-seven permanent buildings, to treat primarily neuropsychiatric patients, was completed and dedicated to Lincoln's Birthday, February 12, 1923." Upon completion of his residency, Dr. Smoot joined the Tuskegee Veteran's Hospital medical staff in 1956.

Dr. Smoot was unrelenting in assuring himself that he was on his way to success in his medical career. He was certain of his dreams to become a doctor who could treat people of all races, despite the fact that white hospital institutions would not allow for such a thing during his training era. He also aspired to acquire the best patient care for his own people. As a result, Dr. Smoot made his way to the South to experience the challenges of being a Black-practicing physician for Black people:

I always tell the story that most people are really not aware of what Tuskegee was about. Tuskegee was the fourth largest community hospital in this nation, at one time. They had as many as 2600 patients and the reason that they had it was because none of the VA's in Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, the lower part of Tennessee, or South Carolina took Black patients. The train that ran through Tuskegee or close to Tuskegee was called the Chehaw train. Twice a day, one way, it was going south and the other day it was coming north. When they unloaded those patients at 2:30, 3:00 in the morning, then all those patients you had to admit. Well, you got part of the next day off, but it was really something to see.

Since other local hospitals would not take Black patients, Dr. Smoot and his colleagues at Tuskegee faced challenging experiences as Black physicians trying to care for them. Patients would be rushed in at all times of the day and night. Although, at times, it got hectic at Tuskegee and Dr. Smoot and other Black physicians were over-worked and under-staffed, they took pleasure and pride in the fact that they were providing the best health care they could for Blacks.

## **V. Starting a Career and a Family**

Tuskegee was, indeed, the challenge that Dr. Smoot needed to prove to himself that his dreams of proper and adequate health care for Blacks could be made into reality. Tuskegee was also where Dr. Smoot's medical career took flight and where he began his family. There, not only did he find his calling to internal medicine, but he also met his wife, Minnie Lee Richardson, in little under a year: The Smoots met during Dr. Smoot's residency. [Minnie] was a night nurse, and he had night duty. The combination of circumstances conspired (as [Dr. Smoot] said, 'It was an occupational hazard') so that when he was trying to study for his specialty boards he spent a lot of time with her. Since going to see her was interrupting his studies, he backhandedly proposed, saying that if they got married he wouldn't have to travel back and forth so much. They were soon married; he took his books on their honeymoon but didn't open them.

Minnie, a graduate of the Tuskegee Institute, achieved her nursing degree and continued working at the VA Hospital of Tuskegee through the birth of their first son, Ronald Harding Harvey Smoot, on April 30, 1956. Upon maternity leave to give birth to Dr. and Mrs. Smoot's second son, Duane Thomas, on October 4, 1957, Mrs. Smoot retired from working at the Tuskegee VA Hospital to take care of their children. Dr. and Mrs. Smoot, later, had two more sons: Gregory Walter on January 4, 1960, and James Henry on December 11, 1964.

After Dr. Smoot received exceptional training from the best internship program for Black physicians at that time, he did not want to limit his efforts by stopping there. He had found a passion in internal medicine and planned to specialize in it despite the fact that there were only a handful of Black specialists in the nation. Dr. Smoot did some research and found that Baltimore had many general practitioners and a few Black specialists, but had no internal medicine specialists. So, in January of 1960, Dr. Smoot finished his residency at the Tuskegee VA Hospital, arranged for a position at the Provident Hospital of Baltimore, and headed north to Baltimore with his family; taking with him a new understanding of the deprivation in Black health care in the American South and the work to be done for the national advancement of Black people.

Once in Baltimore, the Smoot family stayed with Dr. Smoot's parents in D.C. Dr. Smoot immediately began his pre-arranged, part-time position at Provident Hospital, commuting daily between D.C. and Baltimore. Provident Hospital, also known as the Black city hospital, was one of the three hospitals in Baltimore where Black physicians were able to admit patients. The other two hospitals, however, had less than a handful of admitting Black physicians: Lutheran Hospital (est. 1960 and later known as Liberty Hospital) had just a few, and Sinai Hospital (est. 1866) had only one. In other hospitals, including VA hospitals, Black physicians were not exactly able to admit patients, but they were able to discharge them.

In October 1960, Dr. Smoot and his family moved into their own home in the Ashburton section of Baltimore. In January 1961, Dr. Smoot established his own private practice in the basement of his newly bought home. Dr. Smoot also found time to join the hospital staff of the Loch Raven VA Hospital as a part-time physician, work for the Social Security Department of Maryland, and publish his first medical work in the Journal to the National Medical Association.

Dr. Smoot was determined to practice as one of Baltimore's first internal medicine specialists, working diligently at Provident during the day and seeing patients through the night at home. Overwhelmed in this on-going struggle to put forth nothing less than the best as far as his medical career was concerned, Dr. Smoot found himself consumed by his work, leav-

ing little time for family life:

[T]rying to get a busy practice or trying to establish a practice was quite interesting. It consumed a significant amount of my time. As a result, my wife, one day, asked my second son what he wanted to be when he grew up. My son replied that he wanted to be a patient. My wife said to him, "what do you mean you want to be a patient?" He said, "You know, I want to come in and go down in the basement where the office is and talk to daddy and have daddy talk to me. You know, I never see daddy".

Dr. Smoot felt bad about missing many of his children's daily activities and parts of their upbringing, but he reassured himself that he was sacrificing these family moments not only for a better future for his children, but also for a better future for Blacks in general.

Dr. Smoot did, on the other hand, have an endless amount of time to see to it that his children received the best education possible. Dr. Smoot remembered the history of his parent's education and how hard his father had fought for his son's exemplary education. Dr. Smoot wanted the same, if not better, for his children. Upon the Smoot's arrival in Baltimore, they quickly saw to it that their children were enrolled in school. However, like most Northern cities, the Black public school and Black education system of Baltimore were ineffective and poor. Seeing the downfalls in the Black public school system of Baltimore as a serious breach in the better education of their sons, Dr. and Mrs. Smoot sent their four sons to a predominantly white private school which trained its students for Princeton University: Gilman. In addition to their efforts to give their sons the best education available, Dr. and Mrs. Smoot would later make tremendous contributions to the face of Black health care education.

## VII. Breaking down Barriers at Hopkins

In the fall of 1960, Dr. Smoot, in addition to his overwhelming schedule, started attending medical Grand Rounds at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine every Saturday, "because it was one of the best educational programs which [he] thought would be helpful [to his medical career]." Many times, he would be the only Black person attending these post-graduate, informational workshops. Although Dr. Smoot thought he only stood out in the crowd because he was Black, a professor of the medical school, Dr. Benjamin Baker, saw much more than that. Later that year, Dr. Baker invited Dr. Smoot to become a member of the Johns Hopkins Hospital Outpatient Staff.

Dr. Smoot was steadfast in taking on his new appointment as the third Black faculty member at Hopkins. He accepted the invitation to work in the Outpatient Center because Hopkins was so stellar. He admired "their pursuit of excellence with regard to medical care." However, once Dr. Smoot joined the staff, he was only allowed to admit patients under stringent circumstances. He only had the ability to dub Black patients, 'Ward patients' (meaning that he could have patients moved from one ward to another within the hospital once the patient had been admitted to the hospital by an admitting physician). In addition to this new 'title', he saw patients at night in his private practice at home. He also accepted an invitation to become a part of the University of Maryland Hospital Outpatient Center Staff. Thus, Dr. Smoot spent each week dividing his time between the chest clinic at Hopkins Hospital and the cardiac clinic at the University of Maryland Hospital.

In 1963, Dr. Smoot was appointed Chief of Medicine at Provident Hospital in recognition of his hard work and remarkable skill as an internal medicine specialist. The same year, he received his specialty boards in internal medicine, becoming the first Black Chief of Medicine in the hospital's history to have board certification in internal medicine. Dr. Smoot considered this feat to be one of his four greatest accomplishments. Dr. Smoot helped in the development of the hospital's infrastructure and patient care by strengthening the health care education of the hospital's doctors. He and his personnel handled all medical cases that came through the hospital. Dr. Smoot was taking his first steps in revolutionizing important aspects (e.g. efficient health care treatment and education) of Black health care. He continued to run the Black hospital and provide better Black health care at Provident Hospital for the next ten years. Dr. Smoot also tried as best as he could to spend time at home and be there for his children. In 1964, the Smoots had their fourth son at Provident Hospital. In every avenue of Dr. Smoot's life, then, things were on the rise.

1966 brought along one of his more memorable feats that would validate his mission in health care. After rising to a much-respected and professional status in the Johns Hopkins Hospital, Dr. Roland Thomas Smoot was granted the privilege of being the first Black physician to have admitting privileges at the hospital despite the fact that the hospital administration had stated that they "were not going to give any Blacks any admitting privileges until there had been one who was fully trained at the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions." In addition to this appointment, Dr. Smoot was made a part-time Instructor of Medicine at the medical school. The following year, he published his second medical paper, as a Hopkins Faculty member, in the Maryland State Medical Journal.

It appeared that Dr. Baker was not the only individual at Hopkins that took a liking to Dr. Smoot's excellent skill as a physician. Dr. Baker did everything in his power to see to it that Dr. Smoot had a chance to prove himself as a physician. He even referred some of his patients to Dr. Smoot upon his retirement. Dr. Smoot took his new title and began to provide

exceptional health care for all, White and Black alike. Dr. Benjamin Baker lived to be 100 years old and just recently died approximately two years ago. Reflecting upon Dr. Baker, Dr. Smoot admitted that he has never forgotten the many things, like equality in health care, that Dr. Baker stood for and how Dr. Baker had helped him to flourish in his medical career.

Later that year, Dr. Smoot moved his private practice out of his home and went into a partnership with a colleague of his, Dr. Donald Stewart, and a few other Black physicians. They established the Garwyn Medical Center, where Blacks could expect to be treated with fairness and respect from physicians of their own race. Apart from working for Hopkins, the University of Maryland, Provident Hospital, and a few other hospital facilities, Dr. Smoot, along with other physicians, found another way to improve Black health care. The Garwyn Medical Center, located at 2300 Garrison Boulevard Baltimore, MD 21216, is still in existence today.

Also, during this time, Dr. Smoot relieved himself of some of his other hospital staff appointments. As a result, he not only found more time to spend giving back to Blacks by securing the best education for them possible, but he also found more time to spend with his wife. Dr. and Mrs. Smoot began to play tennis together and with friends. In fact, at the age of 77, he still plays from 8:30pm- 11:00pm on Wednesday nights and from 5:00pm- 6:30pm on Saturdays.

By 1968, Dr. Smoot had earned his fourth appointment. He was invited to be a part-time Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. The University of Maryland was also where his wife, Minnie, began a Black health education initiative among nurses at the university's school of nursing as well as with those at the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing. Mrs. Smoot, being trained at the best nurses' training facility of her time, saw to it that these young ladies understood proper health care and learned to work around the harsh realities of racism in the health care system. Mrs. Smoot stopped at nothing to make sure that these young, Black women received the best health education available. She even went as far as to allow many of the nursing students to stay at the Smoot residence if they had financial difficulty.

On the medical side of things at JHUSOM and at the University of Maryland, the situation for the medical students had taken a turn for the worse. The University of Maryland had developed a high attrition (drop-out) rate among Black medical students and JHUSOM was beginning to follow suit. Black medical students were having many problems in the medical school systems of the Maryland/D.C. area. Among the medical students and the practicing physicians, there developed this attitude of, "I got mine to get. You got yours to get." They were not helping each other to survive in an extremely competitive field that already made them feel unwelcome and unworthy of the opportunity.

Dr. Smoot took note of what was going on and decided that a new attitude must come to fruition among the Black doctors in aid of the medical students: "We're going to do everything to see to it that you make it." Dr. Smoot (who later says that the event was not necessarily a pre-health initiative, but rather an affair originally started to encourage existing and prospective Black medical students to continue their medical education at JHUSOM and the University of Maryland) felt that if something bad was going on with the Black medical students, the Black practicing physicians should do everything in their power to make it proper. Thus, joining his wife in developing grass roots programs for young Black health care students in training, Dr. Smoot implemented an affair among existing Black medical students, prospective Black medical students, and Black practicing physicians to make sure that these students would receive the best education possible.

Utilizing his own funds, Dr. Smoot saw to it that some of the first matriculating Black medical students at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine (JHUSOM) and the Black medical students at the University of Maryland knew of the benefits these medical schools could provide to their education as well as their plights to improve Black health care: To orchestrate a social scene for them, Smoot paid out of pocket to host a reception that would bring together Black medical trainees and introduce them to practicing physicians in the community. The informal event turned out to hit the nail on the head, creating friendships and establishing networks that extended throughout the city.

He began having Hopkins and University of Maryland medical students meet at the Smoot residence annually (usually on the first week of November) to 'hang out' with a number of doctors in the Maryland/D.C. area. Dr. Smoot wanted the medical students to know that they were indeed welcome to the medical community and that they could make it at these institutions among their non-minority colleagues.

The affair was a huge success. Students found that the doctors were normal individuals who were just like them. The medical students, both existing and prospective, now realized that they could face the challenges of medical school head-on, for before the affair, they had no idea that they could. Later, in 1971, other departments of the University of Maryland, the Black Dental Society, the Black Pharmacy Society, and Chi Delta Mu joined the health alliance and helped fund the initiative:

Over the years, the guest list climbed to 700, and grew to include dental and pharmacy students from Hopkins and the University of Maryland whose departments chipped in to support the affair. Says Smoot, 'The students knew that there were people behind them.' For the Hopkins crowd, he notes, the strategy worked. Their grades and class ranks shot upward.

Dr. Smoot loved seeing the interactions and the bonds that formed between the doctors and the students. He later states that, "[The affair] was all about what I could give to them." This affair, which Dr. Smoot feels to be another one of his four greatest accomplishments, helped Dr. Smoot fulfill a promise that he had made to himself 30 years prior when he first started his quest for a medical education. Dr. Smoot had in yet another way furthered the education and advancement of Blacks in health care. Dr. and Mrs. Smoot's initiatives continued until lack of funds brought them to an end in 1995.

### **VIII. Achievements and Appointments**

Dr. Smoot recounts that he was most effective in the various medical societies he became a part of during the early 1960s. Throughout the 1970s, Dr. Smoot took on a number of titles in these various medical societies. In the earlier parts of the decade, he was a Fellow to the American College of Physicians (1970), president of the Maryland Thoracic Society (1972), a member of the Board of Directors (and the only physician member for 8 years) to Maryland Blue Shield, Inc., (1972-1984) a member on the Board of Directors of the Baltimore City Medical Society (1973), a member of the Governing Council of the Medical Chirurgical Faculty of the State of Maryland (1974), and a member to the Advisory Council to the ACP Governor of Maryland (1975). In the latter parts of the decade, Dr. Smoot became president of the Baltimore City Medical Society (1978) and a member of the Board of Directors of The Maryland Society for Medical Research, Inc. (1978).

Back at Hopkins, Dr. Smoot had now achieved the title of Assistant Professor of Medicine (1974). That same year, he was also invited to join the University of Maryland Hospital Staff. In 1978, he was appointed Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at JHUSOM. His appointment as the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs aided the minority medical students at JHUSOM in their plights to attain their medical school education, which was becoming a more and more difficult thing to acquire each year.

In order to advise, counsel, and mentor the minority medical students the institution implemented Dr. Smoot's position. Dr. Smoot felt that minorities, especially, needed to be directed and counseled in venturing forth into the medical field: "My position at Hopkins Med helped in the fact that I got to speak to students who were having a lot of problems. I got to help them resolve those problems. I got to reassure them that the situations they were in were not unusual and that people had been in similar situations and had made it through okay... It was great at Hopkins not only because it was one of the leading places to practice medicine, but also because minorities had a passion and desire to pursue excellence in medicine."

Dr. Smoot states that he enjoys counseling and mentoring. He feels that mentorship is very important. When asked what compelled him to take on such a position at a time when others failed to light such a torch, Dr. Smoot simply states, "I just wanted them to know that they had what it took to make it. They had the ability to do anything anybody else could." Dr. Smoot also states that it was his value of the pursuit of excellence in any setting that motivated him to be the incredible Assistant Dean of Students that he was to JHUSOM.

Although Dr. Smoot just enjoyed 'advising and mentoring' the JHUSOM students, he does not fail to highlight the fact that it is very important for all Black doctors to advise and mentor. "[Black doctors] must bring up those behind [them], because we're just as capable of achieving as is everyone else." Dr. Smoot feels that his position allowed him to not only counsel, mentor, and advise, but it also allowed him to "let young minorities know what to do, how to do it, and how to go forth from it." So, one finds that in addition to his positions and duties in the aforementioned organizations, Dr. Smoot continued to practice and venture forth in new medical avenues to make sure that Blacks continued to have above standard

education and medical treatment.

Apart from playing significant roles in his profession, Dr. Smoot still managed to find a large amount of time to play various roles in the medical societies, boards and community organizations he had joined decades before. The Medical Chirurgical Faculty of the State of Maryland (Med-Chi) has played an integral part in the history of Maryland as a medical society. It has also helped fight for the rights and proper treatment of Blacks in health care. However, in all of its history, Med-Chi had never had a Black president nor had it, up until 4 decades ago, allowed its Black members full membership. Blacks were not allowed to become members of the medical society no matter how hard they tried to prove themselves worthy of the title. Med-Chi, at that time, had no intentions of making an African American a full-fledged member. Conversely, they had no idea what were in the future makings of its membership or executive racial make-up.

In 1983, Dr. Smoot received an appointment that would highlight the plight of his career. He was the first African American to be elected president of the 6,000-member organization (an achievement that another African American would not accomplish until 21 years later) after 23 years of service, "working his way up through the hierarchies of the Faculty, and always encouraging an active stance on medical issues." Dr. Smoot, admitting that this appointment was indeed one of his four greatest accomplishments, recounts why he originally joined Med-Chi and reflects on what was going on at that time in his life:

I was involved with organizing medicine. I joined the State Medical Society and the City Medical Society in the early part of 1961 and I became president of the Baltimore City Medical Society in 1978. Then, in 1983, I became president of the State Medical Society, which is known as [Med-Chi]. And I did that from April '83 until April '84. During that time I had some health problems and had bypass surgery in January of 1984. Dr. Levi Watkins, who was a friend and colleague of mine over at Hopkins, performed the surgery... On top of that, I became, a year later, one of the delegates from the State of Maryland to the AMA until 1995. [That year], I also became a 40-year member in the medical society and [was] relieved of having to pay dues.

This appointment gave Dr. Smoot the voice he needed to express his concerns about Black education and health care reform and its effects on the Black community.

Dr. Smoot handled his position with the 'utmost dexterity' as sources say and remained an active and involved member even after his presidency. As an emeritus member, he is still very active today.

Dr. Smoot's presidency at Med-Chi was not one of his last positions in the least. Throughout the 1980s, Dr. Smoot took up a number of other positions and duties in various societies and organizations. As the decade unfolded, Dr. Smoot became President of Maryland Consortium for High Blood Pressure Control (1979-1982), a member of the Board of Directors of the Maryland Medical Political Action Committee (MMPAC) (1982), and Delegate to the American Medical Association (1984). Another notable position came about when Dr. Smoot was elected president of the Baltimore City Medical Foundation in 1986. In addition to becoming the vice president of the Organization of State Medical Association Presidents (OSMAP), he remained the president of the Baltimore City Medical Society for the next four years.

Finally, Dr. Smoot notes that he considers his memberships and positions in these various medical societies, in addition to meeting and taking a picture with President Ronald Reagan during his years as a member to the BOD of MMPAC, to be the last and fourth of four greatest accomplishments. Also, in the latter parts of the decade, Dr. Smoot published two more research articles in the Journal of the National Medical Association. He was also the vice president of the Liberty Medical Staff from 1986-1989.

Dr. Smoot sold his practice in September of 1991 to permit more time for his research interests and relieve himself of practicing responsibilities. Dr. Smoot relieved himself of some of his hospital staff duties at the various facilities where he resided on the medical staff. In 1995, he left the Liberty Medical Staff.

## IX. Life for Smoot Today

Presently, Dr. Smoot remains on the medical staff of two hospitals: Johns Hopkins Hospital and St. Agnes Hospital. Today, he is still the Assistant Professor of Medicine and the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at JHUSOM. To date, Dr. Smoot is still a member of the Board of Directors of MMPAC, a member to the Board of Directors of The Maryland Society for Medical Research, Inc., and various other minority scholarship committees, mentor-ships, and minority educational organizations. Also, during this time, Dr. Smoot (in his 60s) and his second son, Duane Thomas, began skiing in addition to Dr. and Mrs. Smoot's late night/early morning tennis playing.

Dr. Smoot finds that the only thing that keeps him going these days is his research of breast cancer. Cancer is also another disease that plagues hundreds of thousands of Black Americans each year. Most often, African Americans have the highest incidences of any type of cancer. Cancer has become one of the new plagues among Blacks. It has become responsible for much of the high mortality rate among Blacks. As has been a condition of the past, many Blacks fail to get proper education regarding prevention and adequate health care during treatment. Instead of going back into medical practice, Dr. Smoot found a new way to aid in the better health care treatment of Blacks. In 1996, he began to conduct breast cancer research because it was a cancer of particular interest to him. Dr. Smoot has been conducting his research at JHUSOM and

at other labs for the past 8 years. When asked what continues to draw him to research at the age of 77, Dr. Smoot simply replies, "Oh, [it's] just what keeps me going these days." Each day, Dr. Smoot continues to make further advancements in the realms of his research.

At the close of the 2003-2004 academic year, Dr. Smoot will retire from the positions of Assistant Dean of Student Affairs and Assistant Professor of Medicine at JHUSOM. However, Dr. Smoot does not feel that he is retiring at all: I don't think I'm really going to retire because, you see, I'm leaving retirement. I don't want to get in the rocking chair as yet, so I'm still planning on doing some things and I had some research, which I want to continue. I'll do everything to make it possible [to conduct my research]. So, yes, I don't necessarily feel that it's retirement. I think that I am at the age where a number of people are doing it and have done it, but that's not in my plans.

Dr. Smoot will remain at JHUSOM as a researcher and plans to dedicate more time to his grandchildren and his many societal, organizational, and community activities where he plans to delve into the issues of health care reform. He also plans to spend more days a week playing tennis.

Dr. Smoot also comments on the history of Maryland and the history of Johns Hopkins over the course of the past 44 years. He states that Blacks have come a long way in medicine and hints that Blacks still have many great strides to make: [A]s far as I am concerned, we have led a tremendous amount of progress... [I] have seen, really, a significant change in a period of time and the whole of Black physicians have not only had considerable increases in responsibility, but have really gone up in administration. And it's just now that we do have some of us who can mentor others as to how to get there... [I]ve seen a lot of changes just because of the policies that occurred... [I]ve lived through all of that and I've seen it, and it's just amazing as to what has happened in this town. Some of the youngsters will never have the knowledge of knowing or the experience of having had to work through that.

Throughout his medical career, Dr. Smoot has never forgotten his initial plights and promises to the advancement and further education of Blacks in health care. However, Dr. Smoot does feel that there are some things that he has learned that he would want those following his lead to be conscious of; things that he was not aware of until much later in his career. When asked what he wants the rest of the world to know from the legacy that he will leave behind, Dr. Smoot replies, "Remember one thing: everybody that's Black ain't your friend. Everybody White ain't your enemy." He also feels that it is very important for young, Black medical students to get their certification in whatever specialty they practice: "Specialty board is only important when you don't have it. You must remember to finish everything that you do." Dr. Smoot remains unrelenting in sending important messages like these to Black health professions students and promoting the education and treatment of Blacks in health care.

## **X. Reflection**

Dr. Smoot was one of the thousands of Black physicians who fought to achieve and practice in a society that, initially, refused to allow Black physicians to even practice on people of their own race let alone patients of any racial background. He, like many other Black health care professionals, dedicated his life to not only the advancement of Blacks in all facets of education, but also to making sure that patients received above standard and sufficient health care regardless of their race, color, or creed. From his childhood to his senior years, his life emanates the ideals of struggle, hard work, and progress. His parents, born in a post slavery age, saw to it that his education was not limited by the perils of racism or Jim Crow's laws of segregation. The Smoots pushed Roland to be the successful and accomplished man that he is today, and for this, Dr. Smoot remarks that he is extremely grateful.

Dr. Smoot joined the ranks of many Blacks at the later part of the 20th century to change the face of health care, desegregate White institutions and facilities, and to see to it that their people would no longer suffer from inadequate and poor health care. Dr. Smoot was part of a generation that moved mountains. They built schools of their own, they built hospitals of their own, they educated themselves, and they made so many great strides that society had no choice but to fold and grant them some sort of partial equality and liberty via legislation and social recognition.

Dr. Smoot played integral roles in struggles, movements, and advancements, as many African American physicians did and are still doing today. He, like many other outstanding doctors in the history of Hopkins, Maryland, and the United States, broke down huge barriers and helped nurture the development of Black education and health care, opening doors to integration and equality.

In reflection of the words of the honorable and late President John F. Kennedy, Dr. Smoot has done everything in his power to right the wrongs around him. He has made a huge impact on all those he has come in contact with. Dr. Smoot has made his mark in the history books and shall live on as a doctor who devoted his life's work to the progress, advancement, and better treatment of his people as a physician and as a human being. Dr. Smoot has, indeed, made a difference in the African American community, past and present. With the ideals he has implemented in young Black health professionals, every man and woman he has affected will be able to try to do the same for future generations.

Dr. Smoot lives on, remembering the innumerable and extraordinary changes he has witnessed over the past 7 decades. He hopes that America's history of Jim Crow segregation and improper health care treatment based on race will not repeat itself. He feels that upholding the ideas of mentoring, 'giving back', and Black progression will help these ugly truths of the past to never reoccur. Despite his various titles and accomplishments, Dr. Smoot has never forgotten the importance of leadership and mentorship and has shown this in various walks of his life (e.g. the health care education affair started in 1968 and his position as the Assistant Dean of Students at JHUSOM).

He broke down barriers in medicine and was able to serve people of his own cultural background in health care and education. Dr. Smoot, like other Black doctors at Hopkins and around the US, is responsible for the exponentially increasing number of minority health care professionals, minority physicians, and minority pre-health students entering today's health care systems, those who venture forth to eradicate the remaining traces of racism and inequality in education and health care.

Although I feel that America may never find another individual quite like Dr. Roland Thomas Smoot, the ideals and life lessons he's shared and leaves behind with us prospective and existing medical students is enough to ensure that a future individual will, someday, make similar, impeccable accomplishments and achievements, if not even more. Where many of the premed and med students of the Maryland/D.C. area would be without the help of Dr. Smoot and various African American physicians is a thought I am not sure is very pleasant to conjure. In working with and documenting the life and times of Dr. Roland Thomas Smoot, I have learned the most important lesson I will ever need to know in pursuing a medical career: I will, one day, become a doctor. I will succeed!

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