

# Negro Surgeon, World Plasma Expert Derides Red Cross Blood Segregation

By JOEL FRANCIS

WASHINGTON—No Negro blood accepted but . . .

When the terrible blitz raids on London in September, 1940, killed and wounded thousands and an emergency call went out to America for dried blood or transfusions, it was an American Negro surgeon to whom English medical men appealed to organize and send U.S. blood plasma overseas.

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When the American Red Cross set up its first blood collection center in New York for our own armed forces, it was a Negro surgeon who was selected to supervise the entire project and expand the system to every city in the U.S.

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When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and maimed hundreds of American soldiers and sailors, it was blood collected by a Negro surgeon that saved their lives.

That Negro surgeon, Dr. Charles R. Drew, head of Howard University's department of surgery, is one of the world's greatest authorities on the collection and preservation of blood plasma for emergency transfusions . . . yet his own blood if taken by the Red Cross today would be segregated and not used by the U. S. Army if the life of a white soldier depended on an immediate transfusion.

## Called To War Duty

Dr. Drew, a quiet, unassuming man, was called from the university for war duty early in World War I. A series of articles by him and Dr. John Scudder stamped him as the outstanding man in the blood plasma field. When the Blood Transfusion Betterment association started collecting blood for the British, it was Drew they selected to head the work. The association president wired Drew at that time: "I am requested to offer this position and all it involves to you as being best qualified of anyone we know to act in this important development."

Today Drew looks back on the early stages of that work for the British wounded and smiles ironically at the changes that have come about in blood-collecting under the supervision of the Red Cross.

"Up until Pearl Harbor neither the British project nor the Red Cross differentiated the bloods of various races except purely as a matter of statistics," explained Dr. Drew at his Howard University post this week.

## Controversy

"Then the Surgeon General of the Army began to receive letters—especially from misinformed whites—saying they would rather have their sons and relatives die than receive the blood of a Negro by transfusion. Since then a bitter controversy has arisen which has been based mainly on distortion of facts. First the Red Cross issued an order refusing entirely to take Negro blood. Protests not only from Negroes but from well-informed doctors on the Red Cross project finally had the order re-



DR. CHARLES R. DREW

scinded and today Negro blood is accepted but segregated.

"The question then arises—is there a difference between the blood of different races?"

"Is it possible to transmit the traits and characteristics of one race to a member of another race by means of blood transfusion?"

"Is it possible to implant by blood transfusion potentialities in an individual of one race that will show up in succeeding generations?"

Dr. Drew was serious although this reporter smiled thinking of reports that beef blood plasma was being experimented with in blood transfusions. Some speculations included the possibility of a baby come to life with a "moo" instead of crying.

## Cites Fears

"No, these are not humorous questions to some people. They are important not only for white people who fear that they or their offspring will get Negro characteristics but by good people who fear they may get the blood of bad people and thereby lose some of their virtue. Or by healthy people who may have the blood of less healthy people infused in their veins," Dr. Drew continued.

"One cannot say that there are no differences in bloods of different races," Dr. Drew pointed out.

"But one can say without any hesitation that no difficulties have been shown to exist between the bloods of different races which would in any way counter-indicate the use of the blood from an individual of one race for the purpose of transfusion to an individual of another race providing bloods were of the same group.

"May I quote from a recent book by Alexander S. Wiener, serologist in the office of the chief medical examiner of New York City. He has this to say:

"By means of serological tests, the proteins and cells of animals of any species can be differentiated, as a rule, from those of animals belonging to other species. On the other hand, attempts to produce sera which would serve to differen-

tiate the bloods of different races particularly in the human species have been unsuccessful.

"There are many theories on the origin of blood groups. Two of the outstanding authorities, Landsteiner and Levine, attempted to study the racial distribution of factors in the blood necessary for agglutination. One of these factors is known as the agglutinin (an inherited substance in the blood cells which makes possible agglutination or clumping). Most of the races thus far examined have the same or a similar distribution of this blood factor.

## No Differences

"Weiner concludes that the importance of blood grouping for anthropology has probably been overestimated, however, and its limitations should be recognized. Thus whereas certain morphological traits, such as the slanting eyes of the Mongolians, the black skin and curly hair of the Negro, clearly indicate racial derivation of an individual, the presence of a particular blood group or type is not peculiar to any race.

"Therefore this still leaves the problem a social one, and like all other social problems where prejudice between races is concerned great difficulties face anyone who attempts to analyze the problems away. There are many white people who simply do not like Negroes and their reason for not liking them is that their fathers did not like Negroes nor their fathers before them. They have been taught since infancy that Negroes are an inferior race—therefore unacceptable socially. There are many who have a real fear born of ignorance that the blood of a Negro carries with it the possibility of their offspring having dark skin and other characteristics of the Negro race.

"Only extensive education, continued wise government and an unceasing fight on our part to disseminate the scientific facts and raise our levels of achievement can overcome this prejudice which to a large extent is founded on ignorance."