

100 YEARS OF GROUNDBREAKING BLACK LIFE SCIENTISTS



BioTechniques

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William Augustus Hinton develops a syphilis diagnostic test based on antibody-antigen clumping, later developing the Davies-Hinton test, using spinal fluid for syphilis detection.

1927

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Ruth Ella Moore becomes the first Black woman in the US to earn a natural sciences PhD, securing a doctorate in bacteriology from Ohio State University that contributed toward an eventual cure for tuberculosis.

1930

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Percy Lavon Julian is the first to synthetically make the drug physostigmine, used to treat glaucoma and anticholinergic toxicity. His later work with soybean products lead to the synthesis of the steroids progesterone and cortisone.

1935

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Charles Drew develops a method for preserving blood plasma for extended periods, providing the foundation for large-scale blood banks and laying the groundwork for cell and organ transplant techniques.

1937

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Herman Branson co-discovers the alpha-helix protein structure.

1938

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Henrietta Lacks is diagnosed with cervical cancer. The cells taken from her biopsy are used to set up the HeLa cell line used in research to this day, without her consent ever having been given for this purpose.

1947

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Alma Levant Hayden becomes the Chief of the Spectrophotometer Research Branch in the Division of Pharmaceutical Chemistry at the FDA, where she uses infrared spectrometry to expose Krebiozen as a fraudulent 'cure' for cancer.

1951

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Having developed the first wire precision resistor, patented in 1959, Otis Boykin develops an electrical resistor that later makes implantable pacemakers possible.

1961

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Juanita Page Cooke's work on protein folding in the team of Christian Boehmer Anfinsen Jr. contributes to his receipt of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for revealing the structure of the enzyme ribonuclease.

1963

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LaSalle Doheny Leffall, Jr. becomes the first Black president of the American Cancer Society, creating programs dedicated to cancer health disparities among Black people. A year later, he becomes the first Black president of the American College of Surgeons.

1964

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Patricia Era Bath invents laserphaco, a device for cataract surgery.

1966

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Marilyn Hughes Gaston demonstrates that long-term penicillin treatment could prevent septic infections in children with sickle cell disease (SCD) leading to universal newborn screening for SCD in all 50 states by 1987.

1967

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John David Carpten's groundbreaking research identifying genomic factors behind higher prostate cancer rates in African American men leads to the formation of the African American Hereditary Prostate Cancer Study – the first genomic study to identify prostate cancer susceptibility genes in African Americans.

1972

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Omowunmi Sadik receives the SUNY Research Foundation's Outstanding Inventor Award for her development of novel microelectrode biosensors. Initially for detecting environmental pollutants, her work has since been used in food safety, disease diagnosis, the detection of explosives and bioterror threats.

1977

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Kenneth Carleton Frazier becomes the first African-American CEO of a major pharma company, Merck & Co.

1978

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Dame Ijeoma Uchegbu is the first to demonstrate that peptides can be delivered across the blood-brain barrier to elicit a pharmacological response and to provide definitive pharmacological and pharmacokinetic evidence of peptide transport into the brain.

1982

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Kizzmekia Shanta Corbett-Helaire pivots on her foundational work with Coronaviruses to focus on creating a vaccine candidate for SARS-CoV-2, sharing the modified spike protein sequence with Moderna and leading the NIH team that collaborated with them to develop the vaccine, working to demonstrate the capability of mRNA vaccines.

1986

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Ronke Mojoyinola Olabisi receives funding from the 100 Year Starship Project to develop a method to achieve wound healing without a scar.

1987

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