

W. MONTAGUE COBB

In First Person: An Oral History

Lewis E. Weeks
Editor

HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATION ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
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W. Montague Cobb

CHRONOLOGY

- 1904 Born Washington, DC, October 12
- 1925 Amherst College (Blodgett Scholar) B.A.
- 1925 Marine Biological Laboratory, Woods Hole, MA
Certificate in Embryology
- 1928-1930 Howard University, M.D.
- 1929-1930 Freedman's Hospital, Washington, DC, Intern
- 1932 Western Reserve University, Ph.D. in Anatomy and
Physical Anthropology
- 1932-1934 Howard University
Assistant Professor of Anatomy
- 1933-1939 Western Reserve University
Fellow in Anatomy
- 1934-1942 Howard University
Professor of Anatomy
- 1945 Surgeon General's Office
Civilian Consultant
- 1949-1977 Journal of the National Medical Association
Editor

CHRONOLOGY

(continued)

1947-1969 Howard University
 Head, Department of Anatomy

1953-1961 Public Health Advisory Council of the District of
 Columbia, Member (Chairman 1956-1958)

1957-1959 Catholic University of America
 Lecturer in Physical Anthropology

1965 White House Conference on Health,
 Member of the Executive Committee

1969-1973 Howard University
 Distinguished Professor of Anatomy

1972 Stanford University
 Visiting Professor of Anatomy

1973- Howard University
 Professor Emeritus

1974 University of Maryland
 Visiting Professor of Anatomy

1979 University of Arkansas Medical Science Center
 Distinguished University Professor

MEMBERSHIPS & AFFILIATIONS

Alpha Omega Alpha

American Academy of Arts & Sciences, Fellow

American Anthropological Association, Fellow

American Association of Anatomists, Member

American Association of History of Medicine, Member

American Association of Physicians

(Vice President 1948-1950, President 1967-1969)

American Eugenics Society, Director 1957-1968

American Society of Mammologists, Member

Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Member

Anthropological Society of Washington, President 1949-1951

Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Member

Bulletin of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of the District of Columbia

Founder, 1941; Editor, 1945-

Gerontological Society, Fellow

Marine Biology Laboratories, Woods Hole, MA

Certificate in Embryology

Medico-Chirurgical Society of the District of Columbia

Recording Secretary, 1935-1941; President, 1945-1947

MEMBERSHIPS & AFFILIATIONS

(continued)

NAACP

President 1976-

National Medical Association

President 1964-1965

National Urban League

Health Specialist 1945-1947

Omega Alpha Omega

Omega Psi Phi

Sigma Xi

AWARDS

Amherst College

D. Sc., 1955

Chicago Defender

Citation, 1943

Georgetown University

Sc.D., 1978

Government of the District of Columbia

Meritorious Public Service Award, 1972

Medical College of Wisconsin

Sc.D., 1979

Medical Society of the District of Columbia

Meritorious Public Service Award, 1968

Medico-Chirurgical Society of the District of Columbia

Distinguished Service Award, 1952

Morgan State College

LL.D., 1964

National Medical Society

D.S.M., 1955

AWARDS

(continued)

Opportunity Magazine

Citation, 1947

U.S. Navy

Distinguished Public Service Award, 1978

Washington Afro-American

Citation, 1948

University of Witwatersrand

LL.D., 1977

BOOKS

Human Archives. Cleveland: Western Reserve University, 1932

What is Man: Synopses of Lectures on Human Anatomy. Washington, DC: Howard University (textbook), 1935

The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology of Howard University. Washington, DC: Howard University, 1936

The First Negro Medical Society: A History of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of the District of Columbia, 1884-1939. Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, Inc., 1939

Index of the American Journal of Physical Anthropology, Volumes I-XXII 1918-1937. Mexico: Instituto Panamericano de Geografia e Historia, 1941

COBB:

As you know, Dr. Weeks, I was born here in Washington seventy-six years ago on October 12, 1904. Our family were poor. However, we always had enough to eat although nothing extra. I am deeply grateful to my parents because they did not teach me to hate. Our home was in a row house as 1326 T Street, NW. There were a few white families in the block. From the back window of our house, I could see the Dennison School, which was a white school, on the next street, S Street. When General L'Enfant planned this city, the interior of each of the blocks was supposed to have a park in it, but that design was never realized. After the Civil War there was a tremendous influx of freedmen coming into Washington. During that period in a huge number of blocks around the city what were later called the "alley dwellings" were put up. They stayed there until FDR came in and Mrs. Roosevelt helped create a national scandal about it. I, in a crude way, noticed that the children playing in the yard at Dennison School were of light complexion, and that the people who lived in the other dwellings were darker, but there was no hard division of boys in the alley playing with the boys on the street. One feature of the alley dwellings, more or less throughout the city, seemed to be that in one of those little houses there would always be what we would call the "Jew store" where some immigrant Jewish family lived.

The one in the alley back of our house was headed by a bearded rabbi. He wore his yarmulke on the regular days.

Now, I was anxious to go to school and my parents told me that when I was four I could go to school. I thought I would go right back there to Dennison, which I could see, but, when the time came for me to be registered, I was taken several blocks away to the Patterson School. I became, in a way, race-conscious then, but not acutely so. When I asked "Why is all this?" instead of telling me that's all whitey's fault and giving me a basis for hating the white man, they didn't.

They said, "You'll learn about it as you grow older."

And I did. I consider the fact that they did not teach me to hate anybody as having been very fundamental. I have since found it difficult for both my colored and white friends to understand that.

When in 1977 I had come back from South Africa as a member of the NAACP Task Force, which went over there, and was promptly invited to give a summation, a talk, at the Cosmos Club, I said that all my life I have been like the chimpanzee whom the learned professor locked in a room and then put his eyes to the keyhole to observe total behavior of the chimp. The professor couldn't see anything. After a time he realized that the chimp was looking back at him. As I slowly assimilated the common talk about racial differences and racial superiority with the white man doing nearly all the talking, I had been looking back at him and have not yet seen anything overly impressive. I have been in school with black boys -- some of whom had been smarter than I -- and also with white boys, many of whom, though highly selective, were dumber than me. So, you might say, in earliest life I got conditioned to objectivity.

My parents, and particularly my grandparents, had been in the habit of

buying books. I did not know that most people did not do that. I was permitted to look through the books and one particular one, Johnson's Natural History, was full of pictures. I think I got oriented to anatomy before I could read. I have this first volume here, which is called The Animal Kingdom Illustrated. You see, my great grandfather, whose picture you saw, gave that to his wife, in 1871. Now, telling you what it was like at that time, there were routine bills you had to pay; there was the grocery bill. Batters' Grocery Store down on the corner of 13th and T, half a block away from my house, was run by an Irish family. You had your little book and when you went down to get a pint of milk, which costs a nickel, you would write it in the book. We burned oil for light and oil stoves. The oil man came around on a truck and you'd get one or two gallons of oil. You had to pay the gas man. So, among those routines the book collectors would come around. You bought books on time, and I did not realize that everybody did not do that. They didn't have high pressure salesmanship then. (You can see, they don't even make books like this now, with this gilt binding.) You would order a book, and a man would come around once a month (you would learn his day), to collect for the books you were buying.

As I say, I looked through the pictures in this book and before I could read I had impressions. Now there are certain things you see in this book published in 1871. Some of the typical treatment...here is the Apollo Velvedere representing the Caucasian type. Then there's Genghis Khan representing the Mongolian type. There is an African Negro, the King of the Ashanti. Here is an American Indian and here a Malay, you see. Now, back in 1871, that's over 100 years ago! For a young child, you got a more objective perspective on the different types because all these pictures are dignified.

Harvard was our first university. Right now, if you were a college student in 1981, and this is a book by Earnest Albert Hooton, Up from the Ape, which he used as a text [Shows book]. He had many physical types shown in this book, and you see this as a college student now and you haven't been exposed to any of these things before. There is a page which shows Mediterranean type, and here's one that shows the Iranian plateau type, and other physical types. We have East Baltic and that sort of thing, you see. Now, when we get over into other things, this is the picture that Hooton put in his modern book representing the American Negro, born in South Carolina. What would you think when you looked at that in respect to these other types? That this was something not as good. So, this kind of preverted teaching has come right down in our own century. This book was published in 1947 but that has nothing to do with the type of the presentation. So, I was fortunate too in early perceptions. I had a criterion by which to compare and I could go to that. This book published over 100 years ago is much better than most of the things produced today, because these people had greater breadth of background.

WEEKS:

Lack of bias there.

COBB:

Yes, and also a sense of responsibility. That book was old then because it's an edition of an older work. So, the recognition got to me then that quality is to be sought more than quantity. There's a tremendous tonnage of bilge coming out today because the publishing houses have to keep going. Gradually I learned, not all of a sudden, that a dateline in a book didn't mean anything. Some of the books that my wife, as a public school teacher, used to use as reference works for her own work as an elementary school

teacher are infinitely better than many of the current books. Of course, the reason for that is that salesmanship is in it now. Each year the salesmen want to promote and get a whole product of their own house adopted and throw out everything else, but much is lost. The quality level is not maintained that way.

The public school to which I first went was Patterson School. It was named for a Negro woman, Mary Jane Patterson, who graduated from Oberlin College in 1862. The custom was, that when a colored school got overcrowded, they'd put up a portable in the yard. Patterson School, at the time I went there, had two portables in the yard, and there was no room for another, so they rented the basement of a Seventh Day Adventist Church, which is across the street, and put up some blackboards and tables for little children, and that's all. My memories of the kindergarten, which I attended when I was four, have always been pleasant. Without my trying to analyze it I know now why. It was because the teachers loved the children and they had them doing something every day that was good. There was no discipline problem. I was eager to go to kindergarten. So I put down that Miss Williams and Miss Montgomery were wonderful ladies.

Now, there were two schools together, Patterson School and then Garnet School. The first six grades were in Patterson and the seventh and eighth in Garnet. Garnet School was named for Henry Highland Garnet, who was a Negro minister who had at one time served as Chaplain of the Senate -- I don't remember that date. But, we were taught those things way back there in 1910. We were getting Negro history. Our family were Presbyterians and the minister of our church, Reverend Francis J. Grimke, married my parents in 1903 and christened me in 1904. In 1909 when the NAACP was formed, Rev. Grimke was one

of the founders. Thus my identification with the NAACP, you could say, has been almost prenatal.

Then, as now, a part of being a minister was supposed to carry many oratorical abilities. Dr. Grimke was considered dry, but Presbyterians do not proselyte much and I was early impressed with his dignity and the respect in which he was held. He never even had a horse and buggy. He always walked. Even in this later years he maintained visiting in his parish calls; he never stayed long. He was very meticulous that every church meeting should start right on the minute. He would start even if there were two people there. That was important. He read his sermons. He had been educated. Well, he came from South Carolina and at that time you could go to the Princeton Theological Seminary, although you could not go to the university. He got his Doctor of Divinity degree at Princeton.

This church, the 15th Street Presbyterian Church, is one of the most distinguished in Washington, although you would never learn about that. It was founded in 1841 by a Rev. John F. Cook. Cook was a liberated slave who had learned to read by stealth. It was illegal to teach a Negro how to read or write in this area. But in the District of Columbia there had been a number of, what one might call, missionary house schools, run mostly by white women from New England. Cook had become very avid about education.

In 1835 they had what are called the "Snow Riots" in Washington, during which white vandals raided every house where they had information that Negro children were being taught, and pulled all the books out on the street and burned them. They did not attack any of the teachers, except more than to warn them to quit and leave town, but they sought Cook to kill him. He escaped, however, and came back. In 1841 he founded the 15th Street

Presbyterian Church. Later, the first public high school for anybody in the District of Columbia was founded in the basement of that 15th Street Presbyterian Church.

My grandmother pledged me to the White Ribbon Recruits at the age of two. That was the juvenile branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. That proved to be a bit premature. As soon as I was old enough, I had to go to Sunday School every Sunday at 9 o'clock. They used to give you a little Cross and Crown pin if you were there thirteen Sundays in a row. If you were late or had bad deportment, you would lose all the Sundays in that term. It took me about four years to get the first year's pin. When I was old enough I had to go to church, then prayer meeting on Thursday night and Christian Endeavor on Sunday. Hence, by the time I was 16 and went to college I had had a very thorough indoctrination to the tenets of the Christian religion.

In college, you got \$60 a year if you sang in the choir, so, I tried out and got placed in the choir for the whole four years at Amherst College. They had compulsory chapel but, if you sang in the choir, you were not supposed to take your cuts. On Sundays you had college preachers from all over the country, different ones, and you had wonderful training in church music: Bach, Handel, Palestrina, all of them. When I graduated from college I stopped going regularly to church and I was rebuked.

I told the people "I'll send you a check, regularly, but don't look to see me in the pew. I'm not interested in the overt form like the Pharisee."

From this early base, from the teachers in the kindergarten, I found that quality in education depends on just as much on the teacher as anything else. There's nothing original about that. I believe President Garfield, who had sat under Mark Hopkins as president of the Williams College, said, "Give me

Mark Hopkins on one end of the bench and I on the other and you can have your libraries, etc." Well, that's true. The colored schools did not have anything much...Divisions 1 to 9 were the white divisions and Divisions 10 to 13 were the colored divisions and Divisions 10 to 13 were like a bed of Procrustes, everything had to be fitted into them.

But, all the best things in Washington were free. Our graded school teachers encouraged us to go down to the public buildings and gradually, at least the boys in my block, began to do that on their own initiative. So, by the time I got to college I knew all about dinosaurs from frequent visits to the Hall of Dinosaurs in the U.S. National Museum. I understood what a coal mine was like and how it worked. They had a wonderful mechanized model down at the old National Museum. Also, the art galleries were free.

I heard my first college band -- one of these big 115 piece bands -- when I went to college. It was at a Harvard/Dartmouth game. I was not particularly impressed. It was sometime afterward that I realized that all my life my ear had become attuned to the best in band music by hearing the free open air concerts of the U.S. Marine Band, the U.S. Army Band, the U.S. Navy Band, which were all competitive. Then there was the Soldiers Home Band, all of which were of high quality, you see.

Then in due course, I got acquainted with the Library of Congress. We have an excellent zoo here and I liked to go there. Through repeated visits to the zoo, one got, unconsciously, an appreciation of the anatomical equipment for survival that every animal has. For that reason, as I told you, later I used to take my medical students to the zoo. They would put that down as another of Cobb's follies but I never bothered about the razz of the multitude, you see. It is still true, as Jesus said, "Wherever two or three

are gathered together in my name, there am I also in your midst."

People are often their own worst enemies and the Negro community has many agencies which destruct. It is said, "Well, that's minorities, they will fight among themselves." That applied to the high schools here. The system then was that there were academic high schools and vocational high schools and I know there were two vocational schools, and later a business school for whites. In order to stimulate Negroes to want to work with their hands and so forth, the Armstrong Vocational school was built here with a beautiful facade, which is still there on P Street. The words, "Armstrong Manual Training School," are up there today. For Negroes there was only one vocational school and only one academic high school -- that was M Street.

They built at the top of this hill down here, 13th Street Hill, Central High School, which looked to the south commanding one of the most beautiful views of the city. It had a marble inlaid foyer and that was just the last word. Well, they had to give Negroes something so they built Dunbar down at 1st and P from N to O, a beautiful school. The design was so beautiful that when they built Eastern for whites, they tried to copy it, but the proportions were not as good. Dunbar was highly admired, but then the idea began to grow that Dunbar is for the elite, which is pure hogwash. Children in the graded schools had an opportunity to indicate which high school they wanted to attend.

It began to be said, "Well, that's upper crust. Most of the students that go there are light," and so forth.

That was a hangover from, you might say, the house Negro-field Negro comeup, but there were influences that would stimulate children to go to Dunbar. It was open to everybody. When I was in Dunbar High School I walked. There were only two faculty members who owned automobiles. At 10

minutes to 9 in the morning you would see all the streets from all the directions filled with pupils and teachers walking to the school. Now, how could that high school, which, at the time I went there, was one of the best in the country, although I didn't know it until I was 50, had produced so much unless it had been undergirded by a strong elementary school system all over. That was why it was so good. And in 1981, today, while we're hearing that students have been pushed on unready. The President of the University of the District of Columbia just said that. School Superintendent Reed said that one of the things that disgusted him so that he resigned was this idea of social promotion just because a kid had been there. And so, when they built the new Dunbar, who was it that wanted the old torn down? The Negro community. They said it was a symbol of elitism, which is all hogwash, you see. So those efforts in trying to motivate from within tend to be offset by the people of your own group.

WEEKS:

I have been curious about how you happened at attend Amherst College.

COBB:

How did I get to Amherst College? The principal of the high school when I went there in 1917, Garnet C. Wilkinson, was himself a graduate of Oberlin. At that time the colored schools did get a high quality of teachers because of the handful of Negro graduates from outstanding colleges at that time; they got positions of teaching at Dunbar -- that was a good spot. So, we had better teachers.

Dunbar High School urged its students to use the Library of Congress. So much so that particularly on Saturdays and Sundays the library had to establish certain hours for high school students. That was the effectiveness

of this teacher stimulation. It doesn't seem to have held out when I pass the Martin Luther King Library at 10th and G Streets, which is all glass front. Sometimes you look in there and see more whites than blacks. We have not yet got the constant intellectual stimulation. The black population's much larger, therefore, you ought to have more people in there reading. Not that everybody would use the library.

Because the colleges let out for Christmas vacation before the public schools did the boys and girls who had been away to school would come back to Dunbar, just the homing instinct. Mr. Wilkinson would always have a special assembly at which everybody who had been away at school would just come informally on the stage and tell how it was where he went.

From that very unscientific basis of what three fellows -- Percy Barnes, Charley Lewis and Dudley Lee -- said about Amherst, I said, "Well, I think that's the one I'd like to attend more than schools others talked about." You see how unscientific that was.

So I opted to try to go to Amherst. Well, they had a fellow there teaching Latin who was not too good himself, but he was going down. However, he picked somebody else to recommend to Amherst. Wanted me to go to Bates. I've nothing against Bates, I didn't want to go there. So, one of the math teachers told me that this man that's teaching you Latin didn't have the sole recommending authority, that the principal would give me a good letter and I could get two Amherst alumni to write letters. All right. My record was good enough, so Amherst accepted me on condition that as I'd only had one year of French and had to have two, I would have to get the other year. Mrs. Mary Hundley, who is now in her 80s, had just come as a French teacher that year. In six weeks of summer school I got a year of French under her. There you

have the dedication and the ability. She didn't get any money for it or anything, and she whipped my head. That was 1921. I had two years of further French in college, but that was reading, you see. I never used it, but Molly used to emphasize, "a," "ou," "er."

I didn't get to France until 1954 and landed at Nice. I'd just been to cold England; boy, it was cold. Here was this warm climate in France. I was very anxious to try out my French. I went to some merchant and asked for what I wanted in French, and he says, "En, speak French, huh?" But I had never had a chance to use it in 33 years after I left her.

Now, the other kind of thing...I had some excellent teachers -- not all of them were good. Clyde McDuffie was a little man, much smaller than me. He never had a course in education in his life. He was an M Street graduate, gone to Williams, graduated Phi Beta Kappa in three years, which was as much as a feat then as it is now. He came to teach Latin and he would have you doing things like this --World War I was on and we were doing Caesar, "Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres." He put a map of World War I showing the disposition of the Germans and the Allies and spent a lot of time pointing out this mountain range, this river and all that. Now let's see how Caesar and Ariovistus fought it out on the same line. I had him. In the third year. We had Cicero, and he would always encourage you to make that Latin come alive. We would go around shouting Quosque tandem abutere, Catalina, patientia nostra? "How long, oh Cataline, will you abuse our patience?" Now, the first, second, third and fourth orations were all printed in the book, but the second oration was the one which described Cataline's debaucheries. Although it was printed in the book, the Board of Education said that wasn't the right thing.

One day Mac came in and said, "Let's do a little sight-reading." We had

all translated the second oration privately, you see. Somebody started off a little too competently. Mac says, "Wait a minute, this doesn't sound exactly like it's sight-reading." The elegant Latin says, "Why, O Cataline, do you sit with your head sunk down...What's he saying? Free that up, free that up."

Finally somebody said, "Where were you last night, Cataline?"

McDuffie said, "That's what he's saying."

We had people equally good in history. One teacher -- a school is named for him now -- Nevall Thomas, was faultless in the classroom. He had taken two Cook tours and brought back a stack of pictures. He liked the ladies all right, but he just never chose to get married. He wasn't any homo or anything like that, but he became a fiery NAACP warrior outside the school. In Falls Church, Virginia, right across the river, he made such good speeches that some of them sent word that if they caught him over there they'd kill him. Mr. E. B. Henderson, physical education teacher, used to live in Falls Church. He was a fearless NAACP activist too and also his wife, Mrs. Nellie Henderson.

Now, at Amherst in those days, the fraternity system was at its height. I think there were twelve or thirteen fraternities there, and they had a hierarchial order. Alpha Deltas were aristocrats; Psi U's the rich guys, Dekes were athletes, and so on down. At that time they didn't take in Jews and they didn't take in Negroes. We didn't bother because we wouldn't even have had the initiation fees, which were very high. In Washington there were all the advantages, which were open to everybody. So, all the things that counted were there and we had been sufficiently schooled not to expect any bids to fraternities. If you were supposed to speak on campus, and somebody didn't speak, it didn't bother us at all. But there was a curious thing that in the open competitions, all the men who didn't belong to fraternities were called

Nu Phi -- non-fraternity -- generally won. They gave an interfraternity cup for scholarship and Nu Phi would generally win that. In my freshman year, they had an interfraternity cross-country. I had run my senior year in high school and to my surprise, I won the college cross-country championship. I think it was five miles and Nu Phi won that. This is the first time anything overt came up. Generally, the man who stood highest on the winning team would get his own medal and the team cup. So, while we were standing in line for this exercise in chapel where the trophies could be presented, a fellow said our team wanted him to get the cup. What could I say. Alexander Meikeljohn was president of the college. I saw that somebody had passed a note to him on how to do this -- that is, who would get the cup. Just like that, he decided how to do it. Instead of giving the awards in the one, two, three order, he gave the medal for sixth place first, then fifth and so on. For the first place, he called my name. I had to get both the cup and the medal -- the cup and my own medal -- I saw how he handled that. Alexander Meikeljohn was one of the greatest teachers under whom I've ever sat. They put him out of Amherst at the end of my sophomore year.

WEEKS:

I thought I remembered something about...

COBBS:

But, in the end, he triumphed. He went to Wisconsin and they had the great experimental school out there. But the program attracted the wrong people. Later they had a wonderful memorial to him. Not a memorial, a tribute, thirty years later down here at St. John's College, Annapolis, which I attended. After over 50 years, they were sorry, and they had Meiklejohn back at Amherst as commencement speaker. I believe they gave him another

honorary degree -- he didn't need it -- but he was back and was very gracious.

Now, he was influential in reinforcing me on how to make a decision. I never liked math, but I had made the track team in my freshman year in the spring. Now, the Yankees did learn a good bit about education, and fundamental to that is to keep it simple. The requirements were printed on one page in the catalog. Then the catalog said, "Must take physical education three years. Must swim 200 yards." It was printed on one page. So, there was another rule that you had three cuts in any year course. The final examination counted one-third of the course, and I still approve of that. I wouldn't have completed the whole course in many things if I hadn't had to. But I got so much out of it. Now, any cut that you took over your three allowed cuts was five percent off your final grade.

Math -- one came on Saturday morning -- and I had used my three cuts, failing to have checked and noticed that the track team would be at Williamstown, that is our big meet, on a Saturday. I was passing math, but I didn't see how I could lose five percent so I went to Gladys Kimball, who was the registrar. She had in her head more information about students and alumni than all these computer batteries do now. So I wondered if there were any way I could get this cut excused. She said only Dean Estry could do that. I went to Dean's office but he was out of town and wouldn't be back 'till the next week. So I went back to Gladys and said, "The Dean's away, is there any other possibility?"

She said, "Well, the president could."

I said, "Well, he wouldn't see a pea-green freshman to try to get a cut excused."

She said, "Why don't you try?"

So, I went to the president's office and his secretary asked me what I wanted, and to my surprise she gave me an appointment. I went in.

"Cobb, I understand you want an extra cut excused so you can go to Williams with the track team. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, have you made your decision in the matter?"

"Sir?"

"Well, irrespective of what the College does are you going to Williams with the track team?"

I said, "Oh yes, sir, I couldn't be a member of the team and stay home because I was afraid of losing...."

"Well, then, you've done all you can do, and you made your decision, now the College will make its." And as I left the door, he said, "And do your best at Williams."

So, I won the mile and got third in the two mile. Monday morning I went to see if that cut was up there. It was not. I never forgot that. You've got to make up your mind what you will do irrespective of the consequences and through channels you don't know about. I don't know whether he just said, "Don't put that cut up there," or what. But, that was it.

Now Prexy's logic, which they called philosophy 1, was taught by three men: Albert Parker Fitch, who was Professor of Biblical Literature, Clarence Ayres, a professional philosopher, and the President. They all taught the same standard areas: freedom and determinism, hedonism and so on. For 18- or 19-year-olds to hear one man come in and say, "Now, Professor Ayres will teach you this, but you can see how illogical that is," and so forth. Then Ayres would say, "I know what Professor Fitch has told you and I know what the

President will tell you.

Meiklejohn would say, "Well, Professor Fitch and Professor Ayres told you this, but here you see...." On the last week for three sessions they sat together on the platform so that you could see that three men, highly professionally competent, can differ most sharply with each other and use sharp language in criticizing, but remain good friends. I have found that was more impressive educationally than, we might say, the content of the courses.

Now, I had got oriented to medicine. So I had to be a zoology major. But, in my first zoology course, we had a poor textbook -- I didn't know it -- but Dr. Plough, who I showed you there, was the professor. He used to make very meticulously drawn hectograph notes -- you could draw in color with those things. So the boys said Plough wants you to get his notes.

I said, "Well, this is a first-class college isn't it? They couldn't give anything second-rate."

So, we have our text. I said, "I'll get what's in the text, won't bother with the notes." I ended up with a big fat D, of course. But during the summer I read the notes, and the notes were much better than the textbook. Although Plough later denied it, as I registered for each of his courses: Comparative Anatomies, Geology, and all that, I told him later, he would look up and frown, "You here again?" But, he was damn good.

And in those days the professors read the papers, you see, didn't turn them over to the student assistants and would write annotations on them -- on your examination papers -- give them back to you. Well, that was fine.

I finally ended up winning the Blodgett scholarship to Woods Hole, which was given to the student with the highest cumulative three years in all the courses in biology. I did not have to get it. Plough could have given it to

another fellow, because there's no check. He was very sore because I didn't agree to come back and pick up a master's and teach as his assistant, which was a custom.

But he said, "You won the Woods Hole scholarship, and the other fellow we'll call 'Jones' is right there, but you have a slight edge."

Well, nobody would have known if he'd given it to this other fellow, but it happens that he made the right choice. The other fellow would have agreed to come back, but he did not stay in the work, he did not make any exceptional record, he'd just been grinding.

Robert Frost was another strong influence while I was at Amherst. His class, they called it "English 9" I think, was the first year he had taught as a full-time teacher in any college. The word was out that he wasn't going to give grades and that sort of thing and that his methods were unorthodox. Without pressure I read over 100 books during his course. I never did it before or since. Now, he would do like this. He wore a ruffled suit with this shock of white hair and would start talking when he hit the door. "I put a list of 100 books on the board, read one of them over the weekend. I don't care what you read." And then he'd start talking about something else. He always had a small pile of books. And then the next week he'd pick any boy out and say, "What did you read over the weekend?" Fellow said he didn't have time to read anything. Frost had the ability to give an instantaneous icy stare to say what the hell you're in here for. But then, somebody would say he read so and so.

He said, "Did you like it?"

"Yes."

"What's the plot?" Then the fellow would outline. Frost would carry on

and contrary to the general impression that he was just freelance so and so, he was a man of prodigious learning, and the minute somebody would mention a plot, he could name five or six others that had used that plot. He was always having some other poet or literary figure in. So, he said jealousy doesn't have to go with these heavyweights.

One day he brought Carl Sandburg there. In that deep booming voice, Carl Sandburg will read his poetry, "The fog comes on...." When he had read, Frost said, "When you came here you had your guitar; I think the boys would like to hear it." Sandburg went out and got his guitar, brought it in and sang some ballads.

I remember he had Amy Lowell there. He was as fine a narrator or interviewer as you'd want. He had that skill. I remember Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn -- the dancers -- he had them there one day. Dancing is poetic literature, too. Well, that gives you an idea.

I came down here to medical school, I accepted admission. I was afraid to stay at Amherst, and I think that was the right decision. I might have been caught. If I had stayed at Amherst and taken a master's, I might have gone on and taken a Ph.D. Then I would have been an isolate, but having come down and taken medicine I was free. I could still go on and do graduate work, which I did after my internship.

WEEKS:

How did you happen to do that?

COBB:

Well, I went through Howard medical school at one of its worst periods. That is, there was only one full-time man on the faculty and obviously something had to be done. The General Education Board at that time was just

finishing off its philanthropies to medical schools around the country. On the end it decided to give some fellowships for training new faculty to Meharry and Howard. In the year of my internship, Numa Adams, the first black dean, came to Howard. He was a very quiet man; very tough, and the rigors of that job killed him. He made immortal contributions, because Meharry and Howard had about the same number of fellowships offered them, but he, independently--Adams--put pressure on all his men to get a Ph.D. or other advanced degree while they were away. All but one did. On the other hand, of the fellows who went to Meharry, the same fellowships, none did. It got even worse than that that Dr. Mallowney, the Irishman who was then the President of Meharry, wrote Dr. Lambert complaining that he wasn't putting pressure on his men to get advanced degrees and Adams was making it hard for him, because he wasn't doing it. However, Lambert didn't respond and Adams kept up what he was doing. Now, there isn't anybody on the present administrative staff who could recruit me like that. That man did that in the single achievement. As I said, the job killed him in ten years. But there are a great many people who are unsung. He will get credit in time.

WEEKS:

You went to Western Reserve.

COBB:

Yes, it came about this way. I've given you my early interest in anatomy and Dean Adams sent for me because I had a good record. "Are you interested in a full-time career, in Basic Sciences?"

"I would be if I can pick my field."

"What do you want?"

"Anatomy."

"Well, we have a spot."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

He, Numa Adams, had been to T. Wingate Todd's laboratory at Western Reserve and had been tremendously impressed by what he had seen there, and thought I would like that. It turned out that that was exactly what I wanted. Next to the dissecting room was the Comparative Anatomy Museum and they were doing studies on the GI tract then and they had the x-rays every day. They were doing two lines of studies -- the behavior patterns of the alimentary tract and ossification studies -- and these x-rays would be up every day. Nothing like it ever existed. Anyway I liked that. I had two years with Wingate Todd. He died prematurely at 53. He was a Scotsman and never relinquished his British citizenship. He'd come to the lab at 7 in the morning to do his serious dictating, and then kept going all day long. I wrote a piece on him. Did I send you a list of my publications?

WEEKS:

Yes.

COBB:

I wrote two on Todd. But at any rate, you can see what he was.

WEEKS:

This must have been before John Millis was at Western Reserve. Was it?

COBB:

Oh, yes.

WEEKS:

He's about our age, I think. Maybe a little older?

COBB:

I think so. Now, the year of the Crash--'29-- was the year I graduated in medicine. When I got to finish my internship and I had passed the District Board, I was licensed. Things were getting bad when I went to Cleveland in 1930. When I graduated in 1932, the Depression was at the bottom. Those steelmills all along the winding Cuyahoga River were closed and all the hundreds of factories that were around there. Breadlines. When the New Deal came in, first thing they did was devaluate the dollar, I think, and I agreed to go to work for \$3,500. When I went in it was \$3,500 minus 8% and then that went down to a 15% cut. Howard always gets the cuts when they go in but they don't get the increases on time. Those were long, lean years. I didn't get a raise 'till eight years. My salary was increased from \$3,500 to \$3,800.

But I had the right wife; Hilda didn't mind. She never cared for the perks and I would say, "I don't want you to look for worldly goods. How would it be, you're already the most beautiful woman in the world, how would it be if I had surrounded you in the fur of some dumb animal so people would look at your mink and not at you?"

Then, about 1935, the constrictions of the ghetto, professionally, began to be oppressive. I could have been a good boy and just written innocent pieces on innocent subjects and probably gravitated to the conservative role model status, but I had too much S.O.B. in me for that. So one day I just picked up a baseball bat and, figuratively, started to swing it--had to have a little room. I was out of favor with both Establishments white and black most of the time.

In 1935 I became active with the Medico-Chirurgical Society of the District of Columbia with respect to the admission of Negro physicians to the staff of the City Hospital, which is known as Gallinger Municipal Hospital,

and the setup was that Georgetown and George Washington Medical Schools provided professional staff, but there was no reasons why Howard shouldn't share. Our committees of the medical society weren't able to do more than make statements to officials. But, in 1939 I published a little book, The First Negro Medical Society. I had accidently been made recording secretary of that society by coming in a meeting late. They were electing officers and had got to the recording secretary and as I passed the front door they saw me come in and by the time I sat down in the rear, somebody said "You've just been elected recording secretary." I got up to protest and the chairman wouldn't hear it, and said "We passed that now, and now we've gone on to something else." So the preceding secretary handed me a huge briefcase, which had been stuffed with the papers. He had just put them in there as he got it.

I said, "Is that all?"

"Oh, yes, that's all. I gave it to you just like Ike gave it to me." Well, the preceding secretary had done the same thing.

So going through it I found there was much meat in there. Then I went over to the library of the District Medical Society, and they gave me free access to their materials. So, out of that I wrote this book. I took the manuscript to the Society and they said that was very nice that I'd done that but they didn't see any reason to publish it, just a mimeograph. But, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, who is the acknowledged Father of Black History, had been a teacher in high school when I was there. He had founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. I took it to him. He said that this should appear as a book and that it would be appreciated much more outside the medical world, and the cost wouldn't be great. I forget what it was, but it was some nominal sum. I think \$640 for an edition of 1,000 copies. The

Society Board would say such kind things as, "Well, we don't see why this ought to be a book, but maybe Dr. Cobb just wants his name on the back of a book and so forth."

Some said, "Well, you can't take Dr. Woodson lightly."

"Well, we'll give you \$150."

"Well, all right."

At that time I had a wife and one child and another one in the offing and I didn't have half of that amount, which was \$320 I think I had to get, but I scraped it together. Somehow I got it in press and then after I got proofs I took them around and buttonholed members. I said, "Give me \$2 for this." Woodson said that's what ought to cover it. I opened a separate account and it eventually showed a profit. The edition sold out quite rapidly. When I was Visiting Professor at Stanford in '72, a colleague in anatomy said, "I was just up in San Francisco browsing around and the bookdealer there just sold a little book you wrote in 1939 for \$75."

So now we were in this. Now William Tecumseh Sherman has always been my military model. He never won a battle but he never lost a campaign. So, in 1945 they made me President of the Medico-Chirurgical Society and I said, "Now, we've been talking about Gallinger too long. I didn't ask for this job, you thrust it on me. Now we're going to do something. Are we going to go for Gallinger or not?"

Some said, "We weren't ready."

But I said, "Well, look, readiness is a state of opinion. We had the issue all the time. Now, you vote tonight whether you're going or not."

So, they took positive vote with some strong dissents. It would hurt us more if we go in unready. Now, the decision had been made that we needed an

opening to Commissioner Guy Mason. The District is run by three Commissions: Health and Welfare on the end. When we went to Mason...Oh, a reporter for the Pittsburgh Courier went in, advised Mason of this vote of the society. He said he had no objections to Negro interns and they'd put them in as soon as they could build separate quarters for them. Boy, that was what we needed. We got a number of other organizations pushing it. Then the accident of fate came that Oscar Ewing became Federal Security Administrator. Howard University was under his aegis and he got to looking over the things. He sent for me one day and said, "Looks like I might be able to do something about this." He decided that he would try to bring the three University Presidents together. He said, "We can't do anything with Mason." And Ewing acted on the premise that the President of George Washington and the President of Georgetown couldn't say no. He got them to agree that Howard would come in. So this was historic but the Howard Dean then was too conservative and unfortunately he didn't understand an Irishman's temper. Ewing...the agreement had been made now and he wanted to implement it. There was something down there in front of the District Building where people went to have their chests x-rayed for the public instruction and Ewing and I met there with our coats still opened. He said, "I haven't got the report from Howard yet that we need to go into this thing."

So I said I'd get on it as soon as I get back. I called the Dean's office and the answer was to the effect that the Dean would call Ewing.

Ewing called himself and his secretary told Ewing that he was going to get to that soon. Wow! Ewing got up to Mordecai. Mordecai was out of town. "Where is he? Find him and I've got to have this report in with my meeting by Saturday afternoon." All I know is that they found Mordecai Johnson, the

President, in Cleveland. He and Dean were in the President's office working like hell on Saturday morning, and they got the stuff in. One service was in Pediatrics and was ready. That was that one.

Now, at the same time in 1946 the Hill-Burton Hospital Survey and Construction Act had been passed. All during the '30s there had been this Committee on the Cost of Medical Care. It was like people on Mount Olympus not knowing what the common people are doing. Johns Hopkins had put in full-time clinical faculty and Harvard was waiting to see what they did with it before they acted. In the meantime, the voice of the multitude, not being heard, was mushrooming. In '46 came out the first Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill and Dr. Louis T. Wright, Board Chairman of the NAACP, said, "Would you write the testimony for us and present it for the NAACP?"

WEEKS:

Who said this?

COBB:

Dr. Louis Wright, chairman of the board of the NAACP, my friend there. So, I wrote it and presented it. There was Senator Donnell of Missouri, who was the arch foe. He started to go over everybody.

So, he said, "Who wrote that testimony?"

"I did, sir."

"Who authorized you to do it?"

"The Board of Directors of the NAACP through its Chairman, Dr. Louis T. Wright."

"How many members on the Board of the NAACP?"

I didn't know but I took a guess and said, "About 50." There were 53.

Now, the NMA, the National Medical Association, through Peter Marshall

Murray, was taking the AMA position. They didn't want us, but the NMA did not dare go counter to the NAACP then and so in the record of the hearings the testimony of the NMA through Dr. Emery Robinson, President, and of the National Dental Association, and of the National Urban League, all went for National Health Insurance. The Hospital Survey and Construction Act had an antidiscrimination clause in it. The act did not anticipate that we would overbuild for hospitals, as we have done. There were implementation problems. Then we attacked the Medical Society of the District of Columbia on opening the doors. I was not the president of Medico-Chi then, but they made me the Chairman of the negotiating committee. It took three years to open Gallinger.

WEEKS:

Wasn't there a separate but equal clause in the Hill-Burton?

COBB:

I don't remember that. I mean, I would have to reread it.

WEEKS:

I think in the beginning, but they finally got rid of it later on.

COBB:

Because it was too expensive. Now, it took three years to crack the District Medical Society, but the retired President, that is the President of the year before, was one of our men, Dr. Charles H. Epps. That's the distance we traveled.

Now, in 1957 I thought something ought to be done about this hospital discrimination. So I organized the Imhotep National Conference on Hospital Discrimination. We called it that because Imhotep was the first identifiable name in medical history and whether he was Hamitic or what, if he were abroad

today, he would be classified as a black in the United States. So, I was claiming him at the top of the medical profession. We haven't been back since, but we're on our way. But the name meant "He who cometh in peace." We cosponsored it first two years with NAACP and NMA, the Medico Chi, and there was another one but then after the second year just three. The NAACP, the NMA and the National Urban League. So, we invited the total hospital power structure: representatives of the American Hospital Association, Protestant Hospital Association of the United States and Canada; American Medical Association, American Dental Association, American Nurses Association; all of them. Each year they would only send an observer, never a delegate.

WEEKS:

Nothing official?

COBB:

Right. That was held for seven years. The last one was down in Atlanta, where Adam Powell was the speaker. President Kennedy sent greetings.

WEEKS:

Did anybody from HEW appear?

COBB:

We never had any trouble getting somebody, but they didn't carry any power. Johnson and Kennedy worked in totally different ways. With Kennedy...and of course, they had been familiar with all of these people in the HEW. Kennedy would assign somebody on his staff and then they would be the whole thing. Johnson would split it up and only he knew completely what he had in mind. So, the next year I got a call--this would be '64--somebody was calling for the President, wanted to know whether I would be willing to attend a meeting to discuss hospital problems and so forth.

"Sure, when's it going to be?"

"I don't know."

"Who's going to be there?"

"Well, that's all I was instructed to ask you."

There were several other calls. Each time a different person calling. Finally there was a date. Now it was the President calling this conference. LBJ knew how to hit you so you would feel it. Here are all the officials of the government beginning with the Secretary, Celebrezze, and here are all the representatives of all these organizations that we'd been trying to get -- they're in depth bringing secretarial staff with them and all. Now everybody's waiting for President Johnson to come in, and in walks Hobart Taylor who was the son of his Negro friend in Texas, who Johnson acknowledged helped him get elected to Congress the first time. Hobart, I forget what his title was then, but he was the President's representative on the staff. He came in smiling and said he didn't know why he particularly was there but the President had asked him to come and extend greetings and so forth. The symbolism was there. That was a historic moment. For the first time there was a Negro officially representing the President of the United States. So, Hobart said that "That's all the President asked me to do and I am sure that you will feel the warmth of his welcome."

The job had been done, you see. So, Secretary Celebrezze then took over. And he said that the President feels much can be accomplished in the way of compliance for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and he is very hopeful that that can be made voluntary because we can save untold sums in litigation and controversy if everyone understands what the law is and will comply with it. So, one-by-one each official spoke, next was the Surgeon General. Each had

areas to cover. So I called that the Eighth Imhotep Conference. So that one was settled.

Nothing stays absolutely fluid, and getting down to the current situation now where the fact that we overbuilt for hospitals was first discovered, that we didn't need all that we had put up. But then, independent of an in addition to that, different modalities were discovered. Cutting hospital stay, for therapeutic reasons--didn't need long stays. And then what they call in-and-out surgery. Things like that. Now during that period most of the so-called "traditional" Negro hospitals were phased out.

WEEKS:

If I could just interrupt for a moment, that's a question that's been on my mind since I knew I was going to talk with you. After talking with Mr. Rice and hearing about his early experiences in the small Negro hospitals, particularly you told me one--I think it was the Kate Bitting.

COBB:

Kate Bitting Reynolds.

WEEKS:

Reynolds. When he told me that of all the volunteers who came in and all the people who helped and all the people who did multiple jobs, it seemed like there was a wonderful esprit de corps there. I wonder if there's something missing in that respect now that these hospitals have been closed or absorbed.

COBB:

Absorbed.

WEEKS:

Yes. So, then another thing I wanted to ask you was how about staff privileges and this kind of thing. Have the Negro physicians been elected to

office in AMA affiliates?

COBB:

They have been practically opened up, but it depends of locality again. I have listed all those in the Journal of the NMA in the order in which they occurred. The first was Dr. Nelson out in the Tri-County Society, Baldwin, Michigan.

WEEKS:

Yes, there's a Negro community up there too.

COBB:

He'd been there all that time but they made him President of the whole Tri-County Society. He was the first one. And then in the political scene, Dr. Peter Marshall Murray was President of the New York County Society. That's the largest society of the AMA. The number runs now to about fifteen to twenty. So we might say that that door open a crack--notice I did not say that it's all open. Nothing is ever fixed, you see. And many people don't like the openings and try to keep....

WEEKS:

Well, then, of course, too, the effect on the medical schools has been something that....

COBB:

Well they've all gone out of existence long before--only Howard and Meharry survived.

WEEKS:

They went out before this happened really?

COBB:

Oh, yes.

WEEKS:

They were gone pretty well. Well, of course, a lot of so-called white medical schools have gone out too, if we look back far enough.

COBB:

All that dates from the Flexner Report on Medical Education in 1910.

WEEKS:

Was that the big effect on the Negro schools, too?

COBB:

That's right. I have written on that. Now there are only two that are predominantly Negro, Howard and Meharry, but here's a paradox: Although Secretary Califano said we're over-producing doctors, suddenly two new schools are open predominantly for Negro students. One at Morehouse in Georgia and the other at the Drew School in Los Angeles, with opposite premises. The Morehouse school will train only for the first two years. Then they will farm their people out.

WEEKS:

Something like New York schools.

COBB:

Some to Meharry, and Howard will take some, and so forth. But at Drew is the reverse picture. Premedical training will be done at UCLA or USC and only the last two years will take place at Drew. So, that's a paradox and it's still fluid. In other words, you're apparently establishing two new Negro medical schools. Although now, the ethnic origin is not as basic, they're all open. At Drew, I know they tell me mostly their obstetrical patients are Hispanics. So, we have no stable condition and nobody knows what the impact is of the new cuts. It's producing very irregular effects in different

sections of the country. For example, I think George Washington has got to go up in tuition to \$15,000 per student next year. Georgetown is something like it, I don't know how much. Howard had to raise its tuition too, but not anything like that.

WEEKS:

Does it get any government support?

COBB:

Howard? It's all government support. It has to be cleared. I mean there are other things they get there but....

WEEKS:

This goes way back to 1868?

COBB:

1868.

WEEKS:

1868 was it? Well, about two years ago I attended a meeting of Deans of the so-called new medical schools, which had come to existence, I think, since 1960. These without exception--I think there may have been one exception--but there were about nearly thirty schools. None of them was connected with medical university medical centers, but were using outside hospitals for clinical teaching. I assume that maybe if there is any growth in the number of medical schools, that's the way it will go. But, strangely enough, my job there was to be an observer. In between the meetings at which papers were read, they had open discussion meetings, which were all taped, much as we're taping now. I took these hours and hours of tape and my job was to summarize what had been said in these private meetings and some of the things of course weren't used. I put it all in, but they didn't want to use it all. Some of

them were almost strange because some of these deans of schools were afraid that someday there would be too many physicians as has been prophecied, but what would they do in 1985 if...Would they have to live on less than a six digit income? This was the big thing that they seemed to be concerned with. Then they began talking about what was happening in Italy or Argentina or other countries that have so many doctors that a doctor finds it difficult to make a living unless he has a salary or private income of some other sort. But, income seemed to be their main concern, they were very worried.

COBB:

Individual six digit income?

WEEKS:

Yes.

COBB:

Well, I showed you what my approximate....

WEEKS:

Yes, well, I think I agree with you, it isn't necessary to have six digits, you can live....

COBB:

That's sort of a deceptive thing because you have the goddamn tax collector on your neck if you get in that....

WEEKS:

They call it the bracket creep now, don't they?

COBB:

So I'd just as soon not be bothered.

WEEKS:

Would you like to tell me how you got into teaching?

COBB:

It seems that when I fell into this full-time teaching, not only was the economic Great Depression on, but I found that system of education was too hidebound. Over many years I said this doesn't make sense. Now, these are the standards texts of anatomy. Gray is over 1,500 pages, so are all the others. Now, I reasoned, and I made a picture of the textbooks for the freshman year in our school and it's not an indictment but just a fact that many medical students come to the school not knowing how to read. That applies whether they come from Harvard or Podunk. If you have them for four years you might be able to teach them to read, but in just a year they've got to acquire a great deal. Now, in anatomy alone the great mistake has been trying to read the text like a novel. It isn't organized that way. It's more like an encyclopedia when you want to know about something you look it up. But to sit down and try to memorize a text...Now, in anatomy you have a basic text and usually you have a lab manual and then often an atlas and then sometimes they get other aids. I said my initial premise was, this is all wrong. Man was a good artist before he learned to read. A preschool child makes pictures before he makes letters; therefore, the most primitive thing I can take is making pictures.

"Doc, I can't draw."

"Oh, yes, you can."

So, I said, "I'm going to teach all medical students how to draw the outline of the human body from the front, from the back, and from the side with a skeleton in it."

Well, teaching in an institution which receives government support, the great penalty is to dare to be original. So, I had to guard carefully against

that. I'm at the point now that when the surveyors of medical education come around I survey the surveyors. I had to be properly respectful and be prepared to answer.

"Well, now doctor, you're putting this in here, what other institutions have adopted this?"

I said, "None. I'm just trying it."

"Well, what controls have you set up to check."

"I am putting all my time in on developing the methods, other people can do that. I'll show you the atlas. May I do that now, or do you want to take that along?"

"I won't bother."

Anyway, I showed paleolithic man painting anatomical pictures. His orientation 20,000 years before writing was invented, painting anatomical pictures. "Here's a preschool child making pictures before he does letters. Now, here are the ancient Egyptians, third millennium B.C. on, making canons of proportion by which they drew their figures. I'm not being original. Here's a beautiful statue, Doryphoros of Polycleitos, which was so good that his contemporaries called that statue "The Canon." Other people measured it and the height of the head taken seven and one half times is the height of the body and the height of the head taken twice is the breadth of the body. That's a frame $7\frac{1}{2} \times 2$. Now, we make a dotted cross $7\frac{1}{2} \times 2$ heads. It doesn't matter how high you make the head depending on the size of the figure you want. Now we've got to learn six primary points. The suprasternal notch is $1\frac{3}{8}$ s heads from the top. The nipples in the male are two heads down and one head apart. The umbilicus is three heads down, the top of the symphysis pubis is $3\frac{3}{4}$ heads down, in the middle of the body. The knee joint $5\frac{1}{2}$

and the medial 7-1/5 and that's that.

Now we go ahead and the student has never seen a skeleton, but he's in the lab now and I've got a skeleton there where I'll take half the distance between the suprasternal and we get four secondary points now--suprasternal notch symphysis and put a line in the middle. That brings in a lot of history. That's Addison's transpyloric plane--Thomas Addison--public health administrator of Great Britain, and so forth. He described that at this plane the distance would fall across the pylorus and now the students have learned, "Yea, pylorus, yea." But, it's also half the distance between the umbilicus and sternoxiphoid junction. So you lay that off. And it also goes across the first lumbar vertical.

"Oh, I got that orientation."

You look at the skeleton and "Yea, Yea." And it marks the level of the low end of the spinal cord. "Aaaaah, now we can rest in peace." All he did was take the transpyloric plane. From there we go on and step-by-step build it up. I have proved that I can do that after two weeks of drill with the students on that and on themselves. Starting looking at the patient there, we can do it. Then for an exam toss a coin, which view are we going to draw, front, back or side. I have the drawings that students did on the instruction and that they did spontaneously in the exam, so that the case is proved.

Now, no profession is more conservative than the medical profession. Elsewhere I have said that it takes about 200 years for a new idea to be adopted by the medical profession. Great discoverers have had a hard time. Vesalius published De Humani Corporis Fabrica in 1543 and caught hell from the established profession because he pointed out over 200 errors in Galen. But, Galen was the accepted authority then and all the people in the Ivy League

schools of the day were teaching out of Galen. Here was this upstart comes along and "aaah," so he got driven out. He had to go to be a physician to Charles V and later Phillip II. William Harvey, who was an anatomist and embryologist, not a physiologist, waited seven years before he published his Exercitatio de Motu Cordis et Sanguinis, in 1628. He anticipated that he would be criticized, and was. They cry for innovation today but they don't mean it. Things will be changed in spite of it all. What we're seeing now...I'm going to give you one paper, which I call, "Man is a Slow Learner."

WEEKS:

You did give it to me.

COBB:

Okay. Now we are seeing a retrogression, because the public has seen you don't need all that. Time Magazine has given out a new atlas of the body that's very fine, but all the basic science material could be taught to kids before they finish high school and with great benefit. Now, if a kid is taught that Boy Scout knots are also surgical knots, they can learn surgical techniques young. You make a man wait 'till he's 25, put in 2-5 years of residency before you let him get to the operating table, he's too slow. We're in a vicious circle. Ph.Ds in anatomy are all on grants--the scholarship aid--and the pressure is on from department heads to bring in a grant so we can have an outfit. In one of the late issues of Pharos, which is the official organ of the Alpha Omega Alpha, there's a group of doctors all around a room on their knees bowing down to some charts and they call it "The Worship of Icons." So, if we keep on going as we are, why the doctor who comes to see you won't be able to do anything until he has looked at some tests. So we're getting down to the age of the uroscopists who were the most famous quacks of

all time. They could take a glass of urine and diagnose and prescribe treatment right out of their apothecary jar.

WEEKS:

I'm one of the few people who had typhoid fever in this modern age. I had several friends who were physicians, but the man we called was the doctor down on the corner. He'd never seen a case of typhoid. After they'd discovered I had typhoid and I recovered (this was before antibiotics), then I talked to some of my physician friends. One of them said that he had worked in a lumber camp, as a physician in a lumber camp, and he got to the point where he could smell typhoid. Another one was a European where their textbook on disease started off with typhoid. First you eliminated the possibility of typhoid.

COBB:

Today they've rubbed it out. When I was in medical school we would get two or three cases of typhoid from Eastern Shore, Maryland.

There's another thing that's always important, you need to learn the language of the people. I remember when I was an intern and this fellow had come up...he was from down in Marlborough somewhere. He was scared, never been to a hospital before. The doctor said, "What's your trouble?"

"That's what I come to you for to find out."

"Well, do you have any pain?"

"No, doctor, I have no pain."

He asked him some more things about it. Finally the old doctor said, "Where did you say you're from? Where's your misery?"

"Misery right here, Doc."

They're not interested in your professional preparation and you've got to learn to communicate with them.

There's another story around here. This is apocryphal but it is said to be true. We had a respected physician, who, over a period of years, whenever he would go away, he would hire some Howard senior or intern to take care of his office. It was a chance to get a little money. He would stay around two or three days 'till they got in. The story is that this beautiful young lady came in with an acute case of gonorrhoea but didn't associate the cause with its effect.

"Where are you from?"

"Culpepper, Virginia, Doctor."

He said, "Well, you have a boyfriend?"

"Yes sir, doctor I gots a boyfriend."

He said, "Well, you and the boyfriend ever copulate?"

"Oh, no, doctor we never done that."

"Did you ever have any fornication with your boyfriend?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, you and the boyfriend ever have sexual intercourse?"

"Oh, no, doctor, we never had that."

So, the old man came over and said, "Where did you say you're from?"

"Culpepper, Virginia, Doctor."

"Well, you and the boyfriend ever trim?"

"Oh, yea, me and the boyfriend, we trims a whole lot."

Well, I have made 80 films now and I've put sound on most of them, so that I do not tie myself down at my advanced age with saying that I must get this done. But I keep on moving in all these directions.

WEEKS:

Well, I think that's the secret. If I've learned anything about

retirement, that you don't worry about the time, just keep going.

COBB:

I don't think that I could ever be bored.

WEEKS:

No. I did want to ask you something about Medicaid and Medicare. Well, you said you gave testimony....

COBB:

For national health insurance. We also testified for Medicare because that was the reduced form. They saw they couldn't get a bill passed for the omnibus form and the NMA supported Medicare.

WEEKS:

You supported that even when AMA was not?

COBB:

That's right. Everybody sees you've got to have some national health insurance and it's got to be based on the need rather than on the ability to pay. If I hadn't been a physician when my wife fell ill of cancer, I'd have been rubbed out, because I think the bill for the first several days in the hospital was \$4,500. I had to pay that and other stuff not covered by the limited insurance that she had. I didn't have to pay the professional bill.

WEEKS:

What is the answer? Can we, as a society, can we afford national health insurance?

COBB:

Yes, but there will have to be levelers. In the beginning medicine and the priesthood were as one, and were not supposed to be moneymaking professions. But doctors have got into the habit of becoming wealthy. That

is the reason that the basic sciences have been taken over by the people who are not M.D.s., the Ph.Ds. The lure of money in medicine and nothing else. I wrote a piece on that called "The Third Class Citizens of Medical Education: Basic Science Teachers."

WEEKS:

We have a paper we're going to publish in Inquiry and I'll be sure you get a copy of it, by Dr. George Crile, of Cleveland Clinic, in which he takes a position that for surgery--he doesn't believe in fee-for-service--and that he thinks that there are twice as many surgeons than there need be and there is probably twice as much surgery being done.

COBB:

Amen, I agree.

WEEKS:

He said that if there were half as many surgeons they could be paid good salaries; they wouldn't have any incentive to do unnecessary surgery. Now, assuming that in all good faith, like we mentioned a few minutes ago, that a surgeon thinks in terms of surgery as a resolution of a problem, maybe this oversurgery is being done unconsciously. Although I'm not sure it is altogether. Maybe if we didn't have fee-for-service and -- and these men work for a good salary...

COBB:

That's right. I agree that I went into medicine in the belief I would get a good salary. Of Seven Deadly Sins -- Pride was the first, Greed was the second. We will have to eradicate greed from the medical profession. Now, we are more addicted to the profit motive in our culture than I believe ever before. Everybody wants to make money, but what can you do with it? Now,

labor has come up -- this is crude too -- that people shouldn't be able to make so much money, then when they get ready to die they try to give so many millions to this and that and so forth and so on.

Labor says, "We want some of it. We earned it. We were the producers." Then you've always got to have thinkers. Stradivarius never knew how well his instruments could sound because the bow wasn't perfected until a generation after he was dead, but they've never been able to duplicate his work. They give you precise measurements; they use exactly the same woods and chemically the varnishes, but the intangibles of putting them together, he didn't write down like the prescription. They admit now you can't duplicate a Stradivarius, you make Strad models.

WEEKS:

That's right. The work of genius can be copied only as far as the model stage is concerned. What about Medicaid? Medicaid is a....

COBB:

That's a derivative of Medicare.

WEEKS:

But I mean, in this area has it been very successful?

COBB:

I think it has. In the minority area cutting it off is going to do more harm to minority physicians. They had better get on board with a thinking cap and some of the things, "Well, we don't need to bother about any of their problems." Oh, yes, or else they'll be back.

WEEKS:

This brings up another problem. I think it applies more to middle class

than it does to the poorer people, and that is, I'm wondering if our expectations as persons, as potential patients, sometimes isn't too great. We expect too much of the physician and sometimes we don't...maybe we don't need all the services we're demanding.

COBB:

I could not agree with you more. Again, my view's somewhat heretical. There's nothing new about it. Go back to Plato. After a long discussion in which he had developed that the cultivation of the soul was the highest goal of life but as the soul lies in the body the education of the child should begin with music to instill a sense of harmony. The second element after music in the education of the child is gymnastics because the body must be made a fully coordinated mechanism, and then we must study what we put into the body so that to encourage health and all. All that goes back that far. If people will follow correct rules, preventive medicine is in the family, or whatever substitutes for the family, and is the cornerstone of our good health. That will leave the trained professionals free to take the things that really require a higher degree of expertise. Just as commercial drugstores are showing you how to take your blood pressure and so forth, you don't need to take up a physician's time with what is called "a semi-annual checkup" and that sort of thing. The Hippocratic axiom that experience is fallacious and judgment difficult still holds.

WEEKS:

I was wondering if you want to say anything...first, I think we should mention that fact that you, I believe, were the first Distinguished Professor at Howard?

COBB:

That's right.

WEEKS:

I think that should be in the records somewhere. And you've had so many honorary degrees, so much recognition...I will have this in part of the oral history.

COBB:

I'm always mindful of Paul's letter to the Galatians when he said, "For if a man thinketh himself to be something, when he's nothing, he deceiveth himself." So, I've tried to give you the idea of how much I feel I owe to other people.

WEEKS:

I'm sure that the fact that you've done so much would make me believe that you realize this. That no man stands alone, but there had to be a spark there somewhere to make you do it, to make you willing to work hard at things rather than maybe sit down and read a light book or listen to some music or....

COBB:

I don't read light books.

WEEKS:

Well, I know, but I'm saying, there had to be something to make you....

COBB:

Something of interest. The old parable is, "If you're not getting better, you're bound to be worse for nothing stands still in the universe." So, I try to say, "Mister, which way are you going today?" If I feel I've slipped back I say, "Better get a hold of yourself." Because, if you get frustrated and started feeling sorry for yourself, that's what's called imploding and it grinds you down.

WEEKS:

Well, I don't know how much time we have....

COBB:

I think it's easier to push forward, I've got to get downtown to....

WEEKS:

Maybe I can ask you one or two short questions. One, do you want to mention the fact of the Atlanta meeting of the AAAS, which is...I think that might be good to put on the....

COBB:

Oh yes. We never can find on what front segregation will raise its ugly head. And it was in 1953, I think, that Dr. Gabriel Lasker, who was Secretary of Section H of the AAAS, called me and told me that the AAAS meeting for 1955 had been agreed upon for Atlanta, but their advance man had just sent word that they couldn't change any of the laws of Atlanta, if we had to meet there. Since I was on the National Board of the NAACP, and I had a meeting with Raymond Taylor, Ph.D., Dr. Raymond Taylor, here in the old Statler Hotel. Clarence Mitchell was the Field Director of the NAACP, and we discussed this thing. Taylor wanted to know what the NAACP would do if we met in Atlanta.

I said, "I can't say what they would do."

He said, "Would they picket?"

I said, "I have no idea of what they would do."

So, without any stimulus from me, Dr. Lasker wrote that if they persist in going to Atlanta, he would not prepare the program for Section H. I believe this luncheon was in the summer. In December the AAAS met in Boston. The routines were being discussed there and when the Atlanta meeting came up (I

was a representative of section H and a member of the Council), I inquired as to whether all members of the Association would have equal accommodations and the like in Atlanta. Somebody up front asked "What's he talking about?" In the discussion up there they brought out what was involved. Taylor got up to try to explain and I would say that most of them there didn't know that you had to ride in a colored cab if you came to the airport you couldn't just pick up any cab and go into the hotel, and that you couldn't ride on the streetcar, you have to go and sit in the back. The main hotel there, well, you couldn't stay there. Well, they could go to some of the meetings in there but you couldn't stay at the hotel. Taylor was told to go ahead and reinvestigate the matter. Lasker had said he would not prepare the program and I had now said that I would not attend. They began to push the line that since they couldn't change the laws of the state of Georgia, why it would be better to go there and work for change. So, Taylor went down there and he sold a bill of goods to Dr. Rufus Clement, who as the President of Atlanta University, that they would have the Annual Reception of the AAAS on the campus of Atlanta University, and would they accommodate a certain number of members in their dormitory? Then he came back and told the AAAS Board that that's what he'd done. My reaction was I still wasn't going to Atlanta because, I think, that the engineers met at Georgia Tech -- one of the Sections -- and so, they were put up all along the campus of Georgia Tech, in their dormitories. But, they were just all the members of that Section. It wasn't racial, but all the Negro members are going to have to be quartered over there at Atlanta University. They would be able to attend the meeting rooms in the hotels but they couldn't stay. I said, "To hell with that." It happened that I had had a meeting at Tuskegee a little later and I stopped in Atlanta and asked

Clement what about that and he said that Taylor was a liar, that he hadn't put any such proposition to him, that he had agreed to have the meeting there in Atlanta but this other stuff was all news. So, all right.

Now, Margaret Mead was a member of the Board of the AAAS at that time and they thought that she would really push for moving it. It happened about a day before the final meeting determination to go to Atlanta was held here in Washington. She had been invited to be the speaker for the Anthropological Society of Washington. As a courtesy to her the night before she was invited to a dinner that the association gave. They sat me next to Margaret Mead at that meeting thinking that she would hold forth. She said in the meeting, "Not all Negroes agree with your position, Dr. Cobb."

I said, "Who, for instance?"

She said, "Dr. Channing Tobias."

I said, "He's a good friend of mine. He is the Chairman of the Board of the NAACP, so would you tell me just what he said so that I'll understand, because I know that he went out...."

"Well, so he talked."

Well, anyway, in the meeting she did not buck to stay away from Atlanta and there are various tales about her.

But at any rate, at the meeting in Atlanta the question did come up and a committee was appointed to draw up a resolution about it. My information on it is quite accurate because Dr. Plough was a member of the committee. Detler Bronk, who was then President of the Rockefeller Foundation, wrote the resolution, which said that the AAAS in the future meet only in places where scientists can have free access to each other within and without the places of meeting. When the resolution got to the vote on that there was objection

because of Southern bias. Then it was proposed that they vote on it next year in New York. Well, that didn't go because it would be slanted the other way then. So it was decided that there would be a mail vote and Dr. Dael Wolfle conducted that. I forget what the vote was but it was passed, by substantial margin, and it's binding. That one is over. Section H didn't have any program and Dr. Lasker did not prepare any. He stood firm.

WEEKS:

That solved the problem. Do you care to say anything about your African and Chinese trips?

COBB:

Oh, yes, but I....

WEEKS:

Or do you have to go now?

COBB:

I really do.

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