

**EIP**

# Celebrating Black History Month 2022: Charles Drew

October is Black History Month in the UK and this year's theme is Time for Change: Action Not Words. In commemoration, each week we will be profiling a different Black person who has made a significant contribution in a particular technical field. EIP's Diversity Focus Group sees this as opportunity to share information and learn about different perspectives and histories.

## **Week 3**

**Charles Drew** (1904-1950) was an American surgeon and medical researcher who did pioneering work in the field of blood storage and transfusion. Drew devised improved methods for blood storage and developed the world's first blood bank. He served as medical director of the Blood for Britain Project, organising the collection, processing and shipment of blood plasma to treat casualties in Europe during World War II. Drew became director of the first American Red Cross Blood Bank and invented mobile stations for blood donations – so called 'bloodmobiles'. As a result of his significant contributions in blood storage and transfusion, Drew has been called the 'father of blood banking'.

Drew grew up in Washington, D.C. and was awarded an athletics scholarship to Amherst College in Massachusetts, where he graduated in 1924. Drew pursued a medical degree at McGill University in Canada, and while at McGill, worked with Dr John Beattie, who was doing research into the potential link between blood transfusions and shock therapy. After graduating from McGill, Drew went on to do his doctorate at Columbia University where he wrote his seminal thesis: 'Banked Blood: A Study on Blood Preservation' following his investigation of blood preservation techniques.

Just after earning his doctorate in 1940, Drew was recruited to head the Blood for Britain Project, which was to help British soldiers and civilians by giving blood collected in the USA to the UK. This effort, spearheaded by Drew, involved collecting, testing, and transporting large quantities of blood plasma for distribution in the UK. Based on this work, Drew was later appointed as director of the first American Red Cross Blood Bank in February 1941. At the time, the blood bank supplied blood to the U.S. Army and Navy, who ruled that the blood of Black Americans would be accepted but would have to be stored separately from that of Whites. Drew was outspoken against the practice of racial segregation in blood donation because it lacked any scientific foundation, and in 1942, he resigned in protest.

You can read more about Charles Drew [here](#).

Drew took a stance when confronted with unjustifiable discrimination. While we may have moved on from such stark examples, discrimination still persists, albeit in subtler ways. Drew's decision to resign from a project in which he was invested is a reminder that while it may not be easy to speak up against discrimination, it is important to take a stand. Although everyone would probably prefer to avoid uncomfortable conversations, turning a blind eye to or not 'dwelling' on ongoing issues, this will not drive change. Moreover in 2022, it should not be solely down to minorities to be speaking out about these issues. My hope is that if a comparable situation were to happen today, it would not just be Drew resigning in protest, but many of his colleagues too, regardless of their race.