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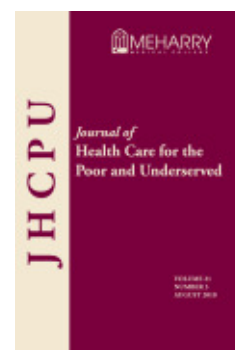
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## A Sterling Legacy

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## A Sterling Legacy

J.W. Jamerson III, DDS, FACD, FICD

In the November 2001 issue of the *Georgia Dental Association Journal*, former editor W. Louis Johnson penned “Beyond the Sea,”<sup>1</sup> a perceptive editorial in which he reviewed *NDA II: The Story of America’s Second National Dental Association*,<sup>2</sup> the recently published book about Black dentists in the United States. He commended the historical work and its authors Clifton O. Dummett and his wife, Lois Doyle Dummett. Dr. Johnson believed the tragic events that occurred the previous month on September 11, 2001 challenged Americans to reflect upon patriotism and increased tolerance among the world’s peoples. He concluded the editorial with thanks to Dr. Dummett for his history as an “American from beyond the sea.”

Just over one year ago, in another fateful September (2006), the Dummetts mourned the death of their beloved son Dr. Clifton O. Dummett Jr., the victim of a malignant brain tumor.<sup>3</sup> He was a professor and head of the Department of Pediatric Dentistry at Louisiana State University School of Dentistry, New Orleans, Louisiana.

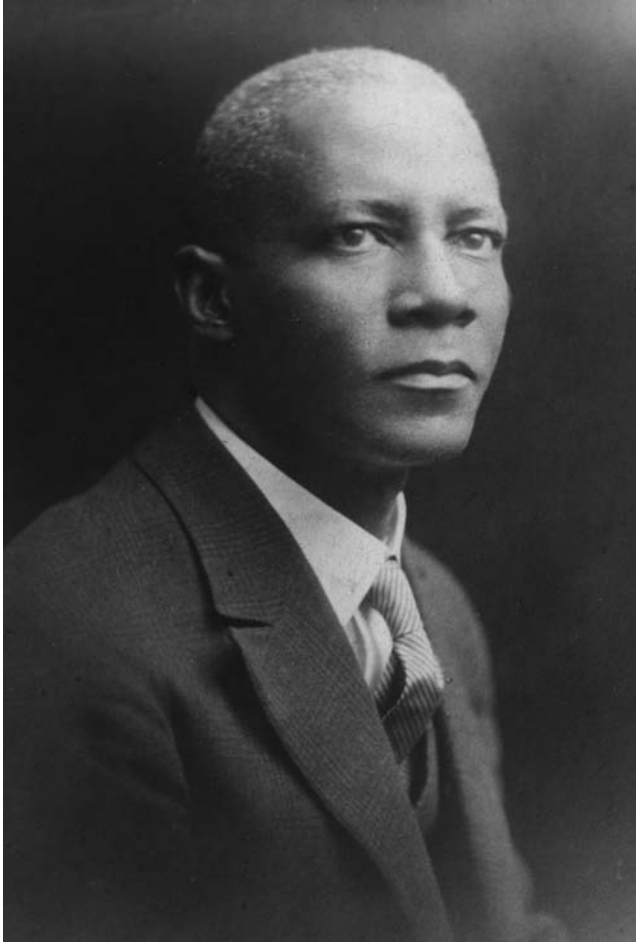
### **Patriarch, The First Generation: Alexander Adolphus Dummett (1874–1949)**

Cliff Dummett Jr.’s career path in dentistry represents a tradition initially forged by his grandfather Alexander Adolphus Dummett. Born in Georgetown, British Guiana, South America, a colony of Great Britain, Alexander Adolphus was the eldest of five children. His father was an industrious brick mason, devoted to the welfare of his family, from whom young Adolphus learned the basics of the trade. He attended school and then trained as chemist/pharmacist and became qualified. Following a sojourn to Africa, A.A. Dummett returned to the Colony’s capitol city where in early 1900 he opened a drugstore in Georgetown’s industrial area and developed a lucrative business. Eventually he became interested in the patient-care side of the health profession and sought training in dentistry as a dental apprentice to one *Dr. Rogers*, an American dentist who had migrated to Georgetown from a prior practice in Barbados, B.W.I.

Pursuant to educational practices of his time and place, A.A. Dummett fulfilled existing Colonial requirements for qualification and in 1906 he became a registered

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*A third generation Savannah, Georgia dentist, J.W. JAMERSON III was the first African American president of the South East District Dental Society of the Georgia Dental Association. He helped engineer changes that led to four Black dentists (including three Meharry Dental graduates) being posthumously awarded GDA Honorable Fellowships, an event that recalled the topic of legacy and family traditions in health professional careers explored here. The author wishes to thank the Dummett family for providing the photographs and documents referred to in this article.*



Alexander Adolphus Dummett

dentist in Georgetown.<sup>4,5</sup> Larger quarters were procured to accommodate both drugstore and dental clinic while management of the drugstore was shared with his brother Allan Allister Dummett.

A.A. Dummett took up residence at 62 Hadfield Street in 1910. This was the same year Dr. Adolph L. Hymans of Dutch Guiana graduated from Howard University Dental College. Hymans returned to South America, this time to British Guiana, and began his practice in Georgetown. He and A.A. Dummett were colleagues. A family connection developed the following year in 1911 with A.A. Dummett's marriage to Eglantine Johnson, whose eldest brother Reginald Fitzherbert Johnson, an Edinburgh-educated physician, was married to Annie Hymans, elder sister of Adolph Hymans. Eighteen years later in 1929 Hymans became the first dentist of African descent named to Fellowship in the International College of Dentists.<sup>6</sup>

Dummett's marriage produced one daughter and three sons. Following the death

of brother Allan Dummett in 1921, the drugstore was leased and the dental clinic was established at the Dummett residence on Hadfield Street. Alexander Dummett served a broadly mixed clientele that included the poor and underprivileged of Georgetown's multiracial populations. His caring demeanor and helpful attitude contributed to establishing a highly successful general dentistry practice for 38 years.<sup>7</sup>

## **The Second Generation**

Devoted to the goals and philosophies of the health professions, A. Adolphus Dummett looked to his children to travel that path. His family concerns were fully supported by his wife Eglantine Annabella, a musically talented and well-educated daughter of Hannibal Johnson, a successful boat builder. The Dummetts' eldest child, a daughter, Ella Adolphine, was urged to study pharmacy in 1928. She completed her studies, but subsequently gave up her pharmacy career for marriage to Dr. Philip Gladstone Barrow, a physician. The Dummett's eldest son, Hannibal Alexander, was encouraged to study dentistry in the United States where his father believed superior dentistry was taught. In 1930 Alex enrolled at Tufts University in Boston, but after two pre-dental years, decided dentistry was not his career choice. He returned home and ultimately became a Community Organizer in the West Demerara Housing and Planning Department of Georgetown.

Undismayed, the father focused on his youngest son, Clifton Orrin, who had always shown an interest in following him in dentistry. After completion of his education in Georgetown, Clifton Orrin embarked for the United States in 1936 to begin pre-dental study at Howard University, Washington, D.C.

## **Legacy Achieved: Clifton O. Dummett, D.D.S.**

Young Dummett earned a B.S. degree from Central Y College (now Roosevelt University) and a D.D.S. degree from Northwestern University Dental School, both institutions in Chicago. He received the M.Sc.D. degree in Periodontics from Northwestern's dental school. In 1947, as a Fellow of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, Dummett earned the M.P.H. degree in Public Health Dentistry from the University of Michigan, the first African American dentist to earn an MPH. Dr. Clifton O. Dummett is licensed to practice in Alabama, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Tennessee. He is also a specialist in periodontics licensed by the Tennessee State Board of Dental Examiners, a Diplomate of the American Board of Periodontology, and a Diplomate of the American Board of Oral Medicine.

Clifton O. Dummett began the first phase of his career at the Meharry Medical College School of Dentistry, Nashville, Tennessee, beginning in late summer 1942 with the responsibility to create a department of periodontics.<sup>8</sup> Two years after joining the Meharry dental faculty he received his coveted U.S. citizenship. In 1949, he was appointed dean of the dental school, thereby becoming (at age 28) America's youngest dental dean. It was at Meharry that the young dental dean evidenced his strong aversion to racial segregation and resigned in protest against agreement by Meharry Medical College to participate in the southern states' "Regional Plan" that was intended



Clifton Orrin Dummett

to strengthen the *status quo* and frustrate efforts by African Americans to obtain equal rights under the U.S. Constitution.<sup>9,10</sup>

Dummett's professional journey continued with his appointment in 1949 as chief of dental services at the Veterans Administration Hospital (VAH) in Tuskegee, Alabama and later at the Veterans Administration Research Hospital in Chicago. While at VAH Tuskegee he instituted a working affiliation with the dental school of the University of Alabama<sup>11</sup> and also organized the first Public Health Institute in the South,<sup>12</sup> an inter-racial convocation of health professional experts that attracted international attention and national publicity. The successful Institute was heralded as a much-needed first for the region.<sup>13</sup>

Ineligible for military service during World War II due to his then non-citizen status,<sup>14</sup> Dummett later joined the U.S. Armed Services, was commissioned Major, USAF Dental Corps in 1954, and was assigned to Elmendorf Air Force Base, 5005th Hospital, Anchorage, Alaska, serving as chief of periodontics and oral medicine, base

preventive dentistry officer, and consultant in periodontics to the Alaskan Air Command.<sup>15</sup> In addition to representing the USAF at annual conclaves of the Alaska Dental Society and the American Dental Association, he initiated Children's Dental Health Week along with a series of preventive health radio dental programs, and organized the first Elmendorf Air Force Base Dental Clinic Day. A Certificate of Appreciation from the Alaskan Air Command in acknowledgement of special contributions to the health of the Command marks Dummett's two-year tour of active duty. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, USAF, and continued in the reserve as Medical Service Liaison Officer and Mobilization Augmentee to the Command Dental Surgeon, Air Force Systems Command, Andrews Air Force Base, Washington, D.C. Dummett was awarded the Certificate of Merit of the Air Force Systems Command, and after 24 years of service retired in 1979.<sup>12,16</sup>

In 1966, Dr. Dummett left the Chicago Veterans Administration Research Hospital to become the dental director of the University of Southern California (USC) South Central Multipurpose Health Services Center in Los Angeles. Two years later he was appointed associate program director and health center director, becoming the first dentist in the U.S. to head an Office of Economic Opportunity Neighborhood Health Center. In 1968, he was appointed assistant dean for hospital and extramural affairs, and inaugurated the department of community dentistry at USC dental school. In this capacity he stressed the need to address the nation's shortage of minority dentists in order to provide access to dental health care for all Americans.

During the course of an illustrious career<sup>17</sup> culminating in retirement from USC in 1989, Clifton O. Dummett gained an international reputation for his scholarship (312 articles and 10 books<sup>2,8,18-20</sup>) and as a speaker.<sup>19,21</sup> He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors including honorary Doctor of Science degrees from his *alma mater*, Northwestern University, and from the University of Pennsylvania and Meharry Medical College,<sup>22</sup> as well as being made an Honorary Member of the American Dental Association.<sup>23</sup> He has held positions of high office in major national and local dental organizations including Editor-in-Chief at the National Dental Association (NDA) for 22 years.<sup>2</sup> During his tenure as editor for the NDA, in 1957, Dummett originated the Association's resolution to the American Dental Association requesting the latter to sponsor binding resolutions urging ADA component and constituent societies to eliminate racially restrictive membership provisions.<sup>2</sup> That initial NDA resolution ultimately led to the 1962 ADA House of Delegates' resolution to refuse seating delegates from any state whose by-laws pertaining to race conflicted with those of the parent organization.

Dummett also served nine years with the American Association of Dental Editors before election to the presidency of the Association. He is a past president of the International Association for Dental Research, the American Academy of the History of Dentistry, and the Los Angeles Dental Society.<sup>18</sup> He is a Fellow of the American College of Dentists, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Public Health Association, the Association of Dentistry International, and the International College of Dentists.<sup>6</sup> He was one of the first three dentists in the nation elected to the prestigious Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Science. Although retired, Dr. Dummett continues to write and maintain an attachment to dentistry.

### **The Third Generation: Clifton O. Dummett Jr. (1944–2006)**

Perhaps the proudest moment for the Dummetts was the birth of their son, Clifton Orrin Dummett Jr., on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1944 in Chicago. His loving parents doted on him but strove to avoid the so-called only-child syndrome. During young Cliff's early years, the family resided in Nashville, Tennessee; Tuskegee Institute, Alabama; Anchorage, Alaska; and Chicago, Illinois, where he completed his elementary school education before enrolling at Lenox School (Episcopal), in Lenox, Massachusetts, where young Cliff was part of the nationwide effort to integrate schools at all levels. Following graduation, Clifton Jr. matriculated at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, where he excelled as a star athlete, earning honors and letters in lacrosse, track, and soccer. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and received a National Science Foundation Grant. He declared his intention to make dentistry his career and chose the Indiana University School of Dentistry in Indianapolis, Indiana, where he obtained the D.D.S. degree in 1969 and was awarded the Indiana State Society of Pedodontics Award. He



Clifton Orrin Dummett Jr.

received an M.S.D. in pediatric dentistry in 1971. He later obtained his M.Ed. degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of New Orleans. He became licensed to practice in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Louisiana, and was a Diplomate of the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry.

C.O. Dummett Jr.'s academic career began as staff instructor, internship-residency program director in pedodontics at Children's Medical Center in Dayton, Ohio, and then coordinator of dental research. He served as director of pedodontic services at Charles R. Drew Neighborhood Health Center in Dayton. It was during his sojourn at this health center that he gained valuable experience in dealing with health problems of disadvantaged minorities. He became an advocate for addressing health disparities and providing access to dental care for underserved populations.

In 1974 he joined the dental faculty at the Louisiana State University in New Orleans, advancing through the ranks to become head of the LSU department of pediatric dentistry.<sup>24</sup> During a 32-year span at LSU dental school he chaired faculty committees and fulfilled teaching and administrative assignments. He was chief of the pediatric dentistry section at Charity Hospital, and coordinated LSU pedodontic extramural activity, pedodontic departmental research, and postgraduate pediatric dentistry.

C.O. Dummett Jr. became, among other things, chairman, pedodontic section of American Association of Dental Schools; president, New Orleans Association for Dental Research; president, Louisiana Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; president, Omicron Kappa Upsilon Honorary Dental Society (Kappa Chapter); delegate to the Louisiana Dental Association; spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), AAPD trustee at-large, and founding faculty member of one of the AAPD's longest-running CE courses, *Comprehensive Review of Pediatric Dentistry*. He was an active participant in the Earlham College Alumni Association and the Indiana University Pedodontic Alumni Association, as well as the New Orleans Dental Association. He was a dental consultant to the Bureau of Health Manpower, Washington, D.C., Head Start-Region V in Dallas and the FDA Center for Devices and Radiological Health. He was a Fellow of the American College of Dentists, and a member of the ADA on-site visitation team for dental schools evaluation and accreditation.

Dummett Jr. lectured nationwide and presented continuing education courses and workshops in Costa Rica, Mexico, Brazil, and Greece. Publications included chapters in textbooks by R.E. MacDonald, J.R. Pinkham, and John Ingle. He served as guest on numerous dental educational television and radio programs.

Cliff Jr. was well known among New Orleans sailboat enthusiasts and was the first of his race to become a member of the New Orleans Yacht Club. Mayor Morial appointed him to the board of directors, New Orleans Municipal Yacht Harbor (1980–83), chairman of operations committee (1981), and vice president of the board of directors (1982–83). He was elected to the Yacht Club board of directors in 1984 and served on the nominations committee beginning 1991. Additionally, he was a member of the board of directors of Sail Louisiana, Inc. (1988–1991), and won many trophies racing his sailboat on Lake Pontchartrain.

Clifton O. Dummett Jr. lost his courageous battle against a malignant brain cancer and departed this life September 13, 2006<sup>25</sup> reportedly with the same quiet dignity that characterized him throughout his life. At a memorial service<sup>26</sup> held at Trinity Episcopal



Church in Baton Rouge, colleagues paid tribute to him<sup>27</sup> as a “compassionate and caring teacher who touched the lives of thousands of students over the years of his career.” Others spoke about “his kindness, sense of humor, and integrity as hallmark traits.” Louisiana State University Dental Dean Eric Hovland declared, “LSU was a much better school because of Cliff and we will miss him deeply.” He remarked on Cliff’s demonstration of “tremendous strength, dignity, and courage throughout struggles with his terrible illness.” The Dean presented a University citation confirming Cliff’s status as Professor Emeritus to Dorothy Maynard Dummett, his widow and wife of 37 years. The Louisiana Academy of Continuing Dental Education established a memorial continuing education course in Cliff’s name, and Earlham College inaugurated the Cliff Dummett Annual Scholarship Award.

## Coda

In addition to the acquisition of technical skills and scientific knowledge, dentists must be conversant with the evolution of dentistry as a health-care discipline, and the growth and development of the dental profession in the United States. To achieve these goals, dental history should be accurately recounted and included in the dental school curriculum. Too often, the experiences and contributions of minority members of the profession have been overlooked, although perusal of contemporary dental literature demonstrates a welcome departure from the former pattern of benign neglect. At the same time, dental history has been neglected as an educational necessity for all American dentists. The author feels confident that this presentation of the legacy of an American minority family that began “beyond the sea” in one of the world’s developing countries is an appropriate contribution to general dental history.

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