Ruth Smith Lloyd



There are many discoveries and contributions credited to astounding Black Physicians across the subject of Anatomy. However, I must admit that Ruth Smith Lloyd resonated with me the most. Her research and contributions to the field of female anatomy has ameliorated our understanding on fertility, effect of sex hormones on growth and many other sexual health topics. Her involvement in anatomy serves as a strong foundation for researchers to this day.

Born in Washington D.C., Ruth Smith Lloyd was a studious and focused young girl. Her father was a pullman porter and her mother worked as a first-grade clerk in the U.S. Treasury Department. Dr. Lloyd attended and studied at Mount Holyoke College, which was predominantly a white institution at the time. Regardless, she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Zoology in 1937. Her areas of research expanded across endocrinology, medical genetics and sex-related hormones.

Despite her initial plans to become a school teacher, Ruth Smith Lloyd was motivated to undertake further studies after her Master’s degree and fellowship. She completed and received these qualifications at Howard University. She continued her growth in academia by receiving her Ph.D. at Western Reserve University with her dissertation, “*Adolescence of macaques (Macacus rhesus)”.* On December 1 1941, this accomplishment was pivotal as it made Dr. Lloyd the first Black American woman to obtain a Doctor of Philosophy in Anatomy. I firmly believe that this success has enthused many other women, like myself, who are Black or part of an ethnic minority, to express an eager interest in pursuing their aspirations.

Doctor Lloyd made life-changing discoveries for each and every person. Her contributions are one of the dominating reasons why we understand how female sex anatomy functions, and the beauty of the female reproductive system. Through her hard work, we are now able to identify many aspects of sexual health, including female fertility. Furthermore, Dr. Lloyd has given us the power to unlock countless possibilities to rectify potentially upsetting circumstances such as infertility. This was done through repeated experimentation and research of fertility in Macaque monkeys. Since Macaque monkeys share approximately 93 percent of their DNA with humans, the research conducted by Dr. Lloyd is life-changing for the human race.

I found a fantastic article written by Dr. Lloyd named ‘The Vaginal Smear Technique’ in the ‘*Journal of the National Medical Association’*  in January, 1952. It is an astounding critical review of the present status of Vaginal Smear Technique in the practice of Medicine. In present-day medicine, vaginal smears are used to identify any inflammation or infections of the vagina or surrounding areas. Vaginal smears are useful to this day. The conclusion of the article, which I have attached below, increased my admiration for Dr. Lloyd. From my point of view, Dr. Lloyd is advocating for the maintenance of good reproductive health of every single woman, regardless of their race, colour or socioeconomic background .

Concluding sentence of ‘*The Vaginal Smear Technique’.*



Concluding sentence of ‘The Vaginal Smear Technique’.

Not only did Doctor Llyod have to deal with racial injustice, but it is highly likely she would have been faced with gender inequality too. Being a black women studying STEM subjects in the 20th century was certainly not an easy feat. One of the main characteristics of Doctor Lloyd which I find motivational is the fact that she did not let any preconceived ideas determine her future. She paved her own path, regardless of any obstacles that may have faced her.

After she completed her Master’s degree, Lloyd married Sterling Morrison Lloyd, who was a physician, and had three children. In doing so, she defied a stigma that I still hear to this day- women in academia, or woman who are practicing physicians cannot have a successful work-life balance. Through her determination and dedication, she became a Rosenwald Fellow in anatomy at Western Reserve University in Ohio where she co-authored several publications. To exceed my awe for her, Ruth Smith Lloyd had many more successes aside from her Ph.D.- she served as an instructor in Zoology at Hampton Institute and as she rose through the ranks, she became associate professor in Anatomy. By the same token, she helped found the National Museum of Women in the Arts of Washington D.C. In my strong opinion, all of this work shows Dr. Lloyd as a selfless woman who cares and works tirelessly so her community can thrive. As someone who strongly believes in empowerment through education, I perceive Dr. Lloyd’s work as both heart-warming and encouraging.

When Dr. Lloyd retired, she did not stop her engagement in her locality. She was an active member of her All-souls Unitarian Church and was a member of a social and service organisation named ‘Girl Friends’. With pride, she continued her exemplary contributions until her death. On 5th of February 1995, Doctor Ruth Smith Lloyd died peacefully at her home town in Washington D.C. Her life was filled with paramount studies in female reproductive anatomy, and significant changes in her community. As an ethnic female, her life has stimulated my desire to make a difference for people who are in the ethnic minority. She is a fearless, powerful and inspiring black woman who made a life-changing discovery in the field of anatomy.

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*References*

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Unfortunately, I could not find a reliable source of any archives of Ruth Smith Lloyd’s Ph.D. I did find this link, but access is restricted. <https://www.cabdirect.org/cabdirect/abstract/19410100808>