

The Myth of Charles Drew's Death -

On April 1, 1950, Drew was traveling to the Andrew Memorial Clinic in Tuskegee, Alabama to deliver a lecture, accompanied by three of his resident physicians from Howard University. All four passengers were black. Drew apparently fell asleep while driving. The car ran off the road (N.C.49 near Haw River), and rolled over. He was thrown out of the car and the vehicle rolled over him. Drew suffered a nearly severed leg, massive chest injuries, a broken neck, brain damage, and complete blockage of the blood flow to his heart. Only one other person was seriously injured, John Ford, but he eventually recovered.

Drew and Ford were taken to Alamance General Hospital, a facilities-poor "White" hospital. The White doctors at Alamance began work immediately on the two injured men. Drew's injuries were so severe and his loss of blood so great that he could not be saved. His family later wrote letters to the attending physicians thanking them for their efforts. Ford was treated at Alamance for several days before being transported to Washington, a Black hospital.

Almost immediately rumors spread that Dr. Charles R. Drew, the internationally famous inventor of the blood bank, had died because a White hospital refused to give him a blood transfusion. To many African Americans the story was believable. In 1950 the South was still rigidly segregated, and Black Americans were often denied treatment in hospitals -- sometimes because the hospitals did not have vacant "Negro beds," and sometimes because the hospitals were for whites only. While Drew himself did receive emergency medical attention, many black Americans did not.