

As a young African American, I sometimes wonder: will prejudice make my goals harder to achieve? My dream of becoming a physician requires years of hard work, and at times it becomes easy to fear that I might be rejected at a prestigious university simply because my economic status and race do not match the typical criteria. This is where inspirational figures such as James McCune Smith make me and all other black students realize that we can achieve *anything*, no matter where our starting point is. Dr. James McCune Smith, the first African American physician in the United States, challenged prejudice against blacks through his education, medical practices, and abolitionist work. Not only did his work as a doctor and author open a door for black people wishing to become physicians, but his struggles and bravery also inspire all generations to come.

James McCune Smith challenged the status quo in American society in several ways. Living in the early to mid-1800's as a black man presented a great deal of hardships, but the first step Smith took towards defying the norm was leaving America and attending the University of Glasgow in Scotland. It was there he received his B.A., master's, and medical degrees before returning to New York City and becoming the first African American pharmacy owner. Smith also published several articles, including articles in abolitionist newspapers *Emancipator* and *Colored American*. Challenging the status quo in nearly every way for a black man at the time, Smith achieved success that most African Americans did not believe was possible.

The impact of James McCune Smith's work still affects us today. In addition to healing and educating the people of New York for decades, he worked tirelessly in support of the Underground Railroad, the abolitionist movement, and against the campaign to send blacks back to Africa. James McCune Smith's influence on the abolitionist movement led to countless slaves making it to freedom and the enlargement of the abolitionist supporter base. Additionally, his work as a doctor showed that African Americans are just as intelligent as whites, and played an integral part in allowing more African Americans to pursue the path to becoming doctors.

Smith's inspiring African Americans to become doctors is still in effect today. Dr. Smith's passion to become a physician was fierce, since he left the country just to be able to attend university. This dedication to following his dreams in a time where it was nearly impossible to do so makes me realize that no matter what gets in my way, no matter what rejections and disappointments I may face, I can do it. I *can* become a doctor; *any* black person can become a doctor, or a successful business person, or anything they want to be. We have to overcome the hardships together, and although Dr. Smith had to do it alone, his bravery and iron strong will led him from being born a slave to becoming America's first black physician, surgeon, and pharmacist.

Dr. James McCune Smith spent his lifetime challenging America's prejudiced status quo and in doing so left an unforgettable and inspirational mark on American society. Proving that African Americans are just as capable of doing professional jobs as whites are, being an integral part of the abolitionist movement, and showing African Americans that achieving their dreams is possible is just a scratch on the surface of Smith's work. After learning about his life and his efforts, I wish I could give a thank you to Dr. Smith--a thank you for his bravery, his confidence, his intelligence, his eloquence, his determination, and his hard working spirit. As I start to enter the next stage of my life, the working stage, I hope I can be as brave and relentless as Smith, and I will carry his inspiration with me for the rest of my lifetime.