

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Ophthalmologist Publishes the Untold Story of David K. McDonogh, America’s First Black Ophthalmologist

New York, USA, June 1, 2021 – David K. McDonogh’s inspiring story chronicles his journey from slave to esteemed eye physician. His tale strikes at the heart of race relations at the time and resonates with issues that American society still grapples with today.

The story begins when David, an enslaved young man working on a plantation in New Orleans, was just 19 years old. The mercantilist and plantation owner by whom David was enslaved, John McDonogh, saw “intelligence, knowledge, and solidarity of judgement” in David, and arranged for him to attend Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania to receive a college education.

The article details the difficulties David encountered on campus and the challenges he overcame to become one of Lafayette’s first black graduates. Despite the systemic inequality and racism that he faced — including hearing that “no credible medical institution was willing to admit a Black man, even with his academic record and his apprenticeship to a local physician” — he went on to attend medical school at Columbia University and became the first Black ophthalmologist/ENT surgeon in New York.

By the time he passed away David, who went on to marry and have three children, had worked on abolition in league with Frederick Douglass, and ran his own practice in Greenwich Village. He was the first enslaved person to receive a medical education, the first Black attending physician at the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary, and the first Black ophthalmologist in America.

While David’s story shows how far we’ve come as a society, it underscores the challenges we must still overcome for there to be true equality, equity, and inclusion. Richard Koplin, author of the piece, perhaps summarises it best with this hopeful statement: “Even in the face of overt racism, David did find allies among white individuals mindful of the inequities of life for Black Americans, and who took it upon themselves to rectify them. I am confident that after a particularly ugly and politically chaotic period in America, fair-minded and thoughtful citizens will step up to bring closure to a divisive period in our history, allowing us to move forward for all our citizenry and reignite this experiment known as American Democracy.”

Read David K. McDonogh’s inspirational story in The Ophthalmologist [here](#).

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