

BIOGRAPHIES FOR DR. AND HELEN WHITE

Dr. Sidney White, Jr.:

Dr. Sidney White was the first African American president of the Austin Dental Society, the first African American dentist to become a member of the then 10th District Dental Society (Capital Area Dental Society), and taught at Howard University College of Dentistry in Washington, DC, and as preceptorship faculty at Baylor University College of Dentistry.

Born August 18, 1928, he was the fifth child of eight, Sidney White graduated from Emmett J. Scott High School in Tyler, Texas, and went on to receive his Bachelor of Science with pre-dental preparation from St. Augustine's College in Raleigh, North Carolina. After graduation, White was drafted into the U.S. Army where he served for two years attaining the rank of Staff Sergeant. Upon being honorably discharged, he taught as a science teacher and later (1958) was admitted to and received his Doctor of Dental Surgery degree from the Dental School at Howard University, and interned at Goldwater Memorial Hospital in New York City.

In 1960, he entered general practice in Austin, TX, where for numerous years he was the only African American Dentist in the city.

Austin's Notable African American Dentists:

early 1930's-1950's - Dr. Everett Givens (*highly respected individual; Givens Park was named for him*)

"Dr. Givens had one of the first two-story houses in the Black community. It was grand and had a swimming pool in the back!" remembered Anita Swain.

1940's - Dr. Hammonds

1950's - Dr. Duncan (*a short tenure in Austin, then moved to San Antonio*)

1960's-2000's - Dr. Sidney White, Dr. Norman Mason (left in 2018), Dr. Madeline Anderson, Dr. Reginald Christopher

2000's - Dr. Oliver Wayne McElveen

Upon graduating from Meharry Medical and Dental College, and Howard University Dental College, Dr. White was literally on his way to establish his practice in San Antonio, in 1958, when after a stop-over in Austin prompted him to stay a while in the city. He met with Hobart and Venolia Gaines, a prominent couple in the area, who originated from Dr. White's hometown of Tyler, TX. Prior to integration, Hobart was the principal of LC Anderson High School, then later he became the first African American Assistant Superintendent for the Austin Independent School District. The couple convinced Dr. White to open his practice in Texas' Capitol City.

Consequently, in 1968, Dr. White co-developed the Medical Plaza Complex at [2113 E. MLK, Jr. Blvd.](#) with Dr. Sylvester Bradford, Austin's first African American optometrist, founded and joined Dr. White's crusade to focused on recruiting dental, medical and pharmacy services minority professionals to Austin. Dr. White and Dr. Bradford initially established their practice He, and Mrs. White were intent on diversifying Austin's professional business population, just as they had done within his dentistry office. Dr. White was well ahead of his time ensuring he had a very diverse work staff hiring men and women including blacks, whites, and Hispanics. And, this diversity trickled into his patient enrollment as well with about 30%-40% of his practice serving non-Black individuals.

In 1968, Dr. White and his wife, Helen, tapped noted Austin builder Walter Carrington Builders, Inc. to custom build their forever home in the Westover Hills (Section I) then-all-white, affluent suburbs of Northwest Hills (aka Far West).

Dr. and Mrs. White hosted countless dinners, parties and gatherings at their lavished home to recruit minority dentists, physicians and professionals to Austin. In the era of Jim Crow and segregated hotels, there were limited overnighting options, the Whites also allowed the invitees to transient at their home. In 1970, Dr. Norman Mason, DDS, another Howard University graduate, was referred by his cousin to visit Dr. White in Austin. Mason said, *"My cousin said Sidney [Dr. White] was overworked, so my wife and I stopped by his office. He invited us to his home for dinner and to stay the night. When we insisted, we were going to stay at a hotel, they [Dr. and Mrs. White] paid for the hotel. They took us all over Austin, and we were so impressed with how clean the city was. It took my wife and I all of 30-seconds to know Austin was the place for us! As soon I I received my [test score] results from the Board, we became Austinites!"*[1].

Dr. Mason was also onboard with Dr. White's mission to recruit more Black human capital to the city. By 1975, Dr. Wayne McElveen, DDS, a practicing dentist from New Jersey, was recruited by Dr. White and Dr. Mason. *"Having heard about the forward-thinking liberal-mindedness of people in Austin (being the capitol), the sale of practicing in Austin was not a hard one,"* said McElveen [2]. His work paid off, and thanks to him, innumerable African American talent was recruited to Austin.

In addition, to practicing dentistry, Dr. White's role was also contributed to his community where and how he could.

Realizing that to attract talented African Americans professionals to Austin there had to also be an outlet for them to recreate, Dr. White became a co-owner in one of Austin's largest Black nightclubs of its time – *Phases*.

Hastened by negative treatment received in white-owned clubs in the city, *Phases* was born of the owners conviction that the time had come for Austin to

have a first-class club owned by blacks, run by blacks and catering to blacks. *"We definitely wanted a site on the east side of town...because this is where the original black community settled,"* said Dr. White.

The nightclub, opened April 14, 1978, in a beige-colored building across from Rosewood Park and quickly evolved into more than a bar club. On any given 24-hour day, the club would dish up breakfast for one of the black college fraternity, cater lunch for City Council members or candidates, serve evening cocktails to a bevy of black businessmen, host a hundred screaming women for a ladies' night, and spin records in the disco for a younger crowd. *"Dr. White was reserved, but you always knew he was inventorying the business when he stopped by the club. "Dr. Bradford was the character and was very talkative. Both men were very nice and great to work for",* said Pamela Crenshaw, former waitress at Phases.[3]. (James Pinkerton, Austin American-Statesman, *Onward*, May 3, 1983)

Dr. White distinguished himself by his commitment and service in the community and to his profession. *"He was a giver. He loved his church and community, and he and Helen gave with their time, talents and treasures"* remembered Mason. McElveen reflected, *"Sidney introduced the idea of us [dentists in his office] going to predominantly schools with minority students to speak to them on how dentists benefit their overall health. So, we spoke at elementary schools, middle schools and high schools. I was a good thing."*

In 1965, he was recognized with the lifetime ethical and professional care and respect of his peers by being named 10th District Dental Society (Capital Area Dental Society) Dentist of the Year (1989-90), and nominated as Dentist of the Year by the Academy of General Dentists.

His numerous professional, civic and community affiliations include:

- American Dental Association, Texas Dental Association-Life Member
- Gulf State Dental Association-Admiral Club Member, Gulf Pac-Chairman
- Presidential Service Award Receipt
- Member-National Dental Association, E.H. Givens Dental Society, Academy of General Dentists, American Academy of Implant Congress, National Analgesia Society, past member-Austin Dental Advisory Board.

Dr. White was a distinguished fellow in the Academy of Psychosomatic Medicine; he was a charter and board member of the Austin 100 Club, co-founder and charter member of the Capital City Lions Club.

He was a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated, and received the organization's Civic and Service Award for his contribution to community. *"Sidney was a lifetime member and always financial, but did not participate much in the day-to-day happenings, but did participate in activities benefitting the community. And, he never failed to have a table at our Black and White Ball. He*

was always willing to help and hosted several meetings at his home. The frat [Kappa Alpha Psi] would meet Laity Lodge (a religious-oriented retreat facility owned by the Butt family [of H-E-B] outside of Kerrville, TX with cabins), and everyone wanted to go to Sid's because of his infamous "punch" made with Hawaiian punch and adult libations of his own special concoction.", said James "Jim" Johnson, fraternity brother and golfing partner of Dr. White. Johnson recalled Dr. White hosting several meetings at his home for fraternity events, where his wife, Helen served delicious nibbles.[4]

A life-long dedicated Christian servant, Dr. White was a devout member of St. James Episcopal Church (his brother was an Episcopal priest) where he served in numerous capacities, which included several years (1963-64, 1969-70, 1972-73, and 1980-81) as Senior Warden. *"Dr. White was already there by the time I got there in 1963. He was a great supporter financially - one of our best pledgers (individuals pledging to give monetary funds to the church). He helped to get St. James started during a time of strict segregation. When black Episcopalians were not allowed to worship in the white Episcopalian churches, key black folks established their own. Dr. White was also a part of the Bishop's Committee, an usher, and an avid photographer of events and activities at the church. And, he helped the church embrace an atmosphere of welcome and radical hospitality. Dr. White was certainly known as a 'pillar of the church' and was well-loved for all his efforts"*, remembered Catherine Petit, long-time member and friend of the Dr. White.[7]

Dr. White was well-established in the church, and he "attempted to start a men's group there similar to the Knights of Columbus. *"He called it 'Men of St. Andrews', but I don't know if it still remains"*, said Johnson. *"Along with Mr. Lonnie Jackson, he [Dr. White] started the St. James Jazz Festival, which is still enjoyed today"*, recalled Georgetta Bryant, a long-time member of St. James.[8]

Dr. White was a man of great vision, and shared his vision with others with a hand-up for anyone in need. On August 16, 1962, Dr. Sidney White married, educator and socialite, Helen Marie Fields, who appreciated and shared his vision. They were married for 39-years.

Dr. Sidney White passed away April 23, 2002.

Helen Fields White:

Educator, socialite, fashionista, housewife, godmother, sorority sister – these are just a few descriptors Helen Fields White held in her lifetime.

Helen, born February 26, 1932, was a rare bird from Austin, Texas. The youngest of four children, at the age of 14 on her mother's death, she raised her niece, while her father worked, and the other children reared their own families.

She graduated with high honors from high school and went on to attend and graduated from then-Sam Huston College (now Huston-Tillotson University), where she was a model student, and became a member of the Alpha Kappa Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. After receiving her Bachelor's of Arts in 1952, she moved to California and proudly landed a job with the Los Angeles Police Department's Detective unit utilizing her inquisitive nature. She soon moved back to Texas to care for her father, and shortly after his death she began teaching elementary school during the desegregation era. Helen, being the best of the best, was one of the first and few African American teachers selected to teach at Highland Park Elementary, a white rudimentary institution. She later was offered and accepted a teaching position at Simms Elementary.

Helen was a renaissance woman of her time – astute at business and very independent – she purchased a new car and a new home all before 30 – AND on her own. This was notable feat for a Black woman before the 1960's! *She promptly left and went to Leif-Johnson Ford and purchased a Ford Falcon, then smartly drove by the first dealership to let them know she, an unmarried African American woman DID, in fact, purchase a car in her own name and on her own*", recited her godson, Lamont Alexander.[5]

Helen was from a family of means. Her grandfather purchased a block of homes in Austin's East side and divided it amongst his children. One of those children, Helen's father, a railroad worker and chauffeur for the famous Nelson-Davis family (owners of a well-known local grocery chain at the time), spoiled his children, so Helen was used to nice things. *"She and her family came out to our house [the Alexander Homestead - one of the first African-American families to settle in Austin] for fresh corn and watermelon dressed in their Sunday best - they were always fancily dressed! Every time they'd come to the farm she had on a different dress. I only had two dresses! And, her father was driving in a big car. I remember at one time they had a Packard,"* recalls Helen's third cousin, Anita (Alexander) Swain.[6]

Helen was known to be a fashionista. Along with the spacious and immaculately decorated 'home on the hill' and Dr. White continued to lavish her with the finer

thing in life - expensive clothes and furs, and sparkly jewels, including a three-carat diamond ring!

Accompanied with her stunning looks, insightful fashion sense and shrewd business acumen, suitors were not difficult to come by, but the only one that caught her eye was Dr. Sidney White, Jr. She was proud to boast the title “*doctor’s wife*”, and was all too happy to embrace his vision of helping others and uplifting those in the Black community. She was all too happy to set the table for invited guests.

Helen Fields White departed this earth on July 12, 2015.

The Whites worked hard, but they also enjoyed life, catering indulgent parties, elegant dinners and hosting membership inductions and events for their respective fraternity and sorority members. The Whites were one of the premiere African American “it” couples of the time.

Although, the Whites received quite a pushback about their home ([8601 Azalea Trail](#)) purchase in the ‘white-area’ of town (Some white people did not want them in “their” neighborhood, and some blacks felt they [the Whites] had turned their backs on the African American community that had supported them). Fortunately, there were whites who welcomed them, and blacks that were happy for them. Regardless of what was said, good or not, the Whites always lent a hand where they could and constantly strived for upward mobility and continued to fight for integration issues for the betterment of the African American community.

The Whites devoted their life to promoting and supporting charitable, community and civic causes, and uplifting their African-American community and comrades. They opened the doors of their home, hosting countless events at their suburban home, to key leaders and politicians, community members and visitors for regular galas, luncheons, meetings and fraternal inductions and ceremonies.

Informational Interview Credit List:

- [1] Dr. Norman Mason, personal communications, August 5, 2021
 - [2] Dr. Oliver Wayne McElveen, personal communications, August 5, 2021
 - [3] Pamela Crenshaw, personal communications, August 29, 2021
 - [4] James "Jim" Johnson, personal communications, August 27, 2021
 - [5] Lamont A. Alexander, personal communications, August 2, 2021
 - [6] Anita (Alexander) Swain, personal communications, August 7, 2021
 - [7] Catherine Petit, personal communications, August 31, 2021
 - [8] Georgetta Bryant, personal communications, August 28, 2021
- Information texted from Gail Wormley, August 29, 2021