

## Transcript for Interview With Thomas Ward

**Interviewer:** To start off, we were wondering if there were any specific things that you might like to talk about?

**Ward:** Are you all interested in just Chicago or are you interested in medical racism issues overall or from a specific time period?

**Interviewer:** Well predominantly Chicago, but if you want to include information from other places that's fine, and we are supposed to look at history over a long span of time so information over any time period is fine.

**Ward:** Okay because my work is in the South, and so I didn't do too much in Chicago. Now, Provident Hospital of course is very important nationally because there were very few hospitals in the early and mid part of the twentieth century where black physicians could practice anywhere, in the North or the South, and so lots of black physicians from all over the country went to Chicago to practice at Provident. Especially, for their internships and their residencies, which was a real big problem. What you have is in the early part of the twentieth century, medical education started to say you have to have an internship or residency. Graduating from medical school is one thing, but to really get a job and really be accepted you have to have an internship first and then a residency. What was going on was that you had black physicians graduating from some of the schools like Harriet, Howard, and all the schools in the North like Michigan, Harvard, and Ohio State where they were able to get medical degrees but they weren't able to get internships because most hospitals North and South wouldn't let them be interns or residents. So you actually have a situation in the 1920s, 30s, 40s, even in the 1950s that there were all kinds of internships nationwide going unfilled. There were more internships available than there were doctors graduating school, but so many of them were limited and to only white doctors. There were lots of black doctors who couldn't get any internships. A couple hospitals like Provident in Chicago, like Homer Phillips in St. Louis, like Kansas City number 2 in Kansas City, like Freedman's Hospital in Washington DC which became Howard University Hospital; those hospitals took on way more interns than they actually needed because the necessity was there to train some of these physicians. That was a big part of what I did on Provident. Most of my work was dealing in the South. Was that helpful information for you all?

**Interviewer:** Yeah that was helpful. What have philanthropic organizations done to contribute to the Provident Hospital?

**Ward:** Oh I don't know exactly which ones. I know the Rosenwald Foundation did contribute to a lot of hospitals. The Carnegie Foundation probably did, but Rosenwald would have been the most significant I'm sure because it was in Chicago, and it also made it a necessity to contribute to black hospitals. Off the top of my head I don't know exactly which philanthropic organizations outside of Rosenwald have contributed.

**Interviewer:** How has Dr. Daniel Hale Williams contributed to African American advancement in the medical field?

**Ward:** Dr. Daniel Hale Williams was one of the most important surgeons of the late 19th to early 20th century. He conducted what many people consider to be the first open heart surgery, there is a little debate about this. He was an extremely well respected physician; by black and white, many white physicians certainly have great respect for what he was doing. He was probably the most famous African American physician of the late 19th century; he had been in Washington and of course he spent a good deal at Provident. He was important in that he raised the stature of black physicians nationwide because he did have respect from a lot of white physicians. He was important because he was doing very cutting edge medicine, the heart surgery at a time when people were not doing heart surgery, and he was very important for some of the things I talked about earlier. He was as head of Provident Hospital and other hospitals very significant in training younger black physicians and making sure there were positions for them as residents and interns. He trained a lot of the African American physicians in the early twentieth century.

**Interviewer:** How has the Provident Hospital improved the rights of black patients and black physicians?

**Ward:** Well with black physicians, it provided them opportunity. With black patients certainly in the beginning and early part of the twentieth century it gave them a facility where they could be treated by physicians they wanted to be treated by. One of the big problems for black physicians and black patients is that you had your physician that you went to and you trusted who is African American, you often couldn't practice in a local public hospital. This was true in many parts of the country, North and South. So what you would have is you would have a physician, and he would treat you and any time you would have to have a hospital procedure he would turn you over to a white physician, and so for the patient you weren't being treated by the doctor you wanted, sometimes it meant you were put in a segregated ward. A lot of the hospitals once again even in the North were segregated, and African American patients didn't get the same quality of care as white patients did, and for the physicians, it meant losing the patients a lot of times. One of the things often said was, "oh black physicians were not as good as white physicians", and if you have zero patients and your doctor can't treat you at the hospital you've kinda confirmed that idea. Even though the reason was because of discrimination not because they were more or less qualified. So Provident Hospital, like the other major African American hospitals, was very important in allowing black doctors to treat their patients, and allowing patients to be treated by their own physicians. It was also important because it was controlled by black physicians; so they were the ones in charge, doing the hiring, and controlling what was going on.

**Interviewer:** How were the black patients treated at hospitals?

**Ward:** Well it varied, it depended on where you were, and when it was. At the very worst, black patients weren't admitted at all hospitals, and of course this happened at a lot of places, North

and South. What was more common would be that black patients would be treated at a segregated ward. Often a basement ward, so it didn't matter how much you could pay, if you were African American you had to be treated in one large ward even if you could afford to pay for a private room you weren't allowed to do so. Some of these basement wards were not nearly as clean, they were not sanitary sometimes, there were some hospitals where you would actually have to move to another building. Can you imagine being kept in one ward, and then wheeled outside to go to the operating room. Other places especially in the North treated black patients more equally, but usually never quite equal. One of the big problems that we were talking about before was that most hospitals outside of a handful didn't give black physicians admitting privileges. So if you were a patient even if you were treated in a nice hospital, and in a nice room you might not even be able to be treated by your own physician. Now a lot of this changes after World War 2, World War 2 was a big turning point in hospitals here because the federal government started building hospitals, and when the federal government started building hospitals under the Hill-Burton Act in 1946 they said you couldn't discriminate, but now there were loopholes in Southern hospitals allowing them to discriminate as long as they provided more hospital beds for African Americans.

**Interviewer:** How have black hospitals filled the void of institutional racism?

**Ward:** They were very important in filling the void of institutional racism, and this is true not only for big hospitals like Provident, but even in very small hospitals in rural areas, sometimes in big cities in the South where black physicians were excluded from the public hospitals. What they did was they allowed two big things: one goes back to what we were talking about, when you have black physicians who were not allowed to treat patients in a local public hospital, small hospitals some of them were owned by the physicians themselves, some of them were owned by organizations, some of them were built like the local black community they allowed black americans to do hospital work; do things like surgery, that they wouldn't have been able to do otherwise. The other thing that we were talking about is it allowed black patients to be treated by the doctor they wanted to be treated by, it also allowed them to be treated often, and usually with much greater respect than they would get if they were treated in a segregated hospital. A lot of the hospitals were not nearly up to code, and were not as modern. Sometimes in places not as sanitary. Provident was very different it was very modern. It did allow physicians to practice where they were not allowed to practice in other places, and it allowed communities to have a great deal of self worth from owning their own hospitals, and having their own hospital. A local black hospital was often a real sign of a great deal of community pride; community was able to build their own hospital. Finally, the third thing, they provided training facilities as we talked about in the beginning. Provident provided a lot of internships, but some of the smaller community hospitals may have been able to provide for one or two interns and that was very important.

**Interviewer:** What role did the Jim Crow Laws have in the creation of African-American hospitals?

**Ward:** There's a silver lining for the Jim Crow Laws, because they excluded people from so many

facilities they forced the black community to provide for themselves. That was an epithet for black physicians and black communities to build their own hospitals. One of the things we see, actually when Jim Crow was dismantled, a lot of those hospitals died because a couple hospitals who previously excluded them were more modern and people started to go there. Jim Crow laws provided an opportunity for physicians and communities to hold their own hospitals and that was significant. Black medical schools, and black medical societies were created because the AMA discriminated against blacks, these societies are still around pushing certain issues.