**Black History Month Highlights of Black American Scientists**

W. Montague Cobb & The W. Montague Cobb Research Laboratory

<https://www.cobbresearchlab.com/issue-1/2015/1/26/the-life-of-dr-william-montague-cobb>

Dr. William Montague Cobb was born in 1904 and made history when he became the first African American to earn a Ph.D. in anthropology. With degrees in medicine and physical anthropology, he researched human skeletal anatomy and was a fervent activist serving as a member of the Board of Directors of the NAACP. Named for him, the “Cobb Collection” originally comprised of 987 de-fleshed human cadavers that were added to the collection between 1931 and 1965. Originating from hospitals in Washington D.C., the CC individuals were assigned a CC number after their autopsy, conducted by the hospital staff or Dr. Cobb himself. A key point about the CC is that it has been used as a resource by many students of skeletal anatomy and has contributed greatly to knowledge used by forensic anthropologists today. In addition, Dr. Cobb conducted studies of his own on demographics and skeletal attributes, that notably included biocultural factors such as ethnicity, nutrition, and age related change. While biocultural approaches would take off as standard some 50 years later, Dr. Cobb was a scientist ahead of his time exploring the breadth of knowledge that might be gained from the human skeleton (Watkins 2007). He also contributed to the Hamann-Todd Skeletal Collection, another essential collection in the creation of forensic anthropology methods and practice today.

Watkins, R. J. (2007). Knowledge from the margins: W. Montague Cobb's pioneering research in biocultural anthropology. *American Anthropologist*, *109*(1), 186-196.

For more information see writings by:

Dr. Fatimah Jackson, Director, W. Montague Cobb Research Laboratory

Dr. Rachel Watkins, Associate Professor Department of Anthropology, American University

And Drs. Lesley M. Rankin-Hill and Michael L. Blakey

**Quotes By W. Montague Cobb**

“Bones have three functions. They serve 1) as structural supports and agents in locomotion, 2) as a reservoir of mineral, particularly calcium, for use in blood coagulability, muscle tone, kidney function and activity of the central nervous system, and 3) as housing for the hemopoietic tissues of the red marrow.”

Cobb, W. M. (1952). Skeleton.

“Man … has become the dominant living creature on our little planet. His future is largely in his own hands. In his higher brain he has an organ with which he can successfully solve all his major problems, *but he cannot derive full benefits from this organ unless he educates it*, a matter which Nature has left almost entirely up to him.”

Cobb, W. M. (1943). Education: Priority Number One. *Phylon (1940-1956)*, *4*(4), 305-310.