

Name: _____ Class: _____

Healing 'Brick City': A Newark Doctor Returns Home

By NPR Staff
2013

Newark, New Jersey is a notoriously high-crime city. Five of the city's last seven mayors have been indicted on criminal charges relating to political corruption. As of the 2006-2010 American Community Survey, 16% of Newark residents ages 25 and over had never attended high school. This is part of what makes the journey of Dr. Sampson Davis, an African-American man who grew up in the city and went on to become a physician and healthcare reform activist, so remarkable. As you read, take notes on Dr. Davis's explanation for his success and his view for the future of medicine.

[1] When Sampson Davis was in high school, he and two of his friends made a pact that they would someday become doctors. All three of them did. Along with those friends — and now fellow doctors — George Jenkins and Rameck Hunt, Davis co-authored a 2003 book called *The Pact*, about that promise and the way it shaped their lives.



"The Three Doctors" by The Three Doctors Foundation is in the public domain.

Now, in a new memoir, Davis describes his experience returning to the Beth Israel Hospital in Newark, N.J. — the hospital where he was born — as an emergency physician. Davis joins NPR's Scott Simon to talk about the book, *Living and Dying in Brick City: An E.R. Doctor Returns Home*.

INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS

On returning to Newark after becoming a doctor

"My calling was a bit different. It was important for me to come back and become a beacon of hope, if you will, to show young people, especially, that education can change a life. It changed my life, and it saved my life in so many ways."

On encountering a childhood friend, Don "Snake" Moses, in the hospital

"He was a young guy that I grew up with in the streets of Newark. And my past wasn't always perfect. I grew up in a single-parent home with five siblings [in a] drug-infested community. And I always had hopes and aspirations¹ of doing more with my life, but I often say you can't aim for what you can't see. Growing up, I was surrounded by so much negative peer pressure and negativity, it wasn't long before I became a part of that fabric.

1. **Aspiration** (*noun*): a strong desire to achieve something high or great

[5] “Snake and I was a part of a team that committed an armed robbery when I was 17 1/2. And I often say 17 1/2 because had I been 18, my story would have been written differently. But it was that life experience that changed me around. I was sentenced to two years’ probation. And I started back in high school and... earned straight A’s in high school, went off to college, and went down a different side of the fork in the road towards education. And Snake — Don Moses — stayed down the same road of crime, and he was in and out of jail.

“And it so happened that I finished college, I went off to medical school, came back home for my residency,² and the first day... I looked up at the board, and ‘Don Moses’ [was] written on the board in the trauma room. I’m like, ‘Wow, I know that name,’ and right below was written the word ‘deceased.’ So, I’m sitting in there, looking at the board and thinking, ‘What are the chances that this is the Don Moses that I know?’ And unfortunately, I sprinted down to the surgical ICU³ and his body was taken away, but his family was there. It was the Don Moses that I knew from childhood.”

On the need to acknowledge mental illness

“When you look at mental illness, in the inner city community particularly, it’s taboo.⁴ It’s almost like, ‘I can’t say to another person that I’m depressed, because it destroys, especially as a man talking to another man, it destroys the ‘man code,’ if you will. But in the book, I refer to a young man that I grew up with who was this bright, happy, young guy who I remember playing basketball with. I left, went off to college and medical school, and I returned. He didn’t look the same. He tried to act as if he was happy, but everything about him screamed depression. His depression stemmed⁵ from many things: He lost his mother, he lost his girlfriend — his fiancée. And he never [sought] help for it because it was one of those situations that I’ve come to understand, where you just don’t talk about it. He unfortunately took his life. He just spiraled out of control — he had no resources, and no ways of dealing with it or coping with it.”

On what it will take to improve health care in inner cities

“I think one is attention to the matter at hand and to realize that there is a need that exists in the cities as far as health care. Not only in the cities but in a great amount of rural⁶ areas, as well. I also feel that there has to be a program in place that encourage[s] youth from the beginning to become doctors, to become health care professionals. There has to be more programs that exist... to help the students matriculate⁷ through high school, through college, through medical school. Because more often, just like myself, you come back. You come back to home.”

-
2. “Residency” refers to the period of advanced training in a medical specialty that normally follows graduation from medical school.
 3. Intensive Care Unit
 4. **Taboo (adjective):** prohibited or restricted by social custom
 5. **Stem (verb):** to come from
 6. **Rural (adjective):** relating to the country, country people or life, or agriculture
 7. to be enrolled at a college or university

On feeling the responsibility to give back

“Through my mother’s way of handling life, she always made sure that I understood the need to give back.... She always said, ‘Once you make it, you have to come back and help other people.’ Too often, in Newark especially, I see so many professionals that do make it out — they don’t return. And I think that’s a crime in itself.... You have to have some social consciousness to give back, to be a part of making it better tomorrow.”

©2013 National Public Radio, Inc. News report titled “Healing ‘Brick City’: A Newark Doctor Returns Home” was originally broadcast on NPR’s Weekend Edition Saturday on February, 2013, and is used with the permission of NPR. Any unauthorized duplication is strictly prohibited.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best identifies the central idea of this article?
 - A. Physicians have a responsibility to actively campaign for comprehensive healthcare and health insurance reform in the communities in which they work.
 - B. Davis overcame the influence of a tremendously negative environment to achieve great success and intends to use his training to better the community in which he grew up.
 - C. Dr. Sampson Davis and his two colleagues were able to become doctors due to a combination of hard work and luck; many Newark residents are not so fortunate.
 - D. Access to healthcare for people living in high-crime, high-density urban areas is the primary concern of physicians who live and work in these underserved communities.

2. PART B: Which phrase from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "Growing up, I was surrounded by so much negative peer pressure and negativity, it wasn't long before I became a part of that fabric." (Paragraph 4)
 - B. "[I] committed an armed robbery when I was 17 1/2. And I often say 17 1/2 because had I been 18, my story would have been written differently." (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "There has to be more programs that exist... to help the students matriculate through high school, through college, through medical school." (Paragraph 8)
 - D. "And I think that's a crime in itself.... You have to have some social consciousness to give back, to be a part of making it better tomorrow." (Paragraph 9)

3. How does the following phrase contribute to the development of the main ideas of the text: "It was the Don Moses that I knew from childhood" (Paragraph 6)?
 - A. It illustrates how many people from underserved communities go down a negative path and it makes Davis's ascent all the more remarkable by comparison.
 - B. It demonstrates the impact the death of a childhood friend had on Davis, who would go on to become an emergency room physician.
 - C. It shows that a life of crime will inevitably result in an untimely death or permanent incarceration.
 - D. It advances the notion that Newark, New Jersey is an underserved city.

4. What is the author’s main purpose in writing the article?
- A. To emphasize the extent to which growing up in a negative environment can stunt a young person’s growth and development.
 - B. To show people how doctors from all different backgrounds can work together to make a difference in the quality of healthcare nationwide.
 - C. To inform and inspire people by sharing the narrative of a hard-working, compassionate person who prevailed over alarming circumstances to realize great success.
 - D. To encourage more young people who have endured difficult childhoods to pursue careers in emergency medicine.
5. How does Davis describe the relationship between growing up in Newark and returning to the city as a physician? Cite evidence from the text in your response.

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. What do you think Davis means when he says that “you can’t aim for what you can’t see” in paragraph 4? Do you agree? Can you think of another example where this might ring true, perhaps in your own life or in the world around you?
2. How does paragraph 7 shed light on how a rigid view of masculinity can negatively impact young men? Can you think of specific examples of ways in which society works to encourage men to repress their emotions instead of dealing with them?
3. Rudolf Virchow, a famous German physician and public health advocate, was famously quoted as saying that “physicians are the natural attorneys of the poor.” Do you agree? What responsibilities do doctors have to society and to the communities they serve?
4. Why do you think Davis considers it so important that individuals from a diverse variety of backgrounds are encouraged to pursue careers in medicine? Do you agree or disagree with his position?
5. In the context of this article, how does a person overcome adversity? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.