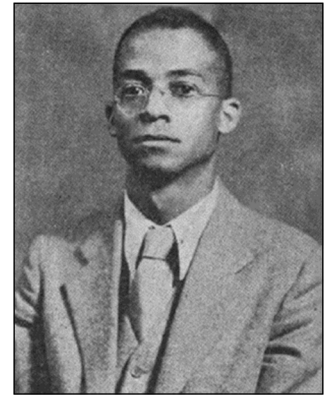


Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee



William B. Redmond (1909 - 1993)

William Benjamin Redmond II, Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College (A & I) alumnus, civil rights activist, farmer, and esteemed Franklin, Tennessee businessman was born in Williamson County, Tennessee on April 11, 1909. The son of William B. and Albinda Redmond, William Redmond II would become one of the earliest Black students in America to challenge America's Jim Crow laws in higher education.

Redmond hailed from an educated and relatively well-to-do family in Franklin. Both of his parents were literate, owned a farm, and possessed sufficient space in their home to take on a boarder. After graduating high school, Redmond's parents enrolled him at Tennessee A and I (renamed Tennessee State University [TSU] in 1968) to continue his education. Upon his arrival in Nashville, the bright and curious student took became intrigued by the sciences and developed a keen interest in Chemistry. An excellent student, Redmond stood out among his peers, averaging ninety percent scores in his physics and chemistry courses during his sophomore year at the university.

Redmond graduated in 1933, with hopes of earning a degree in pharmaceutical studies. He acted upon this dream in 1935 when he applied for admission to the University of Tennessee School of Pharmacy, located in Memphis, Tennessee, only to have the school reject his application because he was Black. At the time of his application, the University of Tennessee had never admitted a Black student in its history. Undeterred by the university's rejection, Redmond secured

assistance from National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP, founded in 1909) attorneys, Charles Hamilton Houston and Nashville attorney Z. Alexander Looby, who filed suit for admittance to the university after failed appeals for admission to the President of the University, James D. Hoskins, and the University of Tennessee's Board of Trustees.

As Redmond's case gained state and national attention, it became apparent that his suit was larger and held much more significance than his goal of obtaining a seat in the University of Tennessee pharmacy school. In a statement, one of his attorneys, Z. Alexander Looby, informed the public that one reason for filing the case was to shed light on the State of Tennessee not providing any postgraduate schools for its African American residents. When Redmond filed his suit in 1937, the Volunteer State had not complied with the United States Supreme Court's ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which required it to provide equal facilities for Black and white residents. Looby argued that the university's refusal to admit Redmond to the pharmacy school because of his race violated protections afforded him under the equal protection clause of the U. S. Constitution and that the absence of any postgraduate schools for African Americans in the state constituted a violation their 14th Amendment rights.

Redmond did not prevail in court, as the judge of the chancery court argued that granting his request for admission to the pharmacy school would require the court to assume legislative authority not granted to it by the Constitution.

Although disappointing, it was not unexpected as the NAACP had several of these cases in courts throughout the country where they experienced mixed results. Tennessee's initial response to Redmond's case was to provide scholarships for its Black students to enroll in out-of-state schools or in Canada. With the passage of the law, the NAACP dropped its appeal of the lower court's ruling.

Nonetheless, Redmond could have gained admission into an institution in Tennessee had he chosen to do so as a result of Lionel Gaines's attempt to enroll in the University of Missouri's Law School. After being denied admission, Gaines and the NAACP sued the state, an act that concluded with the Supreme Court decision in *Missouri ex. rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938) that ruled Missouri had to integrate its law school or provide one for African American students in the state. This ruling would have compelled Tennessee lawmakers to either integrate its segregated universities or provide facilities for the state's African American residents to pursue pharmacy and other graduate degrees. Redmond, however, abandoned his desire to become a pharmacist and chose to return to live among his friends and family in Williamson County.

Redmond spent the rest of his life being a well-respected and successful businessman in Franklin, owning a restaurant, liquor store, pool hall, and maintaining a farm (currently located at the site known as Sturbridge Pointe). In 1982, a tragic fire at one of his downtown stores almost claimed his life, as the firefighters were unaware that he was inside as they battled the flames. After being informed he may have still been inside, firemen rushed in where they found him unresponsive. Although it would take several weeks for him to recover from the ordeal, he would go on to live more than a decade after the tragedy.

William Benjamin Redmond II died on March 7, 1993. With his passing, the state lost a bold champion of equality for all Tennesseans, a beloved businessman, and a gentle spirit whose memory still inspires TSU Tigers and alumni, Nashvillians, and Tennesseans with the courage and resiliency he demonstrated throughout his life.

Dr. Learotha Williams, Jr.

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