



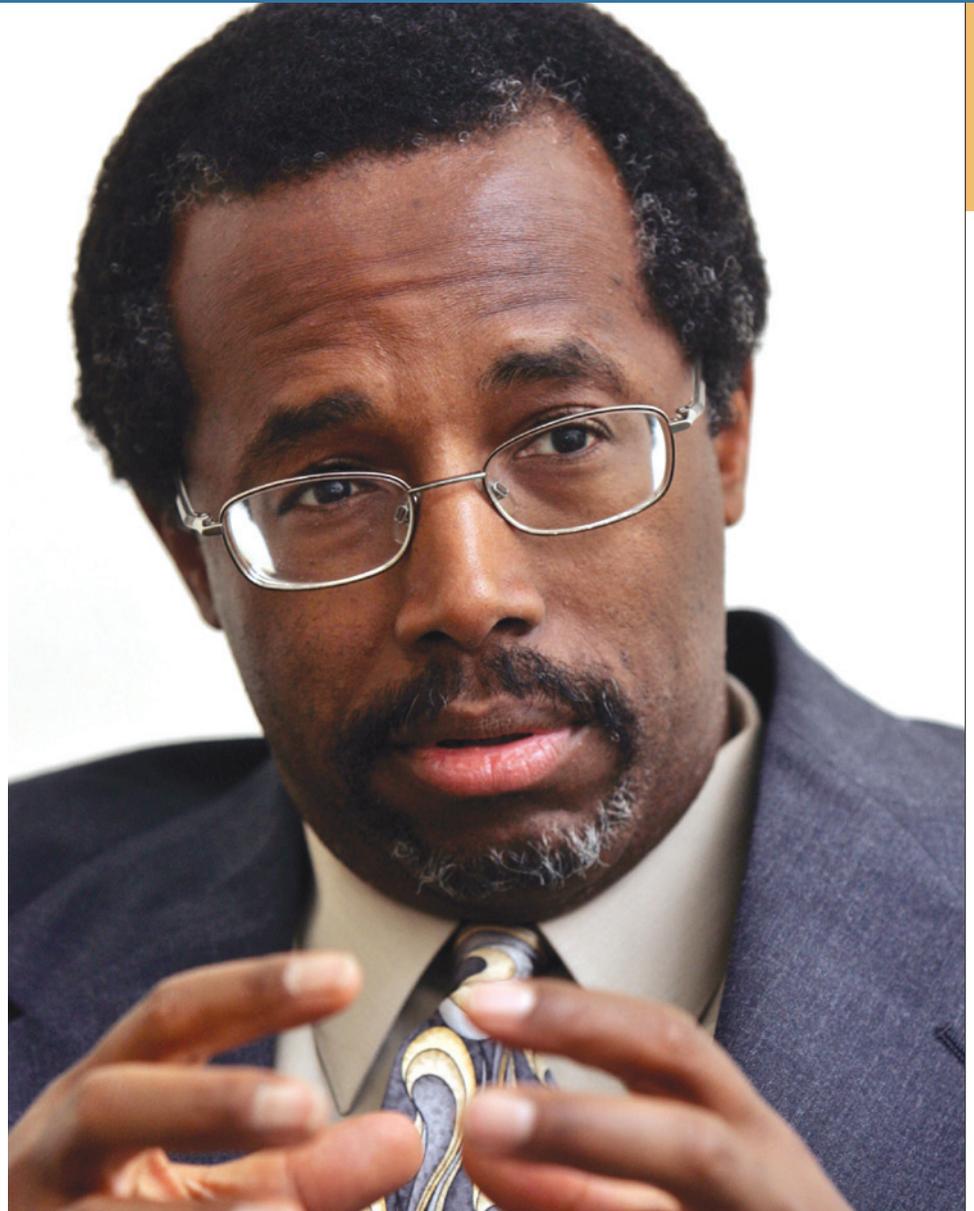
Ben Carson, Neurosurgeon

By Kenneth J. Cooper

Ben Carson was “a ghetto kid from the streets of Detroit,” he writes in his autobiography, at a time when the United States was undergoing the crucible of the civil rights movement. That poor black kid who struggled early in school grew up to be Dr. Ben Carson, one of the world’s greatest neurosurgeons.

Benjamin Solomon Carson was born September 18, 1951, in Detroit. His parents divorced when he was 8; poverty soon followed. An indifferent student, Carson’s grades improved when his mother convinced him to read books and learn multiplication tables. Soon, he found himself immersed in reading, which he credits for his academic turnaround. In particular, he cites the inspiring trajectory of *Up From Slavery*, the autobiography of Booker T. Washington, who was born a slave but founded a university and advised two U.S. presidents.

A graduate of Yale University and the University of Michigan Medical School, Carson spent more than three decades at the Johns Hopkins Children’s Center in Baltimore. He achieved major medical advances early in his career at the renowned teaching



Renowned neurosurgeon Ben Carson led a 70-member surgical team that performed the first successful operation to separate conjoined twins who were joined at the head. © AP Images

hospital. In 1987, Carson led a 70-member surgical team that performed the first successful operation to separate conjoined twins who were joined at the head.

For the past two decades, he and his wife Lacena (“Candy”) have run a national charity, the Carson Scholars Fund, which provides college scholarships to



Ben Carson holds a model of the heads of German conjoined twins during a news conference in Baltimore. © AP Images

outstanding community-minded students and funds reading rooms inside elementary schools that lack libraries. His goal is to help others follow a path to success similar to the one he took, applying the traditional virtues of discipline, hard work and faith. There are more than 5,700 Carson Scholars in all 50 states and the

District of Columbia. In addition, the Ben Carson Reading Project has invested some \$850,000 to create and maintain 88 reading rooms across the country.

In 2008, President George W. Bush awarded Carson the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor the U.S. government bestows on civilians.

Popular recognition has come with the television movie *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story* (2009), about his remarkable life and achievements.

This essay was published in *Stories of African-American Achievement* in 2010.