

In Memoriam: Joseph L. White



Joseph L. White (December 19, 1932-November 21, 2017), affectionately referred to as the “Godfather” of Black psychology by his students, mentees, and younger colleagues, was a professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at the University of California at Irvine where he spent most of his career as a teacher in the field of psychology and mental health as a mentor, administrator, clinical supervisor, writer, consultant, and practicing/supervising psychologist.

He earned a B.A. and master’s degrees from San Francisco State University, and in 1962, he was awarded a doctorate in clinical psychology at the Michigan State University (he was one of only five African Americans who held a Ph.D. in the field). In 1962 he joined the faculty at California State University, Long Beach and taught there for six years and helped in establishing the Educational Opportunities Program

which became a program implemented across the California State University system. In 1968, he helped to found the Association of Black Psychologists with other Black psychologist during a meeting at the American Psychological Association; and helped to establish the first Black Studies program in the U.S. during the 1968 strike at San Francisco State University, and in 1969 he joined the faculty at the University of California, Irvine

Dr. White's 1970 article "Toward a Black Psychology" published in *Ebony* magazine, was a seminal document in the formation of African-American Psychology as a professional field and gave rise to a greater appreciation of ethnic and cultural psychology. The 1970 article argued that whatever the future of race relations and the destiny of Black people, the creation of a Black Psychology was necessary because the psychology created by white people could never adequately apply to African-Americans. Dr. White went further to point out that the application of mainstream white psychology to Black people resulted in weakness-oriented deficit finding, rather than an accurate appraisal of the situation of people of African descent

In 1984, White authored *The Psychology of Blacks*, now titled *The Psychology of Blacks: An African-centered Perspective* with co-authors Thomas A. Parham and Adisa Ajamu which highlights the limitations of traditional psychological theories and approaches when applied to African descent people and provides information on how the African centered perspective is defined, as well as how it operates in the context of the African American family with regard to identity development, education, mental health, research, and managing contemporary issues.

In 1991 White was named director of the African American Studies program at the University of California at Irvine; in 1994 he was awarded a Citation of Achievement in Psychology and Community Service from President Bill Clinton; in 2007 he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of Minnesota (the highest award given to individuals who are distinguished for their accomplishment in cultural affairs, public service or a field of knowledge and scholarship); in 2008, he was honored as Alumnus of the year at San Francisco State University. In 2011 he was coeditor of *Black Fathers: An Invisible Presence in America* with Michael E. Connor which offers a broader, more positive picture of African American fathers, featuring case studies of African-descended fathers that brings to life the achievements and challenges of being a Black father in America with leading scholars and practitioners providing unique insight into this understudied population to argue that short-sighted social policies which do not encourage father involvement must be critically examined and that the value of father engagement is promoted. And in August of 2015, White received a Presidential Citation from the American Psychological Association for his distinguished career as a psychologist devoted to social justice and committed to racial, gender, and cultural equality. He was appointed to the California State Psychology Licensing Board by the Governor of the State of California Edmund G. Brown, Jr. (he served as chairman for three years), he was also member of the Board of Trustees of The Menninger Foundation in Houston, Texas. And additionally, he worked as a psychologist to five hospitals and three clinics in southern California and over the years had served as a consultant for school districts, universities, private organizations, drug prevention programs, and government agencies.