

James S. Jackson (1944–2020)

September 30, 2020



James S. Jackson (University of Michigan)

[APS James McKeen Cattell Fellow](#) **James S. Jackson**, a pioneering social psychologist known for his research on race and ethnicity, racism, and health and aging among African Americans, died on September 1, 2020. His nearly 50-year career at the University of Michigan included serving as director of the [Institute for Social Research](#) from 2005 to 2015, and being named the Daniel Katz Distinguished University Professor of Psychology in 1995. He is survived by his wife, APS Fellow Toni C. Antonucci, also a distinguished University of Michigan psychological scientist and a recipient of the [2020 APS Mentor Award](#), and their daughters Ariana and Kendra.

A native of Detroit, Jackson's interest in psychology took when he was an undergraduate at Michigan State University. He earned a master's degree from the University of Toledo and his doctorate from Wayne State University, where he and others disrupted the presidential address at the convention of the American Psychological Association to demand more support for Black psychology students.

"There must've been about 17 of us from across the country," Jackson said in a [2014 conversation with APS Founding Executive Director Alan Kraut](#). "We all put on our dashikis and marched up there, and took over the microphone. We didn't do this thing lightly. We all thought we were going to jail. But George Miller and George Albee, particularly Albee, and a social psychologist from Harvard, Herb Kelman, decided they would handle this in a very different way. They told us, 'Well, some of your points are well taken. Let's have a meeting tomorrow morning and talk about it, and see what we can do.'"

That meeting led to the establishment of an office of the Black Student Psychological Association, with Jackson as its first president.

In 1971, Jackson achieved another first, becoming the first full-time African American faculty member at the University of Michigan. One of many achievements in his subsequent years there was the establishment, in 1976, of the [Program for Research on Black Americans](#) and its groundbreaking National Survey of Black Americans, considered the most extensive social, mental, and physical health survey of the U.S. Black population. In his [2014 conversation](#) with Kraut, Jackson outlined two distinct aspects of the survey that contributed to its accuracy and influence in the years that followed: establishing WASP (the Wide Area Screening Procedure) to ascertain the exact locations of African Americans; and making it nonracially comparative, to better answer questions for which the comparisons are internal to Black respondents.

In 2014, former U.S. President Barack Obama [appointed Jackson to the National Science Board](#). Over a period of many years, he was elected to the National Academy of Medicine, the National Academy of Sciences, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and served in advisory capacities, including the National Advisory Council on Minority Health and Health Disparities. In 2017, he was awarded the University of Michigan's Inaugural [Distinguished Diversity Scholar Career Award](#).

Look for Jackson's remembrance in a future issue of the *Observer*.