

Witherspoon, August Mclver ^[1]

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11 Sept. 1930-6 June 1994

Augustus Mclver Witherspoon earned a doctorate in botany from North Carolina State University (NCSU) in 1970. In doing this, he became the second African American to earn a PhD at the university. And he was the first black teacher in the university's history to achieve the rank of professor. He was also the first African American to have a building named in his honor on the NCSU campus. Witherspoon spent 23 years at NCSU. And in that time, he produced many academic publications and ground-breaking research. He held senior administrative positions. And he became a community leader, leading efforts to support minority students and break down racial barriers on campus.

Witherspoon was known as one of the 'Founding Fathers' of the African American Cultural Center at NCSU. He used diplomacy and his stature as a scholar to influence policies to help dismantle racial discrimination on campus. And he worked for policies that provided more opportunity for African American students. He did this in an era when southern colleges and universities continued to resist improved social attitudes toward race. College professors played a critical role in promoting change in campus life. And Witherspoon was this type of professor. He compelled NCSU to shape its policies to promote black dignity and freedoms. And he worked for thoughtful dialogue with the dominant white culture.

Augustus "Gus" Witherspoon inspired respect from the southern establishment in North Carolina. He was a Korean War era veteran, a Christian minister, and a well published scholar. He rose to hold high-ranking administrative positions at NCSU. He served as the Assistant Dean, Acting Dean and Associate Dean on the College of Agricultural Life Sciences Graduate School. And he became Associate Provost and Coordinator of African American Affairs. The university named the Augustus Mclver Witherspoon Student Center in honor of his contributions.

Professor Witherspoon was married to Ruth Scipio, a native of Darlington, South Carolina. Known as "Cookie", she was born in 1931. She attended the Columbia Hospital School of Nursing in Columbia, South Carolina and had a long career in nursing. She became the first African American charge nurse at Rex Hospital in Raleigh. She died on October 15, 2015.

Witherspoon recognized that the intersection of school, church and community were important for African American advancement. And his influence reached far beyond campus in secular and religious leadership roles. He passed away on June 6, 1994 at the age of 63 after a brief battle with cancer.

References:

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Additional Resources:

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