

## **Robert V. Guthrie, 75; noted psychology educator**

By Jack Williams  
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

November 12, 2005

Through his research, his writing and his ground-breaking career as an educator, Robert V. Guthrie helped put a new face on psychology.

His seminal 1976 book, "Even the Rat Was White: A Historical View of Psychology," illuminated the contributions of pioneering black psychologists while challenging dubious studies that reinforced racial stereotypes.

"It was a challenge to psychology to make us visible," said Joseph White, a fellow founder of the Association of Black Psychologists. "His book laid out our story, although it was slow catching on at the time."

Dr. Guthrie, who was diagnosed with brain cancer in April, died Nov. 6 at his home in Clairemont. He was 75.

During a career in psychology and education that spanned both coasts, he became the first black faculty member at San Diego Mesa College in the 1960s. In 2001, he was the first black psychologist to deposit his papers in the National Archives of American Psychology in Akron, Ohio, where the occasion was marked by a conference in his honor.

"He was a very brilliant, creative, low-key guy who didn't seek recognition," White said. "His work resonated across the world."

Dr. Guthrie's last academic appointment was at Southern Illinois University, where he taught applied experimental psychology and served as chairman of Black American Studies until 1997.

In January, he was honored as a special Elder at the American Psychological Association's National Multicultural Conference & Summit in Los Angeles.

An updated version of "Even the Rat Was White" was released in 1998 by Allyn & Bacon. Although it was considered somewhat of a classic by then, many white colleagues considered it divisive upon its 1976 release.

David Baker, director of the National Archives of American Psychology, lauded the book as "an excellent piece of historiography that offers a good, hard look at racism in the development of psychology." Baker said some pioneering black psychologists "would be forgotten if not for Guthrie's work."

Dr. Guthrie viewed the book as a template for historical research in other academic fields tainted by racism. "As I wrote, I felt I was leading the forgotten people out of the woodwork," he said in a 2001 interview.

One of his inspirations for the book was Kenneth B. Clark, the first black president of the American Psychological Association. Clark's findings on the shortcomings of racial segregation were quoted by the Supreme Court when it abolished segregation in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case of 1954.

As a student at the University of Kentucky in the early 1950s, Dr. Guthrie became disillusioned when one of his professors expressed doubt over the importance of Clark's research. Acknowledging that the professor spoke out of ignorance rather than malice, Dr. Guthrie dug further into what he described as "a rich heritage in black psychology."

Disillusioned by the slow sales and tepid response to his book, Dr. Guthrie reissued the book through his own publishing house. "He had to keep plugging on," his son, Ricardo Guthrie, said. "The book was not getting the attention he thought it deserved."

The emergence of widely accepted black-studies disciplines in higher education later helped validate much of Dr. Guthrie's work.

"People became more conscious of considering alternative perspectives, and the book was used to bolster the cause of women, blacks, Chicanos and Asians," his son said.

When Dr. Guthrie was invited to address the American Psychological Association in the 1990s, some of his early detractors acknowledged that he had been ahead of his time, his son said.

Robert Val Guthrie was born Feb. 14, 1930, in Chicago. His family moved to the South when his father accepted a job as principal of Dunbar High School in Lexington, Ky. In his youth, Dr. Guthrie's first love was music. He realized a goal by playing clarinet in Florida A&M University's flamboyant marching band, only to see his college career interrupted in 1950 by the Korean War.

While stationed at Sampson Air Force Base in upstate New York, Dr. Guthrie met Elodia Sanchez, a Guatemalan nursing student, at a party. They were soon married.

When Dr. Guthrie returned to Florida A&M after the war, a psychology professor, Joseph Awkard, became his inspiration. He earned his bachelor's degree at A&M, then enrolled at the newly integrated University of Kentucky, where he obtained his master's.

He returned to the Air Force in the late 1950s, serving as a staff sergeant in Baffin Island in northern Canada.

Upon his discharge, Dr. Guthrie moved to San Diego, where he taught at San Diego High School and Memorial Junior High before becoming the first black professor at Mesa College.

During a 1968 conference in San Francisco of the American Psychological Association, Dr. Guthrie joined a few colleagues in founding the Association of Black Psychologists. "It has grown from about 20 to 1,000 members," said White, one of the first black clinical psychologists in the country.

Dr. Guthrie earned his doctorate in psychology in 1970 at U.S. International University. The next year, he accepted a post as associate professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh.

He left Pittsburgh to become a research psychologist for the National Institute of Education in Washington, D.C. He advanced to associate director of the psychological sciences division of the Office of Naval Research before returning to San Diego, where he was employed by the Navy Personnel Research and Development Center.

When he left that post in the early 1980s, Dr. Guthrie opened a private practice, Psychiatric Associates of South Bay, and focused on the needs of minorities.

In recent years, he served on the adjunct faculty at San Diego State University. Before his illness he was working with a San Diego physician, Dr. Joseph Joyner, in a study on childhood obesity and compiling his memoirs – a series of short stories and historical milestones in his life.

Survivors include his wife, Elodia; daughter, Sindhu Sadhaka-Gross of San Diego; sons, Michael Guthrie of Los Angeles and Robert, Paul, Ricardo and Mario Guthrie, all of San Diego; and nine grandchildren.

Visitation is scheduled from 3:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday at Anderson-Ragsdale Mortuary, 5050 Federal Blvd., San Diego. Services are scheduled for 10 a.m. Monday at the mortuary. Interment will be at Mount Hope Cemetery.

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