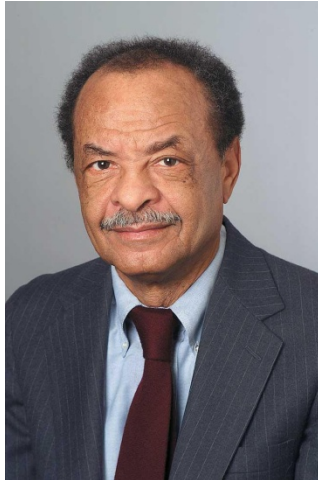


In Memoriam: “Ples” Sterling Stuckey



P. Sterling Stuckey (1932-2018) was an expert in African American history and was specifically interested in the cultural history of enslaved persons of African descent in the United States, and abroad. At the time of his unexpected passing, he was a Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History at the University of California at Riverside.

Stuckey joined the ancestors on August 15, 2018. He was born in 1932 in Memphis, Tennessee. His mother, Elma Earline Johnson Stuckey was a teacher in Memphis, a hat checker, maid, and eventually, a supervisor for the Illinois labor department in Chicago, Illinois as the family settled in the “Windy City” in 1945, as part of the “Great Migration” of African Americans in the North, in what pioneering Black American sociologist St. Clair Drake term the “Black Metropolis” of Chicago. Stuckey worked as a part-time public school teacher, postal worker, and Civil Rights organizer as he earned a Bachelors, Masters, and eventually a doctorate from Northwestern University, in 1972. He joined the faculty ranks at Northwestern one year before he received his Ph. D. in 1971 as an Associate Professor, and in 1977, he became a full Professor in the Department of History.

While at Northwestern, Stuckey also held numerous other prestigious positions, such as: the Hill Foundation Visiting Research Professor at the University of Minnesota (1970-1971), Visiting Research Fellow at UCLA (1975-76), an Andrew Mellon Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University (1980-1981), and a Senior Fellow at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. (1987-1988). In 1989, he took the position of UC Presidential Chair at the University of California at Riverside in the Department of History. Although he did obtain a Fellowship at the Humanities Research Institute at the University of California, Irvine (1991-1992), he stayed at the University of California at Riverside for the remainder of his academic career.

Stuckey is best known for his 1987 path-breaking book *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundation of Black America*, which was reissued by Oxford University Press in 2013, as a 25th Anniversary edition. The main argument of this volume is that during the period of enslavement, African American captives remained essentially African in their culture, particularly in the development and use of African art, dance, and music.

Thus, he contended that accordingly, the culture of enslaved African Americans was undeniable African at its base, and it was not only the principle source of African American art, dance, and music, but it also formed an essential part of American art, dance, and music. For example, not only “Negro Spirituals” but the Blues were created by enslaved African people as a musical way to strengthen themselves in the face of brutal enslavement with the creation of a cultural bond, which one could define as a type of “Pan Africanism.” In other words, Stuckey contended that in the face of much violence and racial hatred, enslaved persons of African descent developed a creative and artistic process that in time would be global in its impact which had never been seen before, as well, as they maintained their humanity and history as enslaved persons.

Stuckey also was the author of another potent book, titled *Going Through the Storm: The Influence of African American Art in History* (1994), that traced the legacy of African American art history from its roots in African culture to its manifestation in “Negro” spirituals and dance to the gospel music and songs of the 1960s. Specifically, he showed how this tradition, grounded in desperation and despair, represents the greatest triumph of the human spirit; the survival enslaved persons of African descent and their descendants, with the creation and use of “Negro” spirituals, Gospel, and the Blues to channel their pain, frustration, and anger into vessels of beauty and power for the entire world to hear and consume. But, these vessels, he concluded are uniquely African and African American.

During the rest of his long academic career, Stuckey authored numerous other highly acclaimed articles and books, such as *African Culture and Melville's Art: The Creative Process in Benito Cereno and Moby-Dick* (2011), and he continued to take on several other prestigious academic appointments. With his loss, he is survived by his wife Harriette, daughter Lisa Dembling, son Cabral Wiley-Stuckey, granddaughter, and a great-granddaughter.