

Dr. Toni Johnson, Ph.D.



She/Her

Dr. Toni Johnson was born in Austin, Texas, in 1956. She was a social justice advocate, therapist, and associate professor of social work at the University of Kansas. Dr. Johnson double majored in psychology and social work at Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma. She then earned her master's and social work doctorate from the University of Texas in Austin. In 2005, she joined the faculty at the University of Kansas and was promoted to associate professor in 2012. Dr. Johnson's research interests included designing and evaluating programs intended to improve the lives of underserved youth and families, with a particular focus on incarcerated Black youth and families.

Dr. Johnson was the co-chair of the Minority Scholar Program at KU, which guided first-generation students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2010, Dr. Johnson received the W. T. Kemper Fellowship for Teaching Excellence. In 2012, she received the Gene A. and Gretchen Budig Award for Teaching Excellence. At the age of 59, Dr. Johnson passed away in

2016. That year, The University of Kansas founded the Toni Johnson Center for Racial and Social Justice. The center's primary goal is to promote an educational environment engaged in racial and social justice in research, teaching, and service. Faculty hired to this center educate students and conduct research on diverse topics related to social justice, including the disproportionate effects that climate change has on marginalized people, understanding the social determinants of health and increasing health equity, and the development of programs to encourage asset building and financial growth in oppressed and marginalized communities. In Dr. Johnson's honor, the KU School of Social Work also provides scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students from historically oppressed or marginalized backgrounds through The Toni Johnson Scholars for Racial and Social Justice Program.

Octavia Estelle Butler



She/Her

Octavia Estelle Butler was born in Pasadena, California, in 1947. She was a renowned American science fiction author. Raised by her mother and grandmother, she was described as a shy child who turned to reading fantasy novels and writing to fill her time. After watching a science fiction film in 1954, Octavia decided she could write a better story. At the age of 12, she begged her mother for a Remington typewriter and began writing science fiction. She later studied writing at Pasadena Community College and UCLA. Her dystopian novels and short stories explore themes including Black injustice, women's rights, and global warming – topics not in commercial demand for much of her career.

In her early career, Octavia woke up at 2 a.m. each day to write her novels while working as a telemarketer and dishwasher. In 1976, Octavia published her first book, *The Patternmaster*, which became part of *The Patternist* series. Octavia published *Kindred* in 1979. Her story follows a contemporary Black writer who is taken back in time to antebellum Maryland and witnesses and experiences the brutalities of slavery that her ancestors endured. In 2022, Hulu released an eight-episode TV series based on this book.

She would publish dozens of books in her career, earning her countless awards and honors, including the Nebula Award for Best Novel, Hugo Award for Best Short Story, and Lifetime Achievement Award in Writing from the PEN American Center. In 1995, Octavia received a prestigious MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship, making her the only science-fiction writer to earn this honor. In 2010, she was inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame. She was the first Black female science fiction writer to become nationally known, opening the doors for other Black female writers to become recognized in the genre.

Percy Lavon Julian, Ph.D.



He/Him

Dr. Percy Lavon Julian was born in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1899. He was an American research chemist, educator, and pioneer in the chemical synthesis of medicinal drugs from plants. When he was a child, access to education for Black students beyond the eighth grade was extremely rare; however, his parents encouraged him to pursue a degree in higher education. With interest in chemistry, he was accepted as one of the few Black students at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, where he was not allowed to eat nor live in the college's facilities. Julian worked to upkeep fires in furnaces, waited on tables, and did other maintenance jobs in a nearby fraternity house in exchange for food and sleeping in the attic. In 1920, he graduated as a Phi Beta Kappa and valedictorian of his class. He went on to earn a scholarship to Harvard University. After earning his master's degree, Harvard administrators withdrew his teaching assistantship due to backlash from White students, making it impossible for him to complete his doctoral degree. He later received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship allowing him to continue his educational pursuits at the University of Vienna, where he earned his Ph.D. in Organic Chemistry in 1931.

In his career, Dr. Julian would be the first chemist to synthesize physostigmine – a drug from the west African Calabar bean used to treat glaucoma. He also developed a way to inexpensively derive progesterone and testosterone from soybeans for medications to help prevent miscarriages and fight cancers. Dr. Julian would later find ways to derive a synthetic version of cortisone from wild Mexican yams, which significantly reduced the costs of steroid intermediates and led to the creation of several critical pain-relieving drugs. Dr. Julian was the first Black chemist inducted into the National Academy of Sciences. He authored and co-authored more than 160 scientific publications, earned fifteen honorary degrees, and received dozens of accolades, including the prestigious Spingarn Medal from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.