

Morris F. X. Jeff, Jr., DSW

(1938-2003)

Dr. Morris F. X. Jeff, Jr., was a social worker, therapist, advocate, trainer, activist and consultant who spoke with clarity on urban problems and solutions using an African philosophical approach. He was a licensed clinician and a widely respected expert on a number of subjects including transracial adoption, black-on-black violence, welfare reform, reparation, manhood development, cultural diversity, the middle passage, rites of passage programs, Kemetic (Egyptian) culture and African spirituality.

Jeff was a native of New Orleans, La., who moved to Louisville, Ky., in 1965, after serving as a caseworker with the Children's Division of the Cook County Department of Public Aid in Chicago, Ill. He received a bachelor's degree from Xavier University in New Orleans, a master's degree in social work from Atlanta University (now Clark Atlanta) in Atlanta, Ga., and a Ph.D. in social work from Tulane University in New Orleans.

Like his father Morris Sr., he dedicated his life to fighting the battles of those who needed it most, African American children. He championed the many unpopular issues within society while challenging those around him to join in those struggles.

After his arrival in Louisville, Jeff first served as project director at the Presbyterian Community Center. In 1966, he accepted the directorship of the Plymouth Settlement House and served in that position until 1972. The Plymouth Settlement House at 1626 West Chestnut Street was started in 1917 to serve the African American population of Louisville's west end.

Jeff was most proud of the work he accomplished at the Plymouth Settlement House. He once said: "In the years since I have been here, Plymouth Settlement House has become seen as an agency that is competent and committed to the needs of serving black people. We are the only settlement house established by black people for black people."

Jeff was a true believer of the need for preserving and advancing African American families. He appeared on the NBC Today Show, ABC Night Line, CBS Night Watch and the Oprah Winfrey Show as an opponent to transracial adoptions. He asserted that black people can and must care for black children.

In 1981, he developed the Harambee Closing Ceremony to honor African culture to be held as part of the National Association of Black Social Workers annual conferences. Harambee is a Kiswahili word that translates as "pulling together" or "we all pull together." The ceremony has since been renamed the Dr. Morris F. X. Jeff, Jr. Harambee Ceremony to honor his legacy and immeasurable contributions to the National Association of Black Social Workers, and to the brothers and sisters throughout the African Diaspora.



Kentucky Commission
on Human Rights

Gallery of Great Black Kentuckians

No. 46

Printed with State Funds 4/09

