

Marvin Dunn '61

Psychologist, Historian, Author and Activist

Bennie Award in Service

Psychologist, historian, author, and community activist Marvin Dunn '61 was born in an orange grove barn in the Blackberry community of DeLand, Florida, in June 1940. His mother, Corinne Elizabeth Williams, was a housecleaner and cook, and his father, James C. Dunn Sr., was a fruit and vegetable picker. A member of a migrant family, Dunn was the second of five siblings who harvested crops in DeLand as well as Hicksville on Long Island, New York.

At DeLand's Euclid High School, Principal Freeman W. Hinson urged Dunn to take a Ford Foundation early admission exam, which allowed him to enter Morehouse College in 1957 and graduate with a bachelor's degree in psychology in 1961. Dunn's classmates included future Morehouse President Leroy Keith Jr., future Surgeon General David Satcher, M.D., and politician Maynard H. Jackson, who became Atlanta's first Black mayor.

From 1961-1967, Dunn served as a U.S. naval officer aboard two aircraft carriers. He then earned his master's degree in education, administration, and supervision, and in 1972, he received a doctorate in psychology from the University of Tennessee–Knoxville.

Dunn began his career as a psychologist for the Dade County Public School Board and Florida Model Cities Community Classroom Program. Then, in 1972, he started a 34-year professorship at Florida International University (FIU), where he founded the Cultural & Human Interaction Center, served as associate vice president for University Outreach & Services, and as acting director of the African New World Studies Program. After the 1980 Miami Riots, he established an alternative high school, the Dr. Marvin Dunn Academy for Community Education.

Dunn was appointed FIU psychology department chair in 2000, a post he held until his 2006 retirement. While there, he co-produced several video documentaries. His FIU archival collection now consists of more than 4,000 photographs and images reflecting the Florida Black experience.

As a historian specializing in Black Florida history and culture, Dunn is the founder and president of the Miami Center for Racial Justice and is known for organizing the "Teach the Truth" tours, which highlight Florida's history of racial violence. Center staff members take participants to historic sites in Florida related to the history of racial violence in the state. In July 2024, the center received a Mellon Foundation grant of \$1.5 million to extend this work to Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi.

Dunn's books include "A History of Florida Through Black Eyes," "Black Miami in the Twentieth Century," and "The Miami Riot of 1980: Crossing the Bounds."
