

American Psychiatric Association Belatedly Removes Award Honoring the Slave-Ownning “Father of American Psychiatry”

The award honored Benjamin Rush, whose theories the psychiatric organization now admits are at the root of the structural racism in psychiatry.

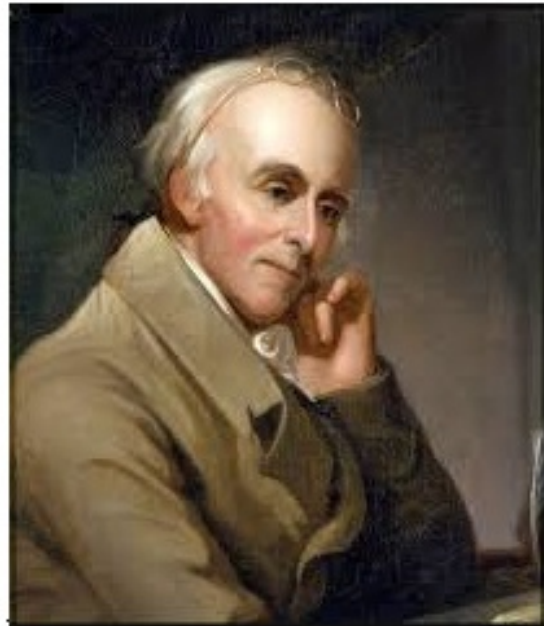
WASHINGTON, DC, US, October 26, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The American Psychiatric Association (APA) no longer lists a Benjamin Rush Award among the awards it confers on member psychiatrists. The Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) had repeatedly called on the organization to disavow Dr. Benjamin Rush, the slave-owning “father of American psychiatry” who is responsible for instigating the “scientific racism” at the very root of the structural racism in psychiatry that the APA now admits.

In 2021, more than 175 years after its founding, the APA issued a public [apology](#) for psychiatry's “role in

perpetrating structural racism.” However, the APA website continued to list the Benjamin Rush Award among the awards the organization presented and only more recently removed it.

The psychiatrist in whose honor this APA award was bestowed bought a child slave, William Grubber, in the early- to mid-1770s, scholars believe, at roughly the same time Rush published a 1773 critique of slavery. While he promoted the abolition of slavery in his writings, Rush [kept](#) his own slave for some two decades, apparently unconcerned with his hypocrisy.

Rush finally released Grubber from slavery in 1794, only after receiving, in his words, “a just



Dr. Benjamin Rush, the “father of American psychiatry,” bought a child slave and only freed him after he got “just compensation for my having paid for him the full price of a slave for life” – in other words, not until he got his money’s worth from his slave.

compensation for my having paid for him the full price of a slave for life.” In other words, Rush made sure he got his money’s worth from his slave before setting him free.

However, Rush’s transgressions go far beyond the human rights abuse of enslaving another human being.

In 1792, Rush declared that Blacks suffered from a disease he called “negritude” that he theorized was caused by a variant of leprosy. “Observations intended to favour a supposition that the Black Color (as it is called) of the Negroes is derived from the Leprosy,” he wrote.

The cure was scrubbing the skin with corrosive acid to turn it white. He also believed Blacks should not intermarry with other races because this supposed disease could infect their children.



With this view of “black leprosy,” Rush set the precedent for all the “scientific racism” that followed, up to present day, as psychiatrists and psychologists claimed to find biological justification for segregation and other discriminatory practices against Black Americans.

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Dr. Benjamin Rush, the “father of American psychiatry”

Rush set yet another racist precedent by considering that African Americans were able to easily endure surgical operations and pain, labeling this “pathological insensibility.” More than 200 years later, physicians are still more likely to [underestimate](#) the pain of Black patients relative to nonblack patients and are less likely to prescribe

African Americans appropriate pain medication.

Rush’s human rights abuses also included treating his patients with darkness, solitary confinement, and a special technique of forcing the patient to stand erect for two to three days at a time, poking them with sharp pointed nails to keep them from sleeping – a technique borrowed from a British procedure for taming horses. “Terror acts powerfully upon the body, through the medium of the mind, and should be employed in the cure of madness,” he wrote.

He also invented the “tranquilizer” chair, into which the patient was strapped hand and foot, along with a device to hold the head immobile.

The legacy of the “father of American psychiatry” is forever debased by his documented human rights abuses and his role in creating the “scientific racism” that has been used for generations by psychiatrists, psychologists, and the mental health practitioners trained by them – racism which has permeated American society and which the APA now admits is still “ingrained in the structure of psychiatric practice and continue[s] to harm BIPOC psychological well-being even today.” With the removal of the Benjamin Rush Award, the APA has very belatedly recognized Rush’s racist legacy.

The Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) was co-founded in 1969 by members of the Church of Scientology and the late psychiatrist and humanitarian Thomas Szasz, M.D., recognized by many academics as modern psychiatry’s most authoritative critic, to eradicate abuses and restore human rights and dignity to the field of mental health. CCHR has been instrumental in obtaining 228 laws against psychiatric abuses and violations of human rights worldwide.

The CCHR National Affairs Office in Washington, DC, has advocated for mental health rights and protections at the state and federal level. The CCHR traveling exhibit, which has toured 441 major cities worldwide and educated over 800,000 people on the history to the present day of abusive and racist psychiatric practices, has been displayed at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Annual Legislative Conference in Washington, DC, and at other locations.

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