

# Author and Professor Emeritus of Chemistry Dr. William Lester Recently Featured on Close Up Radio

OAKLAND, CA, UNITED STATES, June 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Few scientists can say their careers were inspired by a radio commercial, but for William A. Lester, Jr., PhD, Professor Emeritus of Chemistry at the University of California, Berkeley, “better things for better living through chemistry” was more than a slogan. It was a life calling.

Before Dr. Lester became one of the world’s most respected theoretical chemists, he was a young boy on Chicago’s South Side, intrigued by the secrets of molecules and matter. Lester’s curiosity led him from typing physics reports at the University of Chicago to earning a bachelor’s and master’s degree there, then a PhD in chemistry from The Catholic University of America. Along the way, he became “Man of the Year” at the University of Chicago, not only for his academic prowess but also for his scoring records on the basketball court, some of which still stand today.



## A Career Written in Code and Courage

As a high school senior, Lester’s first academic job was typing research reports for a laboratory headed by none other than future Nobel laureate Robert Mulliken. At a time when universities didn’t yet own computers, the research group traveled to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio to run their programs.

Dr. Lester’s path was neither straightforward nor easy. After receiving four rejections from PhD programs after college, he persisted, earning his master’s and eventually his PhD. He credits his

family's resilience and the support of mentors who saw his potential. He also carried a sense of pride from his all-Black elementary school, where annual reunions still remind him of the foundation those teachers provided.

## Science at the Edge

Lester's research has always operated at the frontier where chemistry meets quantum mechanics. His work focuses on using quantum mechanics to unlock the behaviors of molecules. He explains, "It's the use of quantum mechanics to yield the equations that describe the behavior of molecules, and those equations arise from the Schrödinger equation."

Dr. Lester's career took him through positions at the National Bureau of Standards and the University of Wisconsin's Theoretical Chemistry Institute. His expertise in computational chemistry soon led to a management role at IBM's Research Laboratory in San Jose, California. There, he contributed to large-scale scientific computing, shaping the way chemists use computers to unravel complex molecular problems.

In the late 1970s, Dr. Lester was chosen after a national search to direct the National Resource for Computation in Chemistry. This major initiative, established by the National Academy of Sciences and located at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, supported chemists throughout the United States in mastering new computational tools.

Dr. Lester's dedication to science was matched only by his commitment to family. He moved his household from San Jose to Berkeley to support his work, never losing sight of the importance of supporting successive generations of scientists, scholars, and creators.

## Mentoring and Legacy

Throughout his career, Dr. Lester inspired future generations as a professor at UC Berkeley, helping students from all backgrounds pursue science at the highest level. In 2007, a festschrift in his honor was held and the proceedings published by the Journal of Physical Chemistry, celebrating his influence and scholarship. Although he retired in 2010, he remained an active presence in the field for a number of years to follow as Professor of the Graduate School.

His accomplishments extend far beyond the laboratory. Dr. Lester's life is interwoven with stories of perseverance in the face of social barriers, from housing restrictions in Chicago to the challenges of being a Black scientist in major research institutions. He has found strength in family and community, nurturing a legacy that includes not only academic descendants but also children and grandchildren who have excelled in fields as diverse as auto racing, business, military service, and technology.

About William A. Lester, Jr., PhD

William A. Lester, Jr., PhD, is Professor Emeritus of Chemistry at the University of California, Berkeley, and the former director of the National Resource for Computation in Chemistry. Throughout a career spanning more than five decades, Dr. Lester has made major contributions to theoretical and computational chemistry, advanced diversity in scientific research, and inspired generations as both a scientist and mentor. He is the author of numerous influential scientific papers and continues to engage with the scientific community, colleagues and family in Berkeley, California.

Close Up Radio recently featured William A. Lester, Jr. PhD and author in a two-part interview with Doug Llewelyn on Monday June 1st at 4pm Eastern, and with Jim Masters on Monday June 8th at 4pm Eastern

[Listen to the Podcast](#)

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For more information about William A. Lester, Jr. PhD, <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/william-alexander-lester-jr-phd-recognized-for-excellence-in-chemistry-300820546.html/> and [https://www.amazon.com/dp/B005LK6NCS?ref =ast\\_author\\_mpb/](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B005LK6NCS?ref =ast_author_mpb/)

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