

JNE ScholarOne E-News #11

This edition of *E-news* has another interview from an expert in the field who also happens to be a staunch supporter and friend of JNE. Please enjoy until next time.

FTE: From the Expert

Interviewed by: Natascha F. Saunders, Doctoral Candidate



The Journal of Negro Education interviewed Leslie T. Fenwick, PhD, Dean Emeritus of the Howard University School of Education (HUSOE) and a professor of education policy. Dr. Fenwick was appointed dean in January 2007 and served 9 years until June 2016.

Prior to being named dean she held consecutive terms as a presidentially appointed Visiting Fellow and Visiting Scholar in Education at Harvard University; was a tenured faculty member, department chair and associate dean at Clark Atlanta University during her 13-year tenure there; and, was as a Program Officer at the Southern Education Foundation (SEF) where she directed an \$11 million Wallace Funds grant program in 7 southeastern states.

While dean, Dr. Fenwick was co-principal investigator of a \$2.1 million grant from the U.S Department of Education which funded the HUSOE's *Ready to Teach Program*, a 5-state initiative designed to recruit and prepare African American males (and other underrepresented groups) as K-12 public school teachers.

A nationally known education policy scholar whose work focuses on education opportunity (especially from a race equity perspective), Dr. Fenwick was an appointed member of the National Academy of Sciences Committee on the Study of the Impact of Mayoral Control on Washington DC Public Schools and is regularly called upon to testify about educational equity and teacher quality to the U.S. Senate, National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), U.S. Conference of Mayors, National Urban League, National Education Association (NEA), Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), Education Writers Association (EWA), the National Association for Equal Educational Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO), the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), and the Washington Policy Seminar.

Currently, Dr. Fenwick is a member of the Scholarly Advisory Council (SAC) for the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) which opens on September 24, 2016. Additionally, she is a National Advisory Council member for the George Lucas Education Foundation/EduTopia and is a past member of the Board of Directors of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), the Harvard University Principals Center, the Council for Academic Deans of Research Institutions (CADREI), and founding chair of the National Alliance for Equal Educational Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO) Deans of Education (NADEC). A science enthusiast, Dr. Fenwick also held a 3-year term as a member of NASA's Education and Public Outreach Committee.

Known as a Scholar-Administrator, Dr. Fenwick is a contributing author to the best-selling book, *The Last Word: The Best Controversy and Commentary in American Education*, which boasts essays by former President Bill Clinton and noted historian Dr. John Hope Franklin among others. She is also author of the widely cited policy monograph, *The Principal Shortage: Who Will Lead* (Harvard College of Fellows, 2001) and numerous published research articles and book chapters about the superintendency, principalship and urban school reform. Selected as the W. E. B. Du Bois Distinguished Lecturer for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and as recipient of the W. E. B. Du Bois Award for Higher Education Leadership from the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE), Dr. Fenwick has been honored for her unrelenting advocacy of educational equity and access for Black, Hispanic/Latino and poor children.

Her opinion-editorial (OP-ED) articles have been published by the *Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, *The Huffington Post* and *Education Week* and she has appeared on C-SPAN, CNN, The Roland Martin Show, The Roc Newman Show, The Joe Madison Show and locally televised programs discussing educational equity. Her research has been cited in the *New York Times* and the progressive publication, *Mother Jones*.

A former K-12 urban school teacher, school administrator and legislative aid to the State of Ohio Senate, Dr. Fenwick earned the PhD in educational policy and leadership (1993) at The Ohio State University where she was a Flesher Fellow and a bachelor's degree in education (1983) at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education. Dr. Fenwick was recently named by *Black Enterprise* as one of its *Women of Power: 10 Education Leaders Who Are Making a Difference*.

During Dr. Fenwick's 9-year tenure as dean of the Howard University School of Education (HUSOE), many *firsts* were achieved. The HUSOE

- hosted forums which featured three U.S. Secretaries (Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education Dr. John King and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar);
- submitted a record \$18 million annually in grant proposals to federal and other funding agencies;
- established a Capitol Hill Policy Forum which annually hosted nearly 300 educators and legislators discussing federal education and social policy;
- attained ranking in the top-100 schools/colleges of education nationally (of 255 ranked) by *US News and World Report*;
- increased the number of Fulbright Fellowship appointments held by HUSOE faculty and doctoral students;
- earned national designation by Woodrow Wilson National Foundation as one of 29 distinguished Schools/Colleges of Education with teacher preparation programs;
- established the HUSOE-AASA Urban Superintendents Academy which has received national attention and been featured by the Urban League, *Chronicle of Higher*

Education, Diverse Issues in Higher Education, Education Week and other education news outlets;

- recast the faculty with 19 new hires and promotions to the tenured ranks; and
- established the HUSOE's first Board of Visitors and held the School's first fundraising galas which raised nearly \$1 million.

Q 1: After reading through your extensive background you have accomplished much. Which of these accomplishments are you most proud?

Dr. Fenwick:

I'm very honored and humbled to be a member of the Scholarly Advisory Committee (SAC) for the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). Noted historian Dr. John Hope Franklin established the SAC to set the museum's intellectual agenda. It has been a gift to have a role in shaping the museum—to offer my thoughts and perspectives to the museum's phenomenal group of curators, conservators, archivists, historians and other scholars who have dedicated themselves to making the NMAAHC a reality.

The museum has been 100 years in the making and though it wasn't created then, it now lives after 10 years of hard work by a broad and dedicated group of individuals committed to honoring African American history and achievement. The NMAAHC is the 19th and newest museum of the Smithsonian Institution and will open on September 24, 2016 when President Obama dedicates the new building which sits a stone's throw from the Washington Monument.

Of course, the purpose of the museum is to disseminate knowledge to its visitors—many of whom will be students and teachers. Imagine what it will mean to American children and children all over the world to visit this national museum and learn the many untold stories of African Americans' intellectual and cultural contributions to American progress.

Q 2: How would you summarize your research interests?

Dr. Fenwick:

As you know, Charles H. Thompson (who was chair of what was then the Howard University Department of Education, precursor to the School of Education) founded *The Journal of Negro Education (JNE)* in 1932. He founded it because of his abiding belief that scholarly research could be *the* antidote to racism. So, as a successor to Thompson and as a permanent member of *JNE*'s editorial board, I see myself connected to Thompson's intellectual tradition.

I believe that there is an urgent need for a new body of scholarly work and commentary that dismantles the litany of negativity and pathology that dominates research and reporting about Black people. The hallmark of science is replication—replication of what works. Yet too much of the research and media commentary about Black people and the Black community is a litany of negativity (a recitation about what's not working). The image of Black people in contemporary research is dismal and harmful at best, and more often-than-not outright defamatory and libelous.

In my opinion, the constant and consistent recitation of negative statistics about Black people is deleterious to scholarly inquiry, and misdirects policy formulation and funding priorities. There is too little mining of existing data and too few research reports presenting the truth about Black people and the Black condition.

Clearly, my call-to-arms to fairly present Black people to ourselves and the world is not new. Black people from scholar W. E. B. Du Bois (the father of American sociology) to publisher John H. Johnson

(of *Ebony* magazine fame) to noted historical artist William Edouard Scott embodied a commitment to represent the breadth, depth, beauty and tragedy of the Black experience as a whole (and unfragmented) cloth. As you know, Du Bois' work often captured this intention—to *uplift* Black folk in his research. I ask myself and others, what has happened to this intention in research? Where are the spaces where Black people—our images, struggles and triumphs—are *uplifted* and not presented as captured in deep pathology?

We know that the first three chapters of Du Bois' *Philadelphia Negro* are devoted as he stated to “a study of the family, of property, and of organizations of all sorts. It also takes up such phenomena of social maladjustment and individual depravity as crime, pauperism, and alcoholism.” Clearly, Du Bois did not barter away examining the functional in the Black community to focus exclusively on the dysfunctional. For instance, in his examination of Philadelphia slums, he stated: A slum is not a simple fact, it is a symptom, and that to know the removable causes of the Negro slums of Philadelphia requires a study that takes one far beyond the slum districts.

Du Bois' scholarship situated and balanced the Black condition in a worldwide context (read his book, *Africa and the World*) and within America's racially oppressive and capitalist frameworks.

When I delivered the April 2013 W. E. B. Du Bois Distinguished Lecture to the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Black Special Interest Group (SIG), I urged a renaissance among Black intellectuals, specifically calling for Black and other progressive scholars to lead a national movement to present rarely highlighted positive data and research findings about the Black condition—especially those which challenge persistent negative reports and racist notions about Black people.

The lecture, titled *Blacks in Research: How Shall We Be Represented*, appears at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKuKwUy8fOo> and was published in the July 2016 issue of the research journal, *Urban Education*.

Q 3: Did you always plan for this to be your area of research even back through your undergraduate and doctoral years?

Dr. Fenwick:

I am very fortunate to be the fourth generation in my family to be college (and Graduate School) educated. I grew up in a home where my parents spoke with great respect about the segregated schools (Dunbar High School in Washington DC and Sumner High School in Kansas City, KS) and historically Black colleges/universities (Howard, Fisk, Atlanta University, Langston University and Meharry Medical College) that they and other family members attended. Growing up, I'd see in my Dad's library copies of *The Journal of Negro Education (JNE)*, the *Journal of Negro History*, and Black newspapers from Detroit, Kansas, Baltimore and DC. My parents constantly referenced Black scholars like Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois and my Mom was a stickler for impeccable writing (a skill she passed to me and my four brothers). So, when I went off to college, certain knowledge, perspectives and *ways of being* had been poured into me. My parents modeled a strong sense of Black consciousness, a dedication to holding leadership positions (on boards and in civic/service organizations), and a commitment to community uplift through volunteerism. So, in this regard, I knew early-on that whatever career path I chose, my parents' personal attributes were part of my DNA. There was an unspoken but palpable expectation that one lives to make a noticeable and positive difference in the world—and that world of difference is whatever locale is closest to you.

It was also clear to me through my schooling (kindergarten through the doctorate in majority-White schools), that there was a mismatch between what I knew (from my parents and our family friends) about Black life, and how the larger society *taught about* and *thought about* Blacks. The striking

difference between my positive experiences at home and in the Black community and the negative images that I saw of Black people on TV and in newspapers has always bothered me . . . a lot. This pervasive negative representation of Black people in film, TV and books disturbs me. I remember being very young (in 5th grade) when I first thought to myself: Someone needs to correct these misrepresentations.

So, when I think about my research and the opinion-editorial articles I write (particularly *Upending Stereotypes about Black Students* and *School Reform is about Land Development, Not Kids*), I've tried to be a scholar and social commentator who corrects misrepresentations of Black people and offers a novel and accessible slant on current issues.

These misrepresentations of Blacks need to be corrected not only for our own community's sake, but we must all be mindful that demographic predictions indicate that America will be a majority Black and Brown nation in a mere 28 years. We need a nation where we all have a respectful understanding of one other. Understanding is an important prerequisite to unity and moving forward with common purpose.

Q 4: Has there been any events in history that have impacted you personally?

Dr. Fenwick:

I'd cite two events in recent history. First, like most Americans, I've been deeply troubled by the murders of unarmed and innocent Black men. This is especially disturbing to me because I have a husband, Dad, four brothers and three young nephews who are all wonderful, loving, humorous, very intelligent, and strong.

As I listened to the tragic news reports and watched videos of wrongful deaths, I thought about the best action that I could take to counter this madness. I concluded that becoming a Life Member of the NAACP was *one* immediate action I could take. So one night after being horrified by that day's news, I went on-line and paid for an NAACP Life Membership.

In my opinion the NAACP is an institution that still stands as a needed and ever-present advocate for equality, justice, and opportunity. I believe that every American should be a member of the NAACP and support its youth development programs. The NAACP's cause is an American cause. As we seek a more just society, our nation needs organizations that agitate, that say, "No More!" to brutality and evil, and that create more spaces for all people to actualize their potential.

Second, the University of Missouri and Yale University students' protests about campus conditions were so troubling to me that it prompted my husband (H. Patrick Swygert, Howard University President Emeritus) and me to write an op-ed that gained considerable attention. We were outraged that the students' legitimate concerns were being miscast as an attack on free speech when in fact their issues were traceable to a lack of diversity in college faculty and university leadership. To show our solidarity with the students' and their agenda, we wrote the op-ed, *It's 2015: Where Are All the Black College Faculty?* The article was published by the *Washington Post*. You can watch a televised discussion about the article at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ay34lnN5-M>.

Q 5: Are there any specific publications you want to bring to our attention?

Dr. Fenwick:

Yes, there are a few publications I would like to share with your readers. First, my opinion-editorial (OP-ED) articles discuss current issues from a race equity perspective:

Opinion-Editorial (Op-Ed) Articles

Why the Election, the Economy and How Kids Do in School Are Inextricably Linked
The Washington Post, August 12, 2016

It's 2015. Where Are All the Black College Faculty?
The Washington Post, November 12, 2015

Why We Should Diversify the Overwhelmingly White Teaching Force and How?
The Washington Post, May 21, 2015

Upending Stereotypes About Black Students
Education Week, October 9, 2013

Urban School Reform is Really about Land Development (Not Kids)
The Washington Post, May 28, 2013

Journals

Blacks in Research: How Shall We Be Represented? in *Urban Education*
Vol. 51, No. 6 (July 2016) pp. 587-599.

Teachers and Teaching for the New Millennium: The Role of HBCU's.
The Journal of Negro Education Vol. 80, No. 3 (Summer 2011) pp. 197-208.

Book Chapters

"Looking for Leaders in a Time of Change" in *The Last Word: The Best Controversy and Commentary in American Education*. The book features the best commentary essays in the 25-year history of *Education Week* and boasts selections from former President Bill Clinton, noted historian John Hope Franklin, and esteemed educators Linda Darling-Hammond and Howard Gardner among others.

"African American Male Teachers and the School Leadership Pipeline: Why More of These Best and Brightest Are Not Principals and Superintendents" in *Black Male Teachers: Diversifying the United States' Teacher Workforce*.

Q 6: Do you have any advice for this generation coming up behind you? For example, any thoughts on getting through school, moving throughout their careers, selecting one's area of research expertise, and so forth?

Dr. Fenwick:

Yes, I have lots of thoughts, but I'll just share three pieces of advice. First, pursue your Calling. How do you know you're pursuing your Calling? You find yourself thinking about and seeking to *give* rather than *get*. For example, become a teacher because you believe you will *give* students a sense of self and encourage their curiosity about the world. Become a physician because you want to *give* healing and solace to patients not because you want to *get* status and money. Remember, resources (that is, financial and other supports) will naturally come to you when you pursue your Calling. Resources are a secondary (not primary) gain of pursuing your Calling.

Second, whatever profession you chose, know the history of Black people in that profession and read Black scholars in your discipline. Read Frederick Douglass and W. E. B Du Bois. Read Ishmael Reed, James Baldwin's *The Price of a Ticket* and Zora Neale Hurston's essay, *The Pet Negro System*.

Third, financially support at least one young person in your family or community to attend and graduate from an HBCU. HBCUs are 3 percent of the nation's nearly 4000 colleges/university but produce 50 percent of the nation's African American teachers, and large percentages of the nation's African American engineers, physicians and dentists.

Q 7: What are your career goals over the next 5-10 years what more would you like to achieve?

Dr. Fenwick:

Recently, I was the opening keynoter at two national conferences. In both instances, the individuals who introduced me described me as a “fearless advocate for black, brown and poor children.” I was surprised by the use of the word “fearless.” The compliment made me think about the outspoken Congresswoman Millicent Fenwick (R-NJ)—who was called the “Conscience of the Congress” because during her terms in the mid-1970s she voted against her Republican colleagues 48 percent of the time! Can you imagine that happening now? It’s striking to be viewed as fearless, but I see myself as simply speaking about what I know . . . speaking with a conscience

I’ve successfully taught Black students from kindergarten through the doctoral levels. I know what works and have a clear sense about what doesn’t work. So, for instance, when Teach for America (TFA) proponents say: TFA is a great teacher recruitment and placement model, I say: No it’s *not*! It’s not a great model . . . it’s *not* a great idea to pour uncertified, unqualified “teachers” into public schools that almost exclusively serve Black, Hispanic/Latino and poor students. These children—like all children—deserve fully qualified teachers not missionary-teachers who’ve had what I call microwave training in 6-week preparation programs.

Our nation needs leaders who will provide a moral voice and speak and work in deeply informed and bold ways to advance a more equitable society, children’s well-being, and access to quality education and improved life chances. Eliminating disparities based on race requires coalition building. This is the type of work I see myself continuing to do through my writing, speaking, and leadership roles.

Q 8: And lastly any final words? Any final thoughts? Completely up to you, completely open.

Dr. Fenwick:

My parents are among the most fiercely independent people I’ve ever met. From them I learned that we mustn’t wait to do *good* in the world. They taught me to be *impatient*—to *never be patient* about confronting mediocrity, duplicity and unfairness, and evil.

I want to personally thank Dean Fenwick for taking time to share her story and vision with JNE readers. Look for Dr. Fenwick’s publications (Op-Ed pieces in the Washington Post and other avenues) discussing urban education.

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Lenda P. Hill

Associate Editor

The Journal of Negro Education