

Launching Careers *and* Widening the Discourse

TC'S MINORITY POSTDOCTORAL PROGRAM ENCOURAGES SCHOLARS WHO DON'T CHECK THEIR IDENTITIES AT THE DOOR

■ BY ELLEN LIVINGSTON

WHEN MONIQUE LANE WAS A DOCTORAL STUDENT, NO ONE AT HER graduate school of education studied the educational needs of black girls and women. Fortunately Lane, who grew up in South Los Angeles wishing for a teacher who understood the trials of “being black, female and serious about learning,” found a “mentor from afar” — Illinois State University professor Venus Evans-Winters, author of *Teaching Black Girls: Resiliency in Urban Classrooms*. ■ This past winter, Lane — now a Teachers College Minority Postdoctoral Fellow — organized “And Still We Rise: A Conference on Black Girls and Women in Education,” which drew over 300 scholars, public school teachers and others to Teachers College. (<http://bit.ly/1ZOurmt>) Evans-Winters spoke, and several black female college and high school students read poetry and participated in panel discussions.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 24)

“The Fellowship supports knowledge production that shapes new narratives and new understandings of what’s normal.”

— LALITHA VASUDEVAN

VALUING VARIETY

Paul Green (next to Vasudevan) says TC has welcomed those who “valued perspectives on the periphery of what was considered normative.”

“It was amazing to see the light in these young women’s eyes as they saw their *ideas celebrated*,” says Monique Lane, who spotlighted high school students at her conference.

Lane’s story resonated powerfully at the Minority Postdoctoral Fellowship’s 20th anniversary reunion at TC in March. The program’s 30-plus alumni include college deans, department heads, endowed professors, a World Bank policy analyst and four current TC faculty members. Better still, suggested keynote speaker Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Director of Harlem’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, they are challenging a higher education system that still seeks “white students in black or brown face”—scholars who check their race or ethnicity at the door. Calling for “more creative dissent and less cosmetic diversity,” Muhammad, later joined by prize-winning poet Gregory Pardlo, invoked Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor’s post-assimilationist vision of minorities teaching from their experiences and seeking more than mere representation.

The TC Minority Postdoctoral Fellowship grew directly out of the Holmes Group, a national initiative co-founded in the early 1990s by then TC President P. Michael Timpane to increase recruitment and retention of diverse teacher education faculty. In 1995, Karen Zumwalt, then Dean, developed

TC’s Fellowship, modeled on programs offered by some educational foundations.

“Teachers and administrators in our nation’s public schools were predominantly white, although more and more students were not,” recalls Zumwalt, now Evenden Professor Emerita. “We saw this fellowship as our contribution to the profession.”

Today, blacks earn 7 percent of all U.S. doctoral degrees and Latinos 5 percent — numbers that are up since the ’90s but still woefully small. Still, the former TC Postdocs exert outsized influence because their work, from helping young students of color see themselves as math scholars to exploring the impact of growing up Muslim in post-9/11 America, powerfully reflects who they are.

“The Fellowship demonstrates our conception of what an academic community is all about,” says current TC Provost and Dean Tom James. “New funds of knowledge have been brought into the institution, new questions have been asked, new disciplinary perspectives have been seeded.”

All involved agree the program remains essential.

“To ask why we still need this kind of program is to assume that we have parity,” said Soo Ah Kwon, a Minority Postdoctoral Fellow in 2005–06 and now Associate Professor of Asian American Studies and Human Development & Family Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. “This is about asking important questions about inequalities that are still very deeply structured in our society.”

Illustrating that point, Thurman Bridges, a Fellow from 2009–11 and now Associate Professor of Teacher Education at Baltimore’s Morgan State University, described visiting public schools after protests triggered by the death of Freddie Gray, a black man, in Baltimore police custody.

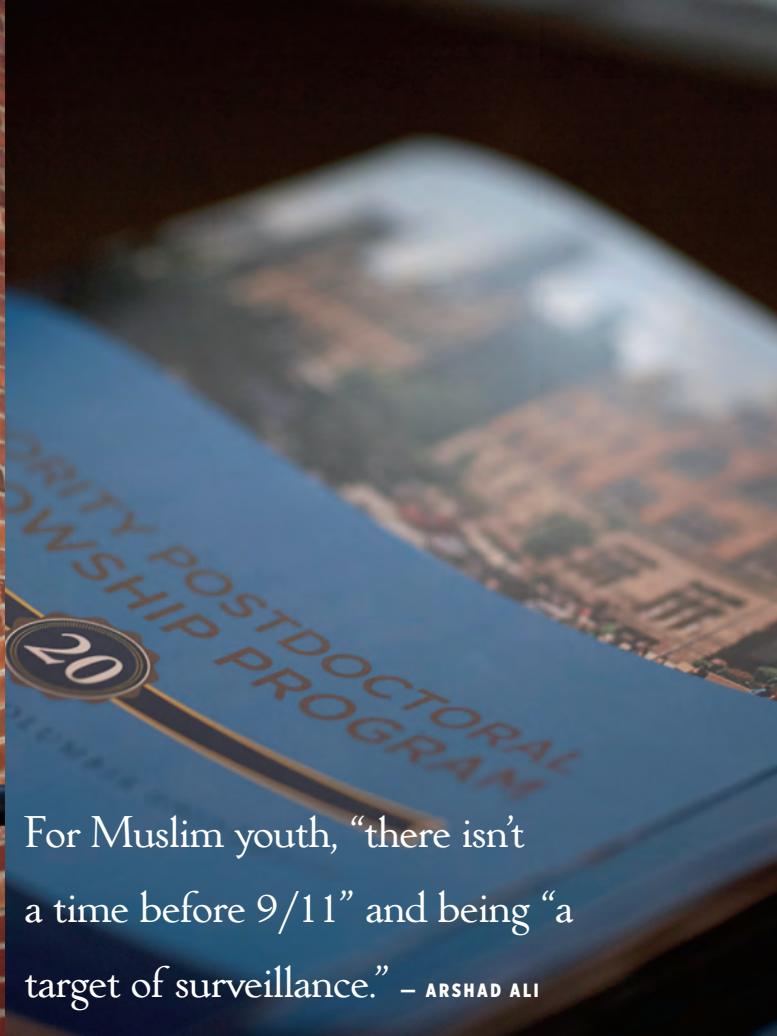
“I see students who are empowered and ready to resist and raise their hands, but state leadership and teachers as leaders aren’t pushing students to think in those critical ways,” he said. “Yet students were engaging in those conversations on their own and looking to do something productive. We need to provide them with opportunities to do that.”

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 26)



“We Have a Lot of Work to Do”: Delores Jones-Brown

Delores Jones-Brown, who attended a segregated elementary school, says TC’s Minority Postdoctoral Fellowship helped her become Professor and Founding Director of the John Jay College Center on Race, Crime & Justice. “In my personal life there’s evidence of substantial change in racial dynamics, but there are still brutal realities out there,” says Jones-Brown. “We have a lot of work to do.”



For Muslim youth, “there isn’t a time before 9/11” and being “a target of surveillance.” – ARSHAD ALI



DIVERSE VIEWS

Arshad Ali (above) studies post-9/11 Muslim youth; Soo Ah Kwon (below), activist youth of color; and Alia Tyner-Mullings, alternative urban schools.



Yet 2008-09 Fellow Michael Wilson, currently Assistant Professor of Inclusive Education at TC and Director of the Teachers College School to Prison Pipeline Project, cited TV host Melissa Harris Perry, who fell out with MSNBC after protesting its decision to preempt her show for presidential campaign coverage.

“We’re constantly in this space of trying to figure out where do I raise my hand, how do I raise my hand, how insistent am I, and how far do I take this?” Wilson said. “How comfortable will an institution be when you turn your words on them? When you turn the words inward you are challenging the institutional preservation. That’s the greatest challenge — each individual’s ability to find that balance.”

For Associate Provost Kristine Roome, Fellowship Coordinator, the reunion was a step toward a broader dialogue. “We’re starting to think about this program collectively,” Roome said. “This network of accomplished individuals, who all had their start at TC, constitutes a wonderful resource. We brought them home to engage collectively in the conversations happening across the country. We are not sure where it’s going to go. All we know is that it’s time.”

Learn more about TC’s Minority Postdoctoral Fellowship at <http://bit.ly/1st2mK8>

The *Difference* a Year Makes

FIVE TC MINORITY POSTDOCS REFLECT ON A CAREER-CHANGING FELLOWSHIP

Soo Ah Kwon

ANALYZING THE POWER OF ACTIVIST YOUTH OF COLOR

As a doctoral student, Soo Ah Kwon helped Asian and Pacific Islander students in Oakland defeat expansion of a local juvenile correctional facility. ■ Kwon found that success inspiring but was equally interested in how the students were affected by working within the political system.

In her subsequent book, *Uncivil Youth: Race, Activism, and Affirmative Governmentality*, she built on French philosopher Michel Foucault’s

notion of “governmentality” to explore how activist youth of color simultaneously work toward racial, social and economic justice and are limited by and even unintentionally reinforce existing power structures. ■ Kwon, now Associate Professor of Asian American Studies and Human Development & Family Studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, says *Uncivil Youth* owes much to her 2005-06 Minority Postdoctoral Fellowship at TC. She worked closely with education anthropologist Hervé Varenne, an authority on how schools unwittingly limit educational activities and the rewards they produce. ■ Kwon currently studies global youth citizenship, particularly programs promoted by the United Nations, and investigates the growing impact of international students, particularly Asians, on American higher education. ■ “People like to think we’ve moved beyond notions of race,” says Kwon, but the TC Fellowship addresses “important questions about inequalities that are still very deeply structured in our society.”

Maisha T. Winn

THINKING ABOUT YOUTH IN THEIR FULL HUMANITY

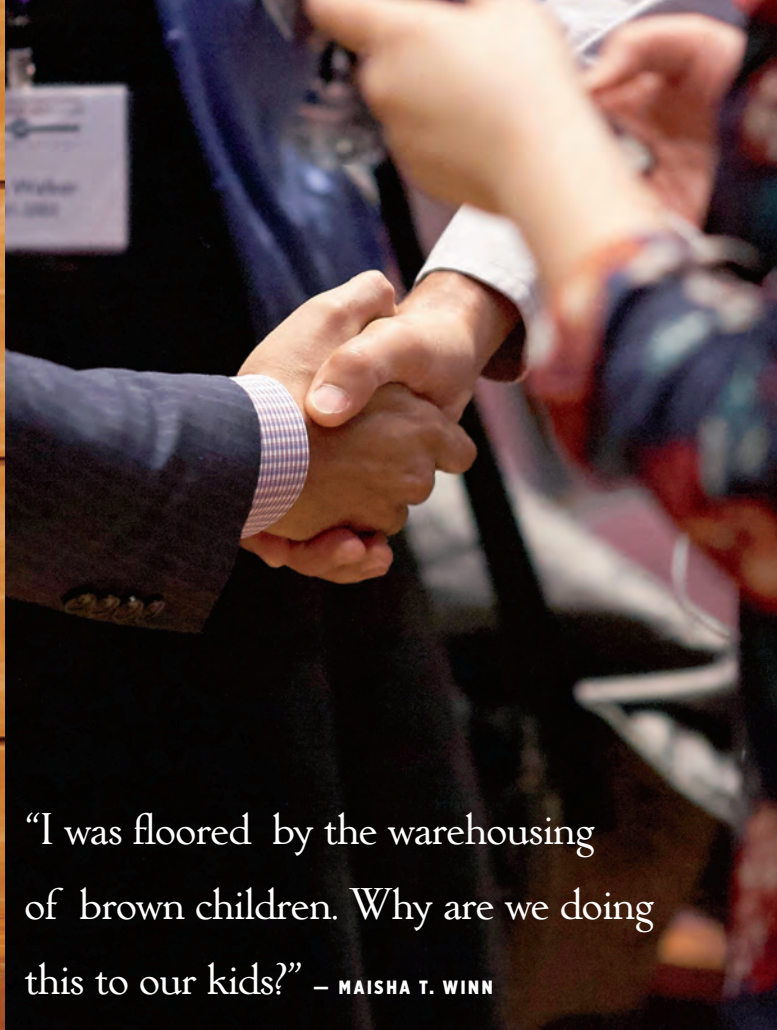
2003 TC Minority Postdoctoral Fellow Maisha Winn discovered the Bronx classroom of “Joe the poetry teacher” — Joe Ubiles, co-founder of school-based Power Writers, which “empowers urban youth through the mastery of language and cultural literacy.” ■ In her book, *Writing in Rhythm: Spoken Word Poetry in Urban Classrooms*, Winn — now Susan J. Cellmer Distinguished Chair in English Education and Professor of Curriculum & Instruction, Language & Literacies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education — writes that Ubiles taught in a room without windows, “but his compassion forged a view many could no longer afford in New York City.” ■ Winn left TC with a tenure-track position and the material for *Writing in Rhythm* (published as Maisha T. Fisher). In *Girl Time: Literacy, Justice, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, she examines a theater program that prepares incarcerated girls “for a performance of possibilities.” ■ “When I set foot in a regional youth detention center — a

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 28)



Telling a Uniquely American Story: Cally Waite

Professor Cally Waite, director of TC’s History & Education Program, is an authority on historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), an interest she developed as a TC Minority Postdoc. Founded mostly to educate newly freed slaves, HBCUs offer a unique window on “the intersection between theoretical democracy and democratic citizenship,” Waite says.



“I was floored by the warehousing of brown children. Why are we doing this to our kids?” — MAISHA T. WINN

COUNTERPOINT

Above and lower right: Minority Postdocs Maisha T. Winn and Rigoberto Marquez. Left: Khalil Muhammad keynoted the reunion conference.



jail for children — I was floored by the warehousing of brown children,” she says. “Why are we doing this to our kids?” ■ Winn now studies restorative justice attorneys working in courts and schools. And she still channels Ubiles, who was “thinking about young people in their full humanity.”

Lalitha Vasudevan

CREATING NEW NARRATIVES

In Fall 2004, TC Minority Postdoctoral Fellow Lalitha Vasudevan sat in her new office and thought: *Now what do I do?* ■ “It was a great moment,” recalls Vasudevan, now TC Associate Professor of Technology & Education. “The blank walls reminded me that it was on me to make things happen. In grad school, you are pushed to cultivate scholarly expertise, somewhat to the detriment of your own intellectual curiosity. Then you’re advised to stick to what you know. So before seeking a tenure-track position, I wanted to figure out what I wanted to do next.” The Fellowship supports “knowledge production that shapes new narratives and understandings of what’s normal.” ■ Vasudevan has since studied “the lived experiences of African-American adolescent boys” and court-involved youth. In *Arts, Media, and Justice: Multimodal Explorations with Youth* (2013) and *Media, Learning, and Sites of Possibility* (2008), she has championed cultivating students’ creative agency. The recipient of TC’s Strage Prize for Junior Faculty, she heads TC’s Media and Social Change Lab and Center for Multiple Languages & Literacies and co-leads TC’s Civic Participation Project. ■ “Being at TC has been an honor and a privilege,” she says. “Relationships from that Postdoc year are still bearing fruit.” — JOE LEVINE

Arshad Ali

STUDYING YOUTH IN THE CROSSHAIRS

The revelation in 2011 that New York City police and the CIA had spied on Muslim communities sparked civil rights lawsuits. It also redirected the research of then-TC Minority Postdoctoral Fellow Arshad Ali. ■ “I had been exploring how race and religion affect the identities of Muslim youth in a post-9/11 world,” recalls Ali, now Assistant Professor of Educational Research at George Washington University’s Graduate School of Education & Human Development. “When the news broke, that research morphed into thinking about surveillance.” His TC Fellowship empowered him to proceed. “It was really powerful to have someone like George Bond [the late TC education anthropologist] engage me as a colleague.” ■ In a recent article in *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Ali describes a growing “culture of fear” among Muslim youth. The “dangerous, violent, rebellious and suspect figure of the Muslim continues to haunt the American imagination,” he says, hampering young Muslims in developing trust and participating socially. ■ “For these youth, there isn’t a time before 9/11,” he says. “A world in which they’re a target of surveillance, of political attack, of cultural attack — that’s normal. My interest is in how they are making sense of this world and in helping them see themselves as people with agency.” ■ Ali applauds President Obama for telling American Muslims “you fit right here,” but notes that “state actions — spying on Muslim communities, as part of a larger concern of policing of communities of color — continue. People’s rights and lives are on the line.”

Rosalie Rolón-Dow

FOCUSING ON THE UNDERREPRESENTED

Since 1970, the U.S. Hispanic population has grown by 592 percent. Yet being “the only one” is still common for Latino scholars, says Rosalie Rolón-Dow, Associate Professor at the University of Delaware (UD) School of Education. “Even though Latinos are the largest group among underrepresented students, we still don’t know a lot about their experiences.” Rolón-Dow, who is of Puerto Rican heritage, is Co-Chair of UD’s Latino/Hispanic Faculty and Staff Caucus. “Like so many institutions, we have some diversity and equity issues. The goal is to better inform what the university is doing about them.” ■ As a 2002-03 TC Minority Postdoctoral Fellow, Rolón-Dow, now an authority on educational identity among Latino students, learned to navigate the academy. ■ “I thought, I’ll just take a chapter from my dissertation and it will be a publication, but that wasn’t the case. Many people that year helped me learn to write for a different audience.” ■ Rolón-Dow believes such experiences remain essential in directing students from underrepresented groups into academia. ■ “We face challenges that other faculty don’t, whether it’s alienation or finding mentors,” she says. At the same time, “culturally and politically, Latinos are a powerful force, and there is so much to investigate.” ■ TC



Pioneering new approaches to teaching and learning



Urging a Global Perspective: Paul Green

The official desegregation of U.S. schools resulted in “the loss of African-American public school teachers,” writes former TC Minority Postdoc Paul Green. Green, Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of California at Riverside, worries that, taught primarily by white teachers, today’s diverse American student population is poorly understood.



“We face challenges that other faculty don’t, whether it’s alienation or finding mentors.” — ROSALIE ROLÓN-DOW

EMPANELED

Clockwise from top left: Rosalie Rolón-Dow; reconsidering the Minority Post-doc at 20; TC Professor and former Postdoc Erica Walker; poet Gregory Pardlo.

