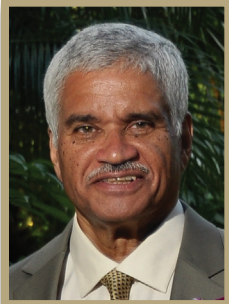


2017 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

◆ Dr. Lenworth Alburn Gunther ◆

Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Award



Dr. Lenworth Gunther's strong sense of commitment to racial social justice grows out of his upbringing and the tumultuous struggles of the civil rights movement during the late sixties and early seventies. He is an educator, historian, and author—and he is known as the “Godfather” to a generation of civil rights activists in New York and New Jersey.

Dr. Gunther is a graduate of New York public schools, and vividly remembers his experience with institutional racism at a young age. Even though he was the salutatorian at his junior high school, a guidance counselor didn't want him to take the exam to get into Stuyvesant High School, one of the top schools in New York City.

“I remember my counselor told me to focus on vocational work because I was better at handicrafts—standard advice for Black students. My mother had to come to school and argue with the counselor so I could take the test,” recalled Dr. Gunther who later became a Woodrow Wilson and Ford Foundation Doctoral Fellow, earning four degrees at Columbia University: a BA, an MA, a Master of Philosophy and a Ph. D. in American History and Russian History.

Dr. Gunther's activist journey began as he fought for racial equality as a student at Columbia University. The struggle continued in the classroom, where he advocated for a curriculum that mirrored the contributions of African Americans and other communities of color, the working poor and the cause of human and civil rights. Two years after he began his teaching career, he helped prepare Columbia University's first African American studies curriculum. Dr. Gunther was an NJEA/NEA member for 38 years.

Since retiring from the classroom, Dr. Gunther has continued to mentor educators and young activists, working with police officers and young people to foster positive community relations. He created the “Gunther Group” which studies global and domestic terrorism and gang activity and specializes in diversity and leadership training around law enforcement issues.

His expertise and extensive research on the social-psychological norms of mass movements, cults, terrorism and the military, has made him a valued resource to law enforcement and the legal community. He has worked in more than 1,000 communities, police departments and advocacy groups offering insights into the personal and professional impact of trends in strategic thinking.

In this challenging time when so many of our core beliefs are under attack, Dr. Gunther reflects on important lessons learned in the classroom and beyond, “The process of change begins with individuals. And actions begin with personal awareness, compassion and undying empathy, and a willingness to stand alone, if necessary, in pursuit of educational excellence and opportunity for all students.”