

Lenora Fulani, Ph.D.

CO-FOUNDER, ALL STARS PROJECT, INC.

DIRECTOR, OPERATION CONVERSATION: COPS & KIDS

DEAN, UX

Trained as a developmental psychologist, Lenora Fulani has been on a four-decade-long journey that has taken her from the elite institutions of academia back to her roots in the poor Black community, where she is known and loved as an outspoken, independent and accomplished activist and grassroots educator and leader.

Her story begins in Chester, Pennsylvania, just outside of Philadelphia. “My family was poor, as was almost everyone in Chester,” she says, “and the effects of poverty were devastating to many people in my family and community. By luck and by circumstance, I was the first in my family to be able to go to college. I decided pretty much from the start that I wanted to become a psychologist, so that I could come back to Chester and save the members of my family and my friends who were suffering.”



Lenora Fulani holds a press conference on the steps of City Hall in NYC (2001).



With young performers from the All Stars Talent Show Network (2003).

As she studied psychology in college (Hofstra University) and graduate school (Columbia University’s Teachers College and the City University of New York), she became troubled by the ways in which the field of psychology related to poverty and its effects, particularly the issues of poor Black people. Even as the new field of Black psychology emerged, she came to see that merely making traditional psychology more attuned to Black people did not automatically mean that it was useful for saving — much less transforming — their lives.

With this realization Fulani began looking for innovators across disciplines whose work could positively impact on the communities she loved so deeply. One of her first stops was Rockefeller University, where she worked as a guest researcher at the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, run by cultural psychology pioneer Michael Cole. Her work focused on the interplay of social environment and learning, with a particular focus on the Black community.

At Rockefeller, she met Lois Holzman (now director of the East Side Institute for Group and Short Term Psychotherapy), who introduced her to radically innovative thinker Fred Newman and the



With Reverend Al Sharpton and Dr. Fred Newman (1991).

independent organizing effort he was leading in poor communities. What followed was a remarkable four-decade-long partnership with Newman, a working-class Jewish man from the Bronx with whom she shared a deep passion for ending poverty and empowering the poor to lead.

Fulani left the university to work with Newman and his community to, in her words, “vigorously pursue the question of development. What is development? How do people develop? How do

communities develop? What is underdevelopment? What is the relationship between learning and development? Is development a social or individual process? Is that a meaningful distinction? And what does any of that have to do with being Black and poor in the United States of America?”



Over the years, Fulani has relentlessly pursued this passion for development. She has twice run for president of the United States as an independent, and in 1988 became the first woman and first African American in history to appear on the presidential ballot in all 50 states. The early 1980s saw her working with psychologists and helping professionals to create community health clinics that brought some of the most innovative and effective approaches to health and mental health care to Harlem and the Bronx.



With UX activists at the African American Day Parade in Harlem.

Perhaps the most important project to grow out of this early period was the All Stars Project (ASP), which she co-founded with Newman in 1980. With the ASP, Fulani has used Newman and Holzman’s cutting-edge discoveries about human and social development, as well as state-of-the-art practices from the worlds of theatre and improvisation, to help pioneer an innovative model for youth and community growth.

Working closely with corporate volunteers, CEOs and partners in Fortune 500 companies, ASP has built a constellation of successful programs, including the Development School for Youth, which Fulani co-directed from 1997 to 2006. Today, she serves as the dean of UX, a free, university-style school for continuing development that, since it began four years ago, has involved thousands of students — mostly adults from the city’s poor and working-class communities — in classes, workshops and field trips. She has documented the



With All Stars Project Board Chair Richard Sokolow (right) and a donor at the annual ASP gala at Lincoln Center.

policy implications of ASP's work in three white papers: *Let's Pretend: A Special Report on Solving the Educational Crisis* (co-authored with Dr. Fred Newman) *Achievement Gap or Development Gap? "Outliers" and Outsiders Reconsider an Old Problem* (co-authored with ASP president and CEO Gabrielle L. Kurlander) and *The Development Line: A Special Report on Solving the Poverty Crisis in America*.

In 2006, Fulani founded Operation Conversation: Cops & Kids, a groundbreaking and award-winning program that, through dialogue and performance-based workshops, gives police and inner-city youth a positive context for improving and developing their relationship. Now a partnership between the ASP and the New York City Police Department, Cops & Kids has become the country's leading police-community relations program. Over the last decade, Fulani has led 127 workshops involving over 2,800 police officers and inner-city youth. She has also hosted eight public demonstration workshops for recent NYPD graduates and members of the public that have reached over 2,200 community members and 4,400 police officers. In 2015, she trained teams of performing artists and social service professionals as facilitators to conduct Cops & Kids workshops.



Top left: Leading a Cops & Kids Demonstration Workshop at the Apollo Theater. Bottom left: With New York City Police Commissioner William Bratton at a press conference in front of the Apollo (2014). Right: Making headlines again with former Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly (2012).



Fulani continues to build connections with some of the most respected and radical political activists and thought leaders in the world. In addition to a decades-long partnership forged on the streets with the Reverend Al Sharpton (civil rights activist and MSNBC host), she has engaged in a series of public conversations with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Alphonse Fletcher University Professor and Director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University), Karl Alexander (Research Professor of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University), Khalil Muhammad (Director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture), Kwame Anthony Appiah (Professor of Philosophy and Law, New York University), John Hamilton McWhorter, V (Columbia) and the late Derrick Bell, (the first tenured African-American Professor of Law at Harvard Law School). In addition, Dr. Fulani



With professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and All Stars president and CEO Gabrielle L. Kurlander (2005).

has presented Presidential Sessions at two annual conferences of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). As a faculty member of the East Side Institute, she addresses audiences of human and community development activists from all over the world.

Fulani was featured on Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s PBS documentary, *America Beyond the Color Line*, and has made countless other TV and radio appearances, including *Crossfire*, *Hardball*, *Fox News*, *Inside Politics*, *The Larry King Show*, *Washington Journal*, *Tony Brown's Journal*, *BET's Nightly News* and *The McNeil-Lehrer Report*. Her social commentaries on a wide variety of topics have appeared in newspapers nationwide including *USA Today*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Washington Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and New York's *Newsday*.

In addition to her presidential runs, Fulani is a co-founder of IndependentVoting.org, a national strategy center for independent voters, and a founder of the Independence Party of New York State.



With playwright Ntozake Shange at the Castillo Theatre's Otto Awards for Political Theatre (2009).

More to read and watch:

[Helping Youth to Develop: A Conversation About Poverty led by Lenora Fulani, Ph.D.](#)

[The Development Line by Lenora Fulani, Ph.D.](#)

[Cops & Kids Demonstration Workshop article from Voices of NY](#)

[Cops & Kids Demonstration Workshop article from The Christian Science Monitor](#)

[Cops & Kids Demonstration Workshop article from the New York Amsterdam News](#)

[Cops & Kids All Stars/Police relationship in 2012 from The New York Times](#)

[Lenora Fulani keynote address at Southern Regional Conference of Independents](#)

[Cops & Kids Demonstration Workshop press clip from NY1](#)

[Cops & Kids Demonstration Workshop press clip from WABC-TV](#)

[Cops & Kids Demonstration Workshop press clip from Fox 5](#)

[Unity Gathering press clip from CBS local news](#)

[ABC-TV's Here and Now](#)

[A More Perfect Democracy \(excerpt\)](#)

[National Conference of Independents \(3/14/15\): "Democracy and Social Crises" \(part 1\)](#)

[National Conference of Independents \(3/14/15\): "Democracy and Social Crises" \(part 2\)](#)

["Welcome to UX" — Lenora Fulani, PhD](#)



Top: Fulani leads her weekly briefing "Performance of a Grassroots Organizer." Middle: With Fred Newman and supporters, Gay Pride March (1994). Bottom: with a fellow cast member in *Have You Ever Seen a Dream Rapping?* at the Castillo Theatre, 2006.