



Glenn S. Johnson, PhD (1962-Present)

Associate Dean for Research and Graduate
Studies

Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of
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"There will be jobs in the environmental field for years to come." Glenn S. Johnson, 2006.

Overview

Glenn Johnson currently serves at the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies at the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs at Texas Southern University. He has spent the majority of his career conducting ground breaking research that has helped shaped the environmental justice movement. Some of his works includes the following:

- Bullard, Robert D., and Glenn S. Johnson. "Environmentalism and public policy: Environmental justice: Grassroots activism and its impact on public policy decision making." *Journal of Social Issues* 56.3 (2000): 555-578.
- Bullard, Robert, Glenn S. Johnson, and Angel O. Torres, eds. *Sprawl city: Race, politics, and planning in Atlanta*. Island Press, 2000.

Early Life and Career

Glenn S. Johnson grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, where his mother was involved in the height of the civil rights movement. Through her dealings with the movement, Johnson first viewed the country's problems with race and inequality through the lens of social justice. He was inspired to continue in that tradition, and became involved with one of the many movements that stemmed from it—the environmental justice (EJ) movement.

Johnson attended the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, where he earned two bachelor's degrees, one in sociology and one in academic psychology. He went on to earn his master's degree and doctorate in sociology from the University of Tennessee. As a graduate student, Johnson met his major mentor, Dr. Robert D. Bullard, and jump-started his involvement in the EJ movement. Bullard is one of the pioneering figures in EJ research and scholarship, and Johnson served as his research assistant while Bullard was

working on the book *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*. Johnson did coding and cleaning the survey data of the book's case studies, and developed a great interest in the environmental field. Building on that experience, Johnson merged his interests in race and social inequality with the environmental movement.

After Johnson received his doctorate in 1995, Bullard recruited him as a research associate at the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University (EJRC). Bullard had established the EJRC in 1994 as a research, policy, and information clearinghouse on EJ issues. While there, Johnson got involved in policymaking, working with elected officials, federal regulatory agencies, and grassroots leaders in communities with high levels of environmental contamination. He began hosting workshops to inform and empower community stakeholders about Superfund sites in their communities; this and other forms of direct community outreach continue to be central to Johnson's work. Johnson is now also an associate professor of sociology at Clark Atlanta University, where he teaches courses about many of the EJ issues that he is also actively involved with. "I've been teaching for ten years now, and I've seen environmental justice become a household word," Johnson says. "I can say that I've participated in that growth process. It's been a busy and exciting path."

Importance of Mentorship to Career

Johnson has worked closely with Dr. Bullard throughout most of his academic and professional career, and counts him as a mentor in every sense of the word. He calls working side-by-side with Bullard as a student, colleague and protégé the highlight of his career. "He showed me the importance of being an activist in the environmental justice movement," Johnson explains. "He was one of the first to point out that we should look at where landfills are placed—primarily in communities of color. He taught me that from there, we should become agents of change through our work, and include people who are normally omitted from the process of change in their own communities." Beyond Bullard's influence, Johnson has inspired and mentored many in the next generation of the EJ movement. He has mentored many undergraduate and graduate students who have gone on to work for environmental groups, colleges/universities, government agencies and community-based organizations. "I tried as much as possible to expose them to environmental justice case studies, and I taught them how to get involved in the policy-making process and find out how to best utilize their skills," he says.

Highlights

In terms of his personal accomplishments, Johnson is particularly proud of several publications. He and Bullard compiled an EJ resource book titled the Environmental Justice Curriculum Resource Guidebook, and Johnson has co-edited three others: *Just Transportation: Dismantling Race and Class Barriers to Mobility*; *Sprawl City: Race, Politics and Planning in Atlanta*; and *Highway Robbery: Transportation, Racism and New Routes to Equity*. Johnson has recently increased his focus on transportation, land use, and metropolitan regional equity issues as key to the EJ struggle. "Over the last seven years, I have been working on diversifying various transportation boards, planning agencies, and smart growth groups," he explains. "These are groups who make transportation decisions in metropolitan areas that impact people of color who are not part of the decision-making process."

Johnson acknowledges that being a part of the EJ movement has its frustrations. “A lot of the policies concerning environmental justice in this country are being implemented too slowly,” he says. “The Federal Government has been very slow to accept and enforce these policies.” However, Johnson says there has been visible progress, even if it has been slower than he would like. “I’m still motivated and optimistic,” he says. “We’ve had some victories. More people are coming on board to help with EJ issues. People of color worldwide are being exposed to the EJ framework.”

Advice to Young Professionals

Johnson says that for young people of color interested in social issues as well as the environment, the environmental field offers endless possibilities. “There will be jobs in the environmental field for years to come,” he says. “But you have to be educated in a variety of subjects—sociology, political science, public health, psychology, anthropology, economics, history, and education. An environmental justice framework can very much compliment any degree.”

For More Information

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