

## **LORETTA CARLE-BRADY**

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I recall clearly the fall that I was asked to speak with a faculty mentor regarding a summer research program. I was 21, living in campus housing, and had just finished working in a residential group home for teenage girls for the summer. I had made a little more than minimum wage and was able to afford my books for the semester and repair my 13 year old used car with the money. When I was told about a summer program that would enable me to conduct research with a professor, that would pay me, house me; and all of this was in my home state? I could not even imagine such an opportunity existed. I could not at that time even grasp the influence and experiences that I was about to experience; all I understood at the time was that I could learn more about psychology, earn money, and stay close to my family. For a poor, first generation student with a difficult home life this was all I needed to know to pursue my application.

Over the past decade since my involvement with McNair much in my life has changed, and I find myself returning to the McNair experience I had for inspiration, explanation, and even guidance. I think back fondly to the moments during the program summer when I got to work with my mentor. My mentor was someone who made the life of academe seem real. She had a great apartment near campus, was passionate about her research, had interesting conversations with colleagues about academia. These were glimpses that would lead me further down the road to a professorship.

Over the past year I applied and eventually received tenure, but the review process revealed to me ways in which my first generation status still influences my career. There are things people new to the academy don't know, and more importantly, they don't know they don't know them, until such a time that professional experience reveals it clearly. I can recall a similar feeling as I learned for the first time how to prepare for a standardized exam like the GRE through the McNair program. I had never been great with numbers so assumed that my dismal opening score was a sign that I would ultimately have to settle on a program that did not require the test at all. It was only through the coaching and tutoring that McNair provided that I was able to increase my performance to competitive limits.

Today in addition to my work as a clinical psychologist I have the privilege of mentoring students as a professor at the same college I graduated from myself. Within the psychology department and within our club I seek students out who may also be first generation students and create with them a dialogue so that they have some context for the experiences they may be having. I make myself a presence on campus, visiting events with my family, so that students get the same glimpse of real life that I was able to be privy to as part of my McNair experience. I know because of McNair how powerful it is to prepare students to compete, build for them a community of similarity, and show them maps of how and who they might become what they hardly dare they might become.