

NASW Publication <http://www.helpstartshere.org/about-social-workers/2013-black-history-month-celebration/dr-sylvester-bowie-2013.html>

### **Dr. Sylvester Bowie – 2013 Black History Month Celebration!**



Dr. Sylvester Bowie, Associate Professor, Division of Social Work  
California State University, Sacramento, CA

*Q. Dr. Bowie, why did you choose social work as your career?*

I chose social work because it was a natural fit for me based on my personality and temperament. Growing up, I was a challenging child and was defiant of all authorities. I hated school because I found it boring. Yet, I had parents and teachers who never gave up on me. Further, I was always hyperactive and would have been medicated if I were living in the USA. Therefore, I am very aware of the need to continue to support, challenge and believe in people even if it appears they are going off track sometimes. Social work with its grounding in the ideas of the dignity and worth of the individual as well as the idea of self-determination provides the opportunity for people like me to feel fulfilled when we work with challenging clients (or students for those in the academy).

*Q. How have minority social workers advanced professionally because of changing perceptions, attitudes, and political climates?*

Minority social workers have made advances not necessarily because of changing perceptions, but despite the many changes that the society has undergone. For example, many of our new and young minority students are not identifying enough with the rich history of contribution to the growth and development of the profession by minority social workers. When the history of social work is told one gets the impression that only benevolent White women were part of the vanguard that fought for the rights of oppressed communities. While many of the forerunners to this generation might not have been trained in the academies offering social work degrees many community stalwarts were there providing services and comfort to minorities who were being oppressed by the system. Enough has not been told in our social work history classes about the pioneering work of the likes of Franklyn Fraser and Whitney Young and the many graduates

from program like that at Howard University. These men and this institution have had a lasting impact on social work practice and policy and the larger American society, yet they are not mentioned as much as they should be.

While minorities and especially blacks have infiltrated the academies and are now a critical mass of the instructional faculties their numbers are still too few. Many minority faculties are called on to be mentors for the students of color who are making up larger and larger portions of the student body. This does mean that the longstanding issue of the successful minority carrying the race on her/his shoulder does visit many minority faculty as they are called on and expected to be the mentors for minority student (even if the individual faculty feels no such desire or inclination).

Having said all that about the challenges, the reality is that minorities in the profession continue to make steady progress as more and more prove themselves to be able and worthy of being considered for important jobs and opportunities. As a community there is a lot to be proud of because of the achievement of many social workers of color who continue to be trail blazers despite the barriers they face.

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### *Honors and Awards*

- Recipient of the California State University Forgivable Loan Award (\$30,000) 2000
- Outstanding Alumni Award CSU, Sacramento 1999
- Citation from Humboldt State University, Department of Social Work for commitment to Social Justice 2005
- Currently First Vice President of the NASW California Chapter (2012-2014)

*To find a social worker in your area, please click [here](#).*



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### **5 Responses to “Dr. Sylvester Bowie – 2013 Black History Month Celebration!”**

1.  *DENISE* says:

[January 31, 2013 at 8:34 pm](#)

Thank you for your comments. What you have said is so very true. Thank you for your brilliance.

2.  *Steadman* says:

[February 1, 2013 at 10:49 pm](#)

It is truly inspiring to read of your commitment to help others because of the challenges you faced as a child.  
Refreshing !!

3.  *Ann-Marie* says:

[February 1, 2013 at 11:06 pm](#)

Your childhood experience has truly made an indelible mark and helped you to understand the challenges that others encounter. Thanks for making your contribution.

4.  *Maurice Gray* says:

[February 3, 2013 at 6:04 pm](#)

Bowie you make all Jamaicans proud. Keep up the good work.

5.  *Dr. Carolyn Peters* says:

[February 4, 2013 at 12:13 pm](#)

Congratulations!

Carolyn