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GLORIA LADSON-BILLINGS

1947

City: Madison

County: Dane

Gloria Ladson-Billings is an influential professor of education who has worked to make education more equitable for students of color.

Gloria Ladson-Billings was born November 3, 1947, and raised in West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Due to social and economic barriers, it was difficult for people from her neighborhood to attend college. However, her love for writing pushed her towards academia.

In 1968, she earned her bachelor's degree in education from Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. Four years later, she graduated with a master's in curriculum and instruction from the University of Washington in Seattle. She worked as a public school teacher in Philadelphia for a decade.

Ladson-Billings taught many bright Black students over the years, but they did not reach the level of success she believed they could. To understand why this happened, she went back to school at Stanford University and received her PhD in curriculum and teacher education in 1984. Her research showed that teachers often saw Black students as problems, rather than students with problems who needed help. She wanted to shift the blame for poor performance away from the students and instead look at the systems working against them. Her work has led to new ways to reduce racial disparities between students of color and white students.

UW–Madison Chancellor [Donna Shalala](#) asked Ladson-Billings to teach at UW–Madison. In 1991, she joined the School of Education as an assistant professor specializing in social studies and multicultural education. In 1995, Ladson-Billings became the first Black woman in the School of Education to earn tenure, an honor that allows professors more security and freedom in their employment. In 2006, she served as President of the American Educational Research Association, the largest association of educational researchers in the world. She wrote four books, edited 12 more, and published 49 journal articles and 65 book chapters. She served as an advisor for 53 PhD students, 21 of whom were Black women.

Ladson-Billings retired from UW–Madison in 2018. That same year, she started a four-year term as [president of the National Academy of Education](#). She continues to be a highly respected and important voice in the world of education.

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/gloria-ladson-billings