



**Elevate** | Early Learning  
Conference®

## Plenary Speaker Profile

Connecting Experiences and Elevating Stories

### Crystal R. Sanders

Crystal R. Sanders is an award-winning historian of the United States in the twentieth century. Her research and teaching interests include African American History, Black Women's History, and the History of Black Education. She received her B.A. (cum laude) in History and Public Policy from Duke University and a Ph.D. in History from Northwestern

University. She is an Acting Associate Professor of African American Studies at Emory University and the former Director of the Africana Research Center at Pennsylvania State University.



Professor Sanders is the author of *A Chance for Change: Head Start and Mississippi's Black Freedom Struggle*, published by the University of North Carolina Press in 2016 as part of the John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture.

The book won the 2017 Critics Choice Award from the American Educational Research Association and the 2017 New Scholar's Book Award from

Division F of the American Educational Research Association. The book was also a finalist for the 2016 Hooks National Book Award.

Sanders' work can also be found in many of the leading history journals including the *Journal of Southern History*, the *North Carolina Historical Review*, and the *Journal of African American History*. She is currently writing a book about Black southerners' efforts to secure graduate education during the age of Jim Crow.

Her numerous honors and fellowships include an Andrew Mellon Graduate Fellowship in Humanistic Studies, a Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowship, a National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation Dissertation Fellowship, a National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship, and a Visiting Scholars Fellowship at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

**Plenary Title: *More Than Cookies and Crayons: What a Civil Rights Era Head Start Program Can Teach Us About Early Childhood Education and Social Justice***

The plenary address will examine the role of black women in the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM), a nonprofit entity that operated 84 Head Start centers in 24 counties in 1965.

Preschool education became controversial as Mississippi's Black working-class participants collaborated with the federal government and moved beyond teaching shapes and colors to challenge the state's racially exploitative social practices, repressive political policies, and White supremacist ideology. CDGM provided an opportunity for black mothers to not only make more money as Head Start employees, but also to have a direct role in the schooling of their youngsters. Developing their children's capabilities was a way to change society.

CDGM taught its students how to speak up and to ask questions and think for themselves, skills that prepared children to question the status quo. Their early childhood education program antagonized the local White power structure and provoked opposition that significantly diminished the transformative possibilities of Head Start and other War on Poverty programs.

Crystal R. Sanders, Ph.D.