THE SAMUEL Z. WESTERFIELD AWARD
ACCEPTANCE REMARKS

Bernard E. Anderson

I am highly honored to accept the Samuel Z. Westerfield Award, the highest recognition bestowed by the National Economic Association. I thank the awards committee, chaired by Professor Samuel L. Myers, Jr., for nominating me, and the NEA board of directors for approving the committee’s recommendation and presenting the Award. It is especially meaningful to be recognized by one’s peers; those who know you best; those with whom you have worked for many years in mutual respect in the common pursuit of the profession.

In receiving this honor, I have been placed in the company of African American economists whose life and work have been an inspiration and a beacon light for others who toil in the vineyard of the economics profession. Few have received the Westerfield Award in the 30 years of its existence. That number began with Dr. Samuel Z. Westerfield himself, an outstanding economist who pursued a brilliant career in academia, capped by his service as Dean of the School of Business at Atlanta University before he broke the glass ceiling for African American economists in the federal service through sub-cabinet positions in the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the Department of State. The rollcall of Westerfield Award recipients includes Professor W. Arthur Lewis, Dr. Andrew F. Brimmer, Professor Phyllis A. Wallace, Professor Marcus A. Alexis, Dr. Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., and Dr. Samuel L. Myers, Sr. Their life and work influenced my career. I will always be grateful to the NEA for placing my name among such a stellar group of economists.

THE BEGINNING

The receipt of the Westerfield Award provides an opportunity to pause and reflect on my career and to recall why I chose economics as a field of study. The story began when I was a boy growing up in Philadelphia
where I lived with my family in a predominantly black, economically diverse neighborhood.

Often on Saturday morning I would join my mother, grandmother, and several other relatives as we walked from our neighborhood to the 9th Street Italian Market, an open air market where fresh meat, fish, fruit, vegetables, and other food was sold. Vendors also sold clothing and sportswear at discount prices.

At an early age, I developed an interest in the differences between the quality of life in my neighborhood compared with that in the white neighborhood surrounding the market. Such differences could be observed in the quality of housing, the age and condition of automobiles, and other signs of what I later learned were measures of economic well being.

There also were differences in the amount of money shoppers had to spend. I noticed that African American shoppers always seemed more cautious than others in spending, always seeking the lower priced cuts of meat, types of fish selected, buying smaller quantities of fruit and vegetables, and the least expensive articles of clothing. That observation struck me even as I enjoyed ample portions of the famous Philly cheesesteaks, soft pretzels, and soda.

I wondered what explained such differences, and why black people as a group were less well off than the white population. Those questions remained with me through grade school and high school, where I observed more differences between the material quality of life between African Americans and whites in other neighborhoods.

THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

After graduating from high school, I attended Livingstone College, a small, church-related, historically black college in Salisbury, North Carolina. Never having set foot below the Mason Dixon line before I went to college, I really did not know what to expect, but I was excited about the prospects of college life.

All members of the freshmen class were required to meet with one of the two college guidance counselors to discuss coursework and to select a field of academic concentration. When I expressed no preference for a field of study, the counselor asked about my interests. I told her about my observation of material differences in well between the black and white communities, and my questions about what explained such differ-