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# Turning Tables: Recovering the African American Resistance Tradition at Predominantly White Institutions of Learning

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# Turning Tables: Recovering the African American Resistance Tradition at Predominantly White Institutions of Learning

## Abstract

*How does race and gender connect to the issue of "authority" in the university classroom? In this session, there will be an exploration of how the subject "authority" in the classroom is linked to white students and their knowledge history. For most white students, the sight of an African American female at the head of a university classroom is an unfamiliar sight. Yet, for the black female professor, the classroom is becoming the "home" of African American resistance to oppression and injustice.*

## Jean Daniels, Ph.D.

Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

...the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. –Paulo Freire, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"

In this discussion of some key passages from Jamaica Kincaid's "Lucy", I want to show how the author's protagonist learns to draw from the tradition of resistance insight into the political and cultural dehumanization of African descendants. In contrast to an acceptance of the position of "other" within white supremacist Western culture, Kincaid's representation of Lucy, focusing on "home" as the site of the resistance tradition, re-visions the collective challenge of African descendants against the practice of dehumanization inflicted on the race. In the process, Kincaid effects a transformation of the protagonist from a passive receptor to an intellectual who is by virtue of her relation to Western society, an intellectual exile. On a personal level, what appears a "first time" "sensation" of something new for Lucy is, on the contrary, evident in the struggles of Africans throughout the Diaspora and has its roots in the resistance tradition.

Further, Lucy's role and an intellectual exile, I will argue, engages the struggle against dehumanization in every day existence with the understanding that, as Paulo Freire points out, dehumanization "is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order" (Pedagogy 26).<sup>1</sup> Consequently, her ability to question the "unjust order" of racial difference will include giving voice to the narrative of her own knowledge and experience in resisting white supremacy.

<sup>1</sup> Freire, Paulo. "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." New York: Continuum, 1970.

## Presenter

**Dr. Jean Daniels** is Visiting Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. Dr. Daniels graduated from Loyola University, Chicago in 1996 with a doctorate in Literature/Cultural theory. Her area of research is Postcolonial Studies/ African Diaspora. Dr. Daniels' article "The Marrow of Tradition" was recently accepted for publication in Griot: Official Journal of the Southern Conference on Afro-American Studies."