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Cornell University

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A Site of Learning and Prejudice: A First-Year Teaching Journal

Yolanda Pierce
Cornell University

This presentation addresses how classroom dynamics and issues of race and gender can form the intersection between academia and activism.

The issues of race, gender, and authority in the classroom are not simply theoretical issues. They are serious challenges that female teachers of color face each time they step into a classroom. When and where she enters, both her race and her gender enter with her.

My teaching journal is the informal, creative outcome of my first-year teaching experience—that of an African American female graduate student teaching her first seminar to 17 White students. Using the age-old tradition of diary writing, over the course of the semester I detailed my purpose for the course, personal reactions to me, the actual experience of teaching the chosen material, my reasoning for choices in the syllabus, materials taught, and methodology.

Sharing from these personal reflections, I would like to present five brief journal entries that span this first semester of teaching. In addition to sharing my concerns about the intersections of race, gender, and authority in the classroom, my journal entries entail what I know now that I wish I knew then in terms of how to respond to these issues within the classroom; my ultimate decision to continue to teach at predominantly White institutions; and what resources I (and others) need as a graduate student to continue to make my classroom a site of learning and resistance.

PRESENTER

Yolanda Pierce is a graduate student of English and is on staff at Cornell University. She is a Ph.D. candidate.