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Transforming the Ivory Tower: Ebony Women Redefining the Academy

From Twilight Zone to the Land of Oz: Redefining 'Place' and Negotiating Self as 'Other' in the Academy

Dr. Olga I. Davis

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“Framed within two metaphors taken from American popular culture, this session informs that a reality of struggle and a journey of situating the self are unique obstacles for African American women transforming the Academy.”

This session examines the African American female experience of the transition from graduate school to faculty at two historically-white midwestern universities. Framed within two metaphors taken from American popular culture, the session informs that a reality of struggle and a journey of situating the self are unique obstacles for African American women transforming the Academy.

The African American female experience in higher education has been examined from several perspectives (James and Farmer, 1993, Saunders, 1990; Moses, 1989). Historically, African American women have focused on education as a means of achieving freedom and respect in American society. Education has been a traditional way to redefine the symbolic constructions of race, gender, and class while transforming African American women from kitchen workers to the intellectuals and scholars we see today.

This session brings in view the lived-experiences faced by many African American women in academics: making a space to negotiate the personal and the professional self while challenging the notion of 'place' in the Academy. First, examining the development of a professional persona in graduate school presents the inquiry. Second, the phenomena of new faculty status is explored from the perspective of redefining 'self' as a neglected resource. Finally, challenging the traditional notions of academic 'place' reveals the obstacles facing African American women's scholarship and teaching methodologies. The essay concludes with the idea of transforming/transcending both the Twilight Zone and the Land of Oz by way of ancestral roots of intellectual and cultural knowing.

PRESENTER

Dr. Olga I. Davis is Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Communication, Kansas State University. She received a Ph.D. in communication studies from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1994.