

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Building Diversity in the University and the  
Community----Fifth Annual National Conference  
(2000)

People of Color in Predominantly White  
Institutions

---

October 2000

## "AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY ISSUES AND ACADEMIC CLASSROOM PRACTICE"

Terry Carter

*English Composition and Rhetoric, University of South Carolina*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/pocpw15>



Part of the [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#)

---

Carter, Terry, "'AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY ISSUES AND ACADEMIC CLASSROOM PRACTICE'" (2000). *Building Diversity in the University and the Community----Fifth Annual National Conference* (2000). 23.  
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/pocpw15/23>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Building Diversity in the University and the Community----Fifth Annual National Conference (2000) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

## **"AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY ISSUES AND ACADEMIC CLASSROOM PRACTICE"**

**Terry Carter**

English Composition and Rhetoric

University of South Carolina

**"What my research revealed was that African American students who do not identify with the academic community do not see it as real; rather, they view their academic education as only a means to an end."**

In the spring of 1999, I interviewed three college students as a part of a larger research project. What my research revealed was that African American students who do not identify with the academic community do not see it as real; rather, they view their academic education as only a means to an end. Also, in the spring of 1999, I began two writing projects to make sense of my own identity as an African American male compositionist in the midst of an academic culture that is very different from my own. One of the projects developed out of an African American literature course and the other one developed from a course in ethics, rhetoric, and composition. I realized that I—as an African American from a rural and low-income community—struggled with accepting the identity changes that are demanded by my participation in a predominantly white academic community. I found myself resisting the academy's teaching that language is the agency which represents an individual's status and identity in our society, a society which values high levels of literacy.

In this presentation I will argue—relying on my own personal research and the research of others in the field of composition, education, and literature—issues of identity in the academic community are the major obstacles that prevent African American students and "Others" from performing well in and becoming community members of the Academy. I will discuss how identity affects student self-awareness in academic communities and classrooms that drastically differ from their home environments. In addition, I will highlight the connections between African American literature created during the Harlem Renaissance and current concerns about African American identity in America's academic institutions. I believe that teachers who are interested in diversifying their classroom practice can gain much from understanding how identity influences student behavior and attitude in the academic classroom and community.

My work here is interdisciplinary and intersects with the ethnographic-educational scholarship of Shirley Brice Heath and Ametha Ball whose work reveals that academic identity formation influences student success in school environments ("Dances of identity: Finding an ethnic self in the arts"). Also, works produced by Nella Larsen, W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington that have significance in the African American literary canon have been valuable in understanding how issues of identity have persisted and evolved in the United States and its academic institutions. Also, I see this proposed presentation as extending a recent CCCC's (Conference on College Composition and Communication) conversation where a panel speaker talked about how

issues of race influenced perceptions of her identity as an African American composition teacher (Annette Powell's presentation on the 2000 CCCC panel, "Blackness, Whiteness, Working-classness: Conceptions, Questions, Ambivalences").

Ultimately, this proposed presentation will rely on such authorities and sources as mentioned above to highlight my own scholarship as an African American in higher education, and it will explore how issues of identity can be used to understand that which draws African American into the Academy. I believe that knowing how to help students explore their own identities allows teachers to better understand how to serve them in academic communities that often resist change and inclusion of others.

**Presenter:**

Currently, I am a third year doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina (USC), and I am pursuing my degree in English-Composition and Rhetoric. My specialization area focuses on the African American influence on composition studies. I have a doctoral fellowship with USC's African American Professors Program, which is currently being sponsored by USC, the Kellogg Foundation, and the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. I recently presented a conference paper—"Education, Identity, and Racial Uplift: Understanding the Transitional Phase of the 'New Negro' in Larsen's Quicksand"—at the Society for the Study of Southern Literature (SSSL) in Orlando, Florida. Presently, I have a proposed conference paper "An African American Explores Identity Issues in the Academic Community"—being reviewed for acceptance at the upcoming 2001 Conference on College Composition and Communication, which will be held in Denver, Colorado. In addition, I am currently working on several articles for publication.