

## **Nell Irvin Painter**

### **Doctor of Humane Letters**

Nell Irvin Painter is a pioneering historian, author, painter and visual artist. She grew up in Oakland, Ca., as the child of a scientist and an educator who encouraged and supported their academically gifted daughter and gave her the lifelong confidence to create and seize opportunities. After a Bachelor of Arts from the University of California at Berkeley, a junior year in France, two years in Ghana, and a master's from the University of California at Los Angeles, Painter completed a doctorate in history at Harvard University and joined the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania. As a member of the original class of fellows at the National Humanities Center in the Research Triangle, Painter came to the South, a region that figures prominently in her understanding of American history. She remained in the South for eight additional years as a faculty member at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill before joining the faculty at Princeton University. Elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Painter is admired for the range of her mastery of the diverse factors that contribute to understanding American history, from her early description based on personal interviews of an elderly African American who had embraced the tenets of Communism, to her life of Sojourner Truth based on the scantiest documentary record, to her interpretation of the sweep of African American history from Jamestown to the present, and a history of the construction of American whiteness. Her eight books and many articles incorporate perspectives from social, labor and intellectual history as well as women's history and feminist theory. Painter's eminence as a historian is attested by the offices to which her peers have elected her, including the national directorship of the Association of Black Women Historians and the presidency of the Organization of American Historians and the Southern Historical Association.

On her retirement from Princeton as the Edwards Professor of American History, Painter directed her energy and creativity to an entirely different career. She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting from Rutgers and then a Master of Fine Arts from Rhode Island School of Design. Her art fuses manual and digital forms in historically infused collages and designs, demonstrating the relevance of multiple disciplines working together. Currently Painter is a thriving artist – teaching, exhibiting her art, lecturing and carrying out her role as one of the nation's leading public intellectuals.

For outstanding accomplishment in the fields of history and art, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is pleased to confer on Nell Irvin Painter the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters *honoris causa*.