The Next Movement in Black Studies: "eBlack Studies"

The term "eBlack Studies" describes the ongoing application of current digital information technology towards the production, dissemination, and collection of historical knowledge critical to the discipline of Black Studies and to the overall black experience. Thus, eBlack Studies, as it is now understood, is widely recognized to be at the forefront of research in Black Studies. Keeping this in mind, we – a group of Black Studies scholars from across the United States – first gathered together at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in July 2008 for the inaugural eBlack Studies workshop. The objectives of this workshop were twofold: to promote digital scholarship in black studies by building a cooperative research network, and to create an agenda for eBlack Studies within the academy as well as within the diverse communities where scholars of color presently work.

The breadth and depth of work represented by the scholars gathered at this meeting broadly define the intersections of Black Studies and emerging issues of digital technology. Our intellectual, community, and activist interests include: Afrofuturism, architecture, archival science and preservation, the Black Arts Movement, bibliometrics, critical race theory, cultural geography, cyberorganizing, ecotourism, environmental justice, genealogy, information seeking behaviors, information management, interpersonal communication, library and information science, public history and memory, rhetoric and composition, urban and regional planning, and US/Africa foreign policy. We have also committed ourselves to work in a number of related fields of study including but not limited to: Afro-Latin America and Latino/a Studies, Archaeology, Black Atlantic Studies, Black Queer Studies, Comparative Literature, Cultural Studies, Ethnomusicology, Psychology, Public Health, and Women and Gender Studies.

As we chart the future of scholarship, teaching, and community work through the use of eBlack Studies, we acknowledge and celebrate our roots in the history and traditions of Black Studies, while, at the same time, we enthusiastically embrace digital culture as it critically interrogates, interprets, defines, and documents the experiences of people of African descent. Furthermore, like Black Studies, eBlack Studies is unquestionably grounded in the history and everyday experiences of living Black communities, and is wholly committed to the preservation and accessibility of Black knowledge, history, experience, and perspective for the continued education of Black people and all people. We work to promote eBlack Studies as an interdisciplinary study of Black life and information communications technology across the African Diaspora based on an engaged model of praxis-centered, community advocacy. eBlack Studies will commit itself to knowledge creation and dissemination, dialogue, debate, engagement, and action in the interests of freedom for Black people in the US and the entire African Diaspora. As such, eBlack Studies will make a powerful contribution towards creating a better world for all peoples. eBlack Studies will work to cross the vast digital divide across ethnicities and transform the technological systems that structure Black life, as well as the patterns of political, economic, and cultural power relations that influence technology design, production, and use.

We believe that eBlack Studies is a movement which is integral to the future of the discipline of Black Studies, and that this future will include utilizing, innovating, interrogating, critiquing, and where needed, resisting digital tools and spaces. As we chart this future, we believe that Library and Information Sciences are also essential to the development of eBlack Studies. Not only will eBlack Studies be at the vanguard for work in Black Studies, it will also contribute to its future through the development of digital archives, while documenting the history of Black Studies and the Black experience.

We believe that eBlack Studies and Black Studies in general must reaffirm scholarly commitment to the wide-ranging diversity in Black experiences. As eBlack Studies holds promise to innovate and develop new directions for Black Studies, it also presents an opportunity to standardize our disciplinary procedures and policies as well as to rejuvenate our pedagogy and practice. The innovations we collectively achieve in these areas will offer unique possibilities for other disciplines, as well. Finally, the weaving of Black Studies and new information technologies offers profound possibilities for the future of the field, including:

• Preservation of the many modes and facets of the Black experience in digitally archived, easily accessible, open source formats.

• Collaborative, interdisciplinary approaches to scholarship, teaching and learning.

• Intersectional approaches to scholarship and action, emphasizing the linkages that persist among class, sexuality, nationality and forms of oppression, while promoting strategies for action and liberation.

• The aggregation and compilation of reports from the outposts of struggle throughout the world providing testimony to scholars, activists and laypeople.

• The active pursuit of connections with scholars of the Black experience and practitioners in areas such as the hard sciences, computer sciences, history of science, engineering, media studies, economics, media production, performance studies, fine arts, and other disciplines not typically associated with work in Black Studies. New ways of imagining connection and kinship must also engage with professional organizations such as the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), transnational grassroots organizations, and non-governmental organizations. We must work to insure that an understanding of the Black experience be more than a mere conversation among academics.

• Utilization of all the available means of digital technologies such as social networking, data mining, the Internet, and others engaged in our scholarship, teaching, curriculum development, and community engagement, not just for our own personal and professional purposes, but to strengthen connections with Black

communities around the world.

- Interrogation and critique of technological systems and tools.

- Advocacy as well as description in our intellectual work.

- Utilization of models of scholarship and engagement that reach beyond traditional academic work and academic systems of financing, reward, and recognition.

We are witnessing an information revolution – a revolution that is leading global transformation. People of African descent have always played pivotal roles in the history of technological revolutions – sometimes as innovators and inventors, more frequently as laborers – and whose labor permitted the wealth that spurred further technological advances. The social consequences of today's information revolution include suffering and economic insecurity for African Americans and others in the African Diaspora, and also dislocations among others in society. Our communities have been digitally divided but we are dedicating ourselves to serve as a bridge over the river of that divide. Our social values are cyberdemocracy, collective intelligence, and information freedom. We embrace the information revolution and dedicate our scholarship to academic excellence and social responsibility. We welcome others to join us in this endeavor.