

Walking on Three Legs:

Rethinking the History of Black Studies in the 21st Century

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The Black power paradigm has been dominant for 40 years in Black intellectual thought and practice, not only ^{for Black people} to be in the system but to have power as well. In fact, this development was a function of both the Civil Rights Movement and Black Nationalist traditions, one led ^{a struggle} to power within the mainstream and the other led to independent institutional strategies. One of the great success stories is the historical experience of Black Studies, especially in higher education. Black Studies is the greatest concentration of Black PhD's in institutions of higher education, except in the historically Black college university or in inner city community colleges. Black Studies is the largest budget directly related to educating a Black intellectual elite. During this 40 year retrospective on Black power, it is important to include Black Studies.

There have been a number of recent interpretations of the narrative history and critical debates around the origins and stages of Black Studies. Rooks in her recent volume portrays Black Studies not only in terms of Black agency, but perhaps more importantly she looks at Black Studies from the standpoint

of big funders who, she argues, in effect co-opted and directed the field hence, the current state of affairs is a function of the Ford Foundation. This analysis is challenged by Hall who argues that while there was this interaction with the mainstream, and with funding organizations like the Ford Foundation, the primary force shaping the vision and plans for Black Studies was autonomous Black agency, itself an expression of the broader Black Liberation movement. Both of these studies focus on the ideological aspects of the Black Studies movement at its inception. Both add to the rich research literature that is focused on the discipline of Black Study itself.

This paper develops a historical model of Black Studies that captures its past, present, and future. In this sense, it is a conceptual framework to interpret the perspectives of Rooks and Hall. This model is additive in that there is a sequential chronological narrative that ~~ends up in~~ ^{overlaps into} simultaneity.

There are three historical stages that make up the national narrative of Black Studies that end up with all three being aspects of the current situation simultaneously. In other words, the general sequence is first the social movement, then an academic profession, and, finally, now becoming a knowledge network. In general, these three stages occurred in sequential

development while at the same time all three constitute possible faces of Black Studies today.

The most generally discussed aspect of the history of Black Studies today recognizes its origin as part of the Black Liberation movement, an expression of Black power on campus. A recent essay by Joseph makes an important contribution by reviewing the very many individuals, organizations, and movements that made up the Black Studies movement at its inception. Joseph clearly indicates that the primary actors were student radicals and what he calls grass-roots intellectuals. In other words, out of the community autonomous Black Nationalist cultural institutions, with the new force of students admitted after the assassination of Martin Luther King, was a mix of people battling against the racism of the university to produce the conditions for the founding of Black Studies.

In another sense, it seems clear now that this upsurge was the last great upsurge for power within the social motion of the industrial system. Black people had aggregated in the cities in the great migration of the war into the industrial system. This aggregating occurred also residentially. And it is this residential aggregation that translated into electoral politics but also a

demand on public services, past the public library, past the elementary and secondary schools, leading to higher education. And so the rise of the Black Studies movement not only was a matter of being in the community based Black Liberation movement with the new student radicals it also expressed something that was part of the Black caucus movement taken up by most occupations and professions

Black Studies as a social movement is closely connected at its inception to Black Studies as academic profession. Rojas makes a recent important contribution to clarify the extent to which Black Studies is organized as an academic profession. The title of his forthcoming book is *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline*. This book is based on comparative case studies of The University of Illinois and Chicago Circle, The University of Chicago, and Harvard. Professor Rohaus has also done a recent survey of Black Studies faculty. With responses from 221 individuals who were 56% women, average age of 49, 78% Black, 8% born in Africa. This is one portrait of the Black Studies professoriate. He also deals with the cannon of what books are recommended for use in Black Studies.

Another recent survey using websites of academic institutions for information about Black Studies has been carried out by Alkalimat and his student associates at the University of Toledo. Thus far they have released data on New York, California, and the Midwest. The dominant findings thus far focus mainly on the difference between public and private institutions. Suggesting that the social movement stage had much greater impact on public institutions and therefore the department structure is associated with public institutions of higher education whereas the centers, programs, and institutes are associated with private institutions.

Knowledge network, perhaps the most comprehensive development of the third stage of Black Studies, has been done at the University of Toledo. After theoretically discussing the importance of technology as a force in history, Alkalimat developed the five aspects of the Toledo model for what he calls eBlack Studies (See handout). eBlack Studies is the discipline of Black Studies immersed in the developments of the information technologies. The key is reinventing our routines of academic life, teaching and research. The key is digitization, using digital tools, especially scanning devices. The first is the digitization of discourse which includes dialogue with colleagues as well as the virtual conference. Next is the digitization of

research. This includes not only the pdf or html version of an academic paper or a PowerPoint presentation but it includes journal and book publications as well taking all of our knowledge and placing it in cyberspace. Lastly the digitization of experience, the documentation of the social forms and cultural forms of life as lived and transformed from atoms to bits, from actual reality to virtual reality in cyberspace.

We propose a historiography of Black Studies. (See Handout) Each stage has its own logic, a dynamic that shapes the form and content of the specific historical process. Our research focus in this article is a comparative analysis of four case studies: Columbia, UCLA, San Francisco State, and Cornell.

Columbia:

According to Joanne Grant (1969), Columbia had by 1968 become notorious for its lack of communication between its student body and administration, particularly student activism/activists. Also because just three years prior, the assassination of Malcolm X had occurred in the adjacent neighborhood of Washington Heights, there had been a profound effect amongst the blacks

of the immediate area, and city in general, particularly amongst the black nationalists, and their white student-activist counterparts. This frustration, coupled with other issues such as the neighborhood-community disconnect and the administration-student rifts, would come to a head in 1969, with the takeover of several campus buildings, most famously including the takeover of Hamilton Hall by black students led by Bill Sales, and other black student leaders and affiliated with local Harlem community organizations.

The key moment in the power struggle at Columbia was at 6am on April 23, when the students would begin their occupation of Hamilton Hall; this action and the ensuing events which would take place over the next week (April 23-30) would see several other buildings taken over by white student radicals, as well as a counterstrike by the faculty, sighting issues related to their academic freedom, and their position that it was being infringed upon by the student protestors (Grant Finally on May 8, President Kirk issued the following statement: “It is agreed on both sides that and without reservation, that the basic structure of the University must be re-examined (Grant, 1969)”. In addition it was agreed that gymnasium construction in Morningside Heights (a key issue among those in the surrounding area) would be halted. On June 24, the “Liberation School” opened with a

curriculum of research and action projects and strategy seminars intended for black students and community members. This represents the very beginning of black studies at Columbia.

UCLA:

1968 can be seen as a turning point in the black studies movement at UCLA, as there was an edict from the chancellor of the campus to immediately hire black professors. What transpired at UCLA was essentially a power struggle between two major black nationalist groups, the United Slaves (US), led by Maulana Karenga, and the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panthers, coordinated by Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter and others (Hilliard and Cole 1993, Mishory 2005). While the conflict between the two groups is well documented and complex in nature, in terms of UCLA the struggle boiled down to the appointment of the new director of Afro American studies department, and a territorial dispute over what the United Slaves perceived to be an infringement by the Black Panther Party of US territory, the campuses’ Black Student Union. The struggle culminated in one of the more tragic events of the Black Power movement, the murders of Bunchy Carter and John Huggins (husband of Party leader, Ericka Huggins) on January 17,

1969. This would be the key event in the evolution of the Black Studies movement at UCLA, which would subsequently flourish under the leadership of Dr. Molefe Asante, then Arthur Smith (Turner 2002).

The uniqueness of the circumstances of UCLA distinguish it from the other black studies programs, in the sense that there appears to have already been a black infrastructure in place at the University, and a functioning director (Singleton) who was not a “mainstreamer” as in the case of DuBois at Cornell (Downs 1999). The issue and disputes were entirely within the struggle for Black Power, a division between the Cultural Nationalist agenda of US and the Revolutionary Nationalism of the Black Panther Party.

San Francisco State

The social movement at San Francisco State revolved around a 1968 student strike organized by the schools’ Black Student Union and the Third World Liberation Front, a coalition of Black, Asian, and Latino student groups that aligned themselves with the causes of the black activist community in the Bay Area and elsewhere in California. The student activists demanded more black representation among faculty, administrators, staff, and students, and

the creation of a department responsible for the research, teaching, and community outreach. After the longest strike ever to take place on an American college campus, an agreement was finally reached with the administration resulting in the creation of the first fully autonomous Black Studies Department in the United States which would operate in the new College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State College.

Today, the Black Studies Department at San Francisco State operates under the chair- department system, under the leadership of chair, Dr. Dorothy Tsuruta whom is also serves as an associate professor within the department. The Department offers two degree options: a major for those pursuing a Bachelors' Degree in Africana Studies, and a minor intended to compliment another major from a different department.

In terms of knowledge network, the Black Studies Department operates a webpage which is a part of the larger College of Ethnic Studies website. There are no faculty publications that can be accessed through the website, however there is a section providing faculty contact information and other limited information on faculty members. The Curriculum for each degree

option is provided in the form of an “advising web page”. There are no syllabi available through the Department website.

Cornell:

By 1968, the year of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the shift from Civil Rights to Black Power was now manifesting itself on college campuses throughout the country. There were now demands being made by student groups, for more black enrollment, and more importantly a department or program that would reflect the interests and needs of the black student population. To quote then Cornell student Stuart Brown “The crucial issue of the next few years is racism in the university, the special needs of blacks, the question of contact with students on academic affairs is a first priority (Downs 1999).”

On the morning of April 19, 1969 a group of black students led by Eric Evans and Thomas Jones, both members of the AAS took control of Willard Straight Hall, they were later engaged by members of Delta Upsilon fraternity, but were able to fend off there invasion. It is at some point after

this engagement with Delta Upsilon that the decision was made to become armed; consequently “guns” were brought in later that evening.

Perhaps even more important was the marching out of armed black students the next day down the steps of Willard Straight Hall, a move which would bring national attention and focus to the campus.

The demands of the occupiers were quite simple; they wanted the students who had been charged in earlier student demonstrations absolved, and “student power” to be included in the official governance of the University.

It was not until May 2, however that the Cornell administration voted to establish a constituent assembly to “restructure” the University. On June 2, 1969 James Turner accepted the position of director of the newly formed Africana Studies Center, which offered ten courses, including Black Consciousness, Black Resistance, and other subjects. In 1970 the University also established the Ujamma residential College, which serves as a “residential study program based on an African American identity (Downs 1999).”

Every institution has a website containing basic information including email. In a couple of cases digital research collections are available online, for

example., at Columbia there is an extensive site on Malcolm X and at Cornell there is an extensive site on indigenous African languages. The main thing is that when one looks at the leading models of transforming a university or a discipline into a knowledge network Black Studies is not part of the cutting edge. One might examine MIT for the state of the art, in that they have over 1000 course online, a storage for all faculty research, and online video of every major presentation made on campus. Black Studies has a lot of catching up to do.

What significance do we find in these case studies?

1. Based on these four experiences we can say that strong battles got results. Black Studies is one of the great victories of the Black Power movement.
2. The outcome differed by class and politics: public, non-elite institutions (in our sample this is San Francisco State University) were more likely to get departmental status, while private and public elite institutions got institutes and centers.

3. Institutes and centers seem to be leading the transformation toward relocating Black Studies into cyberspace.

Our hope is that we can debate the logic of all three stages, especially how we can create stage three, Black Studies as a knowledge network.

Toward a Historiography of Black Studies

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Black Studies...	Dynamic	Examples	Bibliography	Critical Areas for Research
....As Social Movement	Community → Campus	UCLA Columbia	Rooks Hall Joseph	1. Origin of Black Studies 2. Relation of on campus and off campus 3. Nature and content of social change
....As Academic Profession	Margin → Mainstream	San Francisco State Cornell	Rojas Africana Studies in New York Little	1. Structure of academic unit 2. Degrees and curriculum 3. Research and publication
....As Knowledge Network	Black → eBlack	eBlack Studies 2003 Online Conference H-Afro-Am	Alkalimat Banks Nelson	1. Online content 2. Listserv interaction 3. Democratic transparency

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Toward a Model of eBlack Studies

Five Dimensions of Scholarship	Black Studies			The Toledo Experience
	Black Studies	eBlack Studies		
Professional Discourse	Conference (face to face)	Listserv discussions		H-Afro-Am
Curriculum Development	Classroom based campus courses	Distance learning		Joint project with University of Ghana
Research Productivity	Hard copy publications	Research web sites		Malcolm X: A Research Site
Public Policy	Consulting, internships	Advocacy web sites and petitions		1998 Black Radical Congress
Community Service	Volunteering in an actual community	Building a virtual community		Toledo Black Church web project