# Information Technology and Black Studies

A Consultant's Report to the Ford Foundation

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November 2006

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## Executive Summary

Black Studies is entering its third stage of development. The first stage was social movement, the second an academic profession, and now the third is a knowledge network. This report is a discussion of this third stage: its development, best practices and prospects for the future.

Information technology is the basis for far reaching changes in all aspects of society, especially higher education. Digitization of all forms of material and the use of the World Wide Web and Internet is fundamentally changing the creation, storage, analysis and sharing of information. This new innovative environment is the context prompting higher education administrators, policy makers, and students to call forth this third stage of Black Studies.

At the same time that higher education has been an early adopter of these new technologies, the African American community has been characterized as being digitally divided. This creates a greater social distance between Black Studies and the African American community than higher education and communities in general in terms of IT. This poses an additional challenge.

At this stage, Black Studies has adopted various applications of information technologies. Some institutions are more engaged than others, so as of yet there has been no fundamental paradigm shift. This period of start up has been represented by pioneers, conferences, curriculum development, research, and forms of virtual community. In these areas it is possible to identify best practices. However, most of these early examples of best practices dealing with the Black experience have been housed in academic units other than Black Studies. This can produce a polarity.

This situation also applies to the new PhD programs in Black Studies. There is universal use of the most popular applications (e.g. email, downloading information from the web, use of distance learning software, and making one's resume available as a PDF). However, digitization and virtual collaboration are not yet part of normal academic activities, especially research and teaching.

There are clear paths for potential future innovation to promote greater use of more IT applications. This report identifies eight paths to the future:

1. **A national commission on "Information Technology and Black Studies."** This commission can coordinate the development of a general consensus, a framework for everyone. Toward this end it can be composed of the key organizational structures of the field: the Association for the Study of Afro American Life and History, the National Council for Black Studies, the Association of Black Cultural Centers, and the H-Afro-Am listserv. This commission can create, legitimate, and popularize a

whole set of IT applications and network with individual scholars and academic programs leading this paradigm shift.

2. **Centers for "Cybertechnology and the Black Experience."** The aggregation of resources into regional centers can jump start the spread of IT applications within the field of Black Studies. These centers might specialize and build new resources and applications for the field in general. Examples might include curriculum portals for general use, collaboratively built data bases for public use, and digitization programs to transform archives into digital collections on the web.

3. **Programs to train faculty and graduate students in key IT applications.** Annual workshops can be organized in institutions with Black Studies graduate and strong institutional commitment to IT. This can be a positive activity for existing centers for digital forms of scholarship.

4. **Organizing IT training and research in annual meetings.** Using the annual gatherings of scholars and students is the best cost effective way to spread new applications and legitimate their use. This includes pre conference workshop days as well as sessions for papers that report on the use of the new IT applications regarding curriculum and research. These workshops would fit appropriately in the annual meetings of NCBS, ASALH and ABCC.

5. **Development of virtual curriculum resources.** There are courses that constitute a core curriculum in the academic field of Black Studies. Perhaps the most popular courses are an introduction to the field, and a survey course in African American history and African American literature. Using new collaborative software (e.g. Wiki) web portals can be developed that can be inclusive of all the variations used in teaching each course. This will improve the general quality of teaching and assist in the standardization of a core curriculum in the field.

6. **Development of a virtual Black Studies archive of research.** Key research institutions are using new storage capability to store all research data and analysis taking place at their institution (e.g. D-Space at MIT). Since Black Studies research is produced at a diverse set of institutions special effort needs to be made to build extensive digital storage to preserve the integrity of the field based on a more democratic system. This also includes research sites that archive material on a specific theme or subject.

7. **Establish a cooperative research network**. In order to create a national framework for methodological training and a mechanism for generating national data sets, there is a need to establish a cooperative research

network. By coordinating a network of faculty and students, an annual schedule of data collections can be carried out in local areas. These data would be available first to the initiators (principle investigators) and then posted to the web as a public use research resource.

8. **Digital tools need to be developed as part of community service.** Black Studies programs have a historical mandate to liaison with community groups. This can be done via service learning, internships for students in community settings, and by working with local alumni contacts. Important use of IT resources will greatly assist the transformation of community life.

# Introduction

The historical development of the new information technologies is impacting every aspect of society including all aspects of the production and distribution of knowledge. Education is changing. One of the interesting aspects of this change is how accessible all forms of knowledge are increasingly becoming, hence in many respects while one impulse in the world is toward an ideological moment the major thrust of information technology is pushing things toward a global democratic information moment. So in one sense the most important aspect of the historical moment is this tension between the forces moving toward ideology and the forces moving toward universal information. It is in this context that the discussion of information technology and Black Studies is best understood.

The founding of Black Studies is a historical expression of social protest that took place in the 1960's. Black Studies was a Black power project in higher education. There have been many conferences and reports on the state of Black Studies over the last 40 years, and while these reports and books have varying interpretations they all focus on the fact that Black Studies continues to exist and seems to be a permanent part of higher education.

Black Studies has developed over the last 40 years through three stages of development. One, Black Studies began as a social movement fighting against institutional racism and advocating a special focus on research and teaching about the Black experience. Two, Black Studies was developed into an academic profession, fulfilling all of the expectations of a professional field of study that was part of higher education. Three, Black Studies is now becoming a knowledge network, using information technologies to transform its organizational life, its research, scholarship and teaching.

Because the university is changing based on the new technologies along with the society in general, Black Studies faces these very same changes. Information technology is changing the context Black Studies has to exist in, and therefore Black Studies faces the challenge of information technologies as well. In this very early stage of the transformation of the university there is an urgent need to give plenty of attention to the potential of initiatives that use information technology to transform Black Studies into a 21$^{st}$ century discipline, into a knowledge network.

This report was sponsored by the Ford Foundation in its attempt to make an assessment of what practices were under way and to consider proposals for what initiatives might prove productive. This report will consider how information technologies have impacted higher education, how they have impacted the Black community, Black Studies in particular and then make some recommendations for the future.

## Information Technology and the Current Situation

There are two major social formations that contextualize this discussion - the institutions of higher education and the African American community. These contexts contain social forces that are pulling and holding back the informatization of Black Studies. They are not determining, but as powerful environmental forces they must be a focus for any serious analysis and plan of action.

Mid nineteenth century emancipation was about moving Black people from an agrarian slavery into an industrial system. The fight for "40 acres and a mule" became the fight for a good factory job. In this context, the mechanical cotton picker ran people off the land. Today at the first decade of the 21st century people are being run off jobs by the use of computers and the Internet. The 21st century fight for democracy and a good quality of life will be based on digital technology.

First we will present a summary discussion of information technology as part of the African American community and as part of the institution of higher education.

### *IT and African Americans*

Black Studies has as its main focus for teaching and research the African American community and the entire African Diaspora. The extent to which these communities are wired is an important factor in impacting students and the utility of Black Studies IT use off campus. Therefore the focus for IT use in Black Studies must consider the campus and the community. The starting point is the digital divide.

There are three conceptual frameworks for the differences between general adoption of the new technologies and the rates and styles of such adoption in the African American community. The "digital divide" concept pointed to a polarization between the wired and the de-linked. This was contrasted with a "digital opportunity" that directed attention to options to get online in public libraries and cyber cafes. Finally, the research community focused its research on the more generically neutral concept of "digital inequality." There has been consistent innovation in digital technology so the digital inequality to be empirically measured is a moving target, from access and ownership of computers, to using specific applications like email or websites, to broadband and Wifi access and use.

A 2005 report issued by the PEW Internet and American Life Project indicates that 70% of whites go online compared to 57% of African Americans. On the other hand, 74% of white American adults have a cell phone compared to 73% of African American adults. The goal is to speed up the process of crossing the digital divide into using the technology in the fullest sense.

The fundamental facts of the digital divide are important, but also of significance is the need for a policy orientation. We need a vision for a society of great technological

advancement and unprecedented social equality. The following three goals are fundamental to the empowerment of African Americans in the information society:

1. cyberdemocracy—everyone connected
2. collective intelligence—everyone providing digital content—and
3. information freedom—free, open access to all content.

## *IT and Higher Education*

Institutions of higher education not only led in the innovation of digital technologies it has joined government and the private sector in adopting specific applications of these technologies, thus setting in motion the broad paradigm shift from industrial society to a new information society. This started as additive, but has quickly become transformative. Some highlights include the following:

1. Computers became both a ubiquitous tool for text and data manipulation and storage by people in all fields, and computer science became a special academic discipline in its own right.

2. Computer literacy has gradually been stated or implied as a goal for all students as part of general education. This first appeared as part of curriculum reform at Harvard College under the leadership of Dean Rosofsky.

3. The academic field of library science is currently under transformation from library schools to schools of information (e.g. The University of Michigan).

4. Information technology is being managed by new administrative positions such as chief information officer. Each college and sometimes even a department has someone who manages websites, sometimes called a webmaster.

5. The PC has become an indispensable academic tool, sometimes provided but always highly recommended for students and usually provided to each faculty member just as a telephone, facilities for photo copying texts, and access to a library.

6. Virtual publishing of material is increasingly not only supplementing hard copy texts but also replacing it. This includes everything from traditional college catalogs and course schedules, to journals, books, and course syllabi. JStor is one of several efforts to create easy global access to journals for a fee less than hard copy subscription rates.

7. The miniaturization and convergence of technologies is bringing forward new devices such as iPods for storing and accessing sound and video, and diverse PDA's that combine the functions of telephone, TV, web surfing, still photo and video camera. Students are wired at home, in dorm rooms, in class, and between classes on a 24-7 basis.

8. Innovative democratic transparency now exists in a variety of forms for personal archives (e.g. My Space), posting of video (e.g. YouTube), and storing all other forms of information. Media sharing software like My Space, Flickr, and YouTube have revolutionalized massive distribution and use of multi media files motivating millions of people to become up loading content providers.

9. Wireless technology has de-linked from hard wires use of computer access to the web and the Internet making the entire campus a computer lab. High speed connectivity is become ubiquitous in an academic environment.

10. Proprietary software is being challenged by open source software. This has led to an outpouring of local initiatives and a democratic opening for adapting software to local needs. Local staff and relevant academic professionals can re-engineer their institutions as part of commercial products at much lower cost.

MIT is an institutional leader in creating and adopting new information technologies. The direction that higher education is taking is epitomized by what is taking place at MIT. We can think of MIT as thinking about the past, the present, and the future of its institutional impact on the world. Now, in the digital age, MIT is becoming a transparent institution in terms of its past, its present and its future. In terms of the past they have developed D Space, virtual unlimited storage of all the scholarship of their faculty and students so that their intellectual productivity can be stored forever. In terms of the present, MIT World is a website that has been created as a service the university to provide on demand video of all of the main speakers and placing for free, asynchronous viewing. And in terms of the future, that is the curriculum they use to prepare the scientist of the future. They have developed MIT courseware that includes the syllabi and lecture notes of every course taught at MIT being free and available on the website for everyone. MIT has become a transparent institution and by so doing is capturing a global market share of young people interested in science. What you have to pay for is to come and live in the MIT community. So there is a difference between sharing the MIT experience and reproducing the MIT experience in the next generation. The important point is that in the digital age MIT has become a transparent institution.

Another important development is the changing relationships between the campus and the community. Institutions are providing host servers for non profit community organizations (e.g. MetroNet at The University of Toledo), website guides to information of use to community groups (e.g. Community Connector at The University of Michigan),

action programs to build community connectivity and cyber power (e.g. Prairie Net at The University of Illinois) and programs for skilling youth in Cybertechnology (e.g. Computer Club House at M.I.T.). Academic institutions are becoming agents of change in building bridges over the digital divide.

Another major transformation that has taken place has to do with academic discourse. The academic use of listservs is changing the networks for sharing information that used to be centered around journals and annual professional meetings this now takes place on a daily basis on a global level as virtual discourse. H Net at Michigan State University is a major example of using listservs to create new networks of scholars and academics to share information and raise the level of professional collaboration. They have over 100 lists and their service is provided for free.

The websites associated with each listserv are information hubs for research groups and entire fields of study. Some are associated with professional associations, and all are global in reach and participation.

One of the major revolutionary tools is the wiki. This software is the realization of collective intelligence, an organically growing and self-correcting knowledge production process that for the first time in human history is linking our species in thought in real time. Never before have African Americans been able to represent themselves in the mainstream on equal terms with everyone. Wikipedia is a democratic tool waiting for Black Studies students to join and make history.

Higher education has changed in fundamental ways. There will likely be no turning back. Guiding this change are key reports such as the report from the American Council of Learned Societies' Commission on Cyberinfrastructure for Humanities and Social Sciences prepared under the leadership of John Unsworth (Illinois).

However, the future is not inevitable and predetermined. IT is socially produced and socially applied. How each is done is critical, hence as Black Studies professionals get involved they can impact the future. The current staging area is still fashioning the ground floor of the future. However, this window of opportunity will be short lived.

## IT and Black Studies

The African American experience provides topical areas of research for many academic disciplines. It's often as simple as employing the "race" variable routinely in any analysis. However, Black Studies as a field or discipline is quite different in several respects:

1. it is intentionally based on the trans-disciplinary character of Black intellectual history;
2. it privileges the subjective voice of African Americans;

3. it combines both basic and applied focus of scholarship; and
4. it responds to and seeks legitimacy from the campus and the community.

Given the history of the US, Black Studies has always been a historical demand for knowledge and democracy, but in different ways by each generation.

The current manifestation of Black Studies reflects three stages of development. Senior professors in Black Studies today have gone through these stages both as a historical sequence as well as a model of three simultaneous possibilities on any campus social movement (e.g. social protest), academic profession (e.g. curriculum development and faculty tenure), and knowledge network (using IT in all forms and applications).

The knowledge network stage of Black Studies is emerging based on practical activity accompanied by research and theorizing. Banks calls for a "Black digital ethos," suggesting that a set of beliefs, values and norms are required for this third stage. Alkalimat discusses a model of "eBlack Studies" that sets forth a practical program for the paradigm shift. In very broad terms a school of scholars and artists have identified their theoretical orientation as "Afro futurism." They define their work as imagining if not creating the future usually based on the new technologies. These three concepts represent a focus on style of work, program and mission. Each seems essential for retooling Black studies as a knowledge network. But as we know, history is not a narrative based on straight lives, or "as the crow flies," because history walks on the ground.

## *Survey of Recent Developments*

There have been key pioneers or early adopters of IT exploring applications in Black Studies.

1. Early mapping of cyber space via webliography was carried out by Art McGee and graduate students at Georgia Institute of Technology.

2. Individuals and groups, either as formal organizations or as a Black caucus in mainstream academic organizations, have set up listservs serving diverse disciplines and fields of study such as Sociology, Library Science, Literature, Economics, Anthropology, etc.

In addition, there have been several conferences and a symposium held on IT and the Black Experience. Some of the main ones are the following:

1. 1998, MIT, Race and Cyberspace http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/forums/race.html
2. 1999, University of Toledo, Afro-Cyber Tech Seminar
3. 2001, MIT, Race in Digital Space http://web.mit.edu/cms/Events/race/

4. 2004, University of California at Santa Barbara, Afro Geek Conference, http://research.ucsb.edu/cbs/projects/afrogeeks04.html
5. 2005, University of California at Santa Barbara, Afro Geek Conference http://research.ucsb.edu/cbs/projects/afrogeeks.html

There have also been efforts to archive conferences as digital files on the web. An early example of this placed the audio files of a 1990 conference on Malcolm X on the web. A more recent example is a comprehensive digital archive of 60 hours of video of a 2003 conference in NYC. The online 1990 conference is in sound files contained on a single server. The digital archive of the 2003 conference is distributed over servers in eight different institutions. In these two cases an IT application in Black Studies has been precedent setting for all academic disciplines and fields of study. This demonstrates that the last can be first.

This utilization of IT is also the focus of an emerging research literature.

There are 23 book-length treatments of eBlack, the Black experience and the revolution in information technology. Our focus on information technology cannot be entirely separated from a more general concern for all forms of technology. We need to read technology back into Black intellectual history. These authors and books are not in conscious dialogue yet, in part because the authors are still fighting to break out of limited disciplinary networks. We need a hypertext literature that ignores these inherited limits and boldly moves to create new networks based on methods, empirical and theoretical analysis, strategy and tactics for policy guidelines, and action agendas. These authors are like people in a circle turned away from each other, facing outward, talking to other people, other networks. We need a call for people to turn and face each other, to realize that productive discourse awaits us as a network of researchers in the area of eBlack studies. In general, this will be a necessary dynamic to invigorate and diversify the general field of social informatics.

Each of these 23 books pays attention to a key focus of eBlack studies; each can be thought of as advancing a major thesis on the nature of the eBlack experience. Of course all of the books are broader than this, and consequently overlap to an extent. They also tend to confirm the four theses which form the overall framework of the work being done in this emerging field.

1. The social polarization thesis: Alkalimat et al. (1995), Jennings (1995/1996), Mack (2001) and Green (2001). The basic argument is that the social dynamics of the birth of the information revolution produced a digital divide that was exacerbated by a preexisting social divide.

2. The Afrocentric thesis: Battle & Harris (1996), Jenkins & Om-Ra Set (1997), Eglash (1999), Sobol (2002), Nelson (2002), Alkalimat (2004), Sinclair (2004), and Pursell (2005). The argument is that Black culture is a basis for participating in the information revolution.

3. The anti-racist thesis: Ebo (1998), Kolko et al. (2000), Chinn (2000), Nakamura (2002), and Kevorkian (2006). This argument is that racism in society and cyberspace impacts identity and cultural practices.

4. The cyberpower thesis: Barber & Tait (2001), Nelson et al. (2001), Nuwere & Chanoff (2002), Williams (2003), Alkalimat (2004), and Banks (2006). The argument is that Black people can change physical space and cyberspace by acting virtually.

Each of these theses can be found in empirical research and theoretical formulations. In general, all four aspects link cyberspace-based virtual reality to our actual lived experiential reality. This literature is just emerging, usually in collections of articles, and is tentative and suggestive, exciting and path-breaking.

The four theses outlined above are points of emphasis, and collectively make up the main features of an overall interconnected social process. The social polarization thesis is about the basic conflict in society, the dialectics of haves and have-nots. The Afro centrism thesis is about the importance of culture, the role that tradition, continuity, and community can play in advancing the information revolution from a Black perspective. The anti-racism thesis is a combative thesis that takes on omissions and distortions about Black people and argues the importance of destroying stereotypes. Finally, the cyber-power thesis argues that the key process is the empowerment of social groups and communities to use information technology in the struggle for self-determination and social justice.
Each thesis deserves to be tested on the basis of empirical research. The extent to which Black people use information technology needs to be examined in all four aspects: social polarity, culture, racism, and cyberpower. On the basis of the literature covered in this review we can begin to construct a research framework.

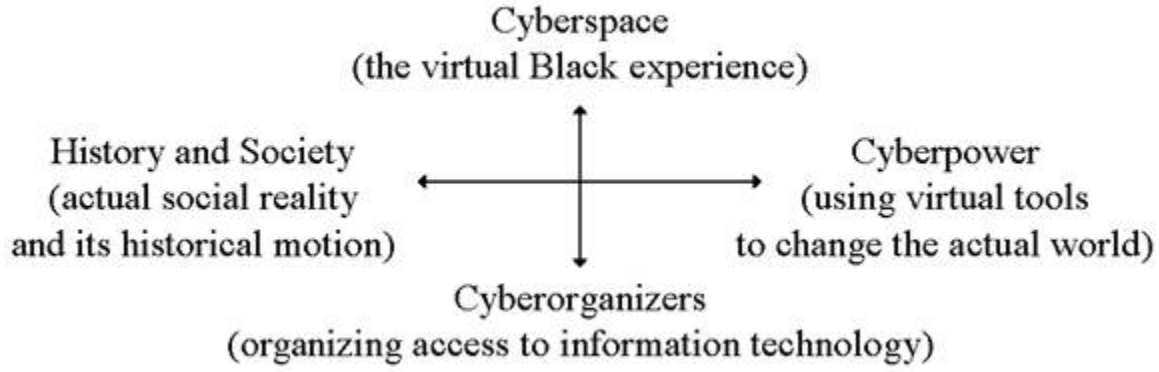



**Figure 1. The sociology of eBlack: a research framework. The process from left to right is capacity building, from right to left, social change.**

Figure 1 presents a research framework for a sociology of eBlack. From left to right cyberpower is theorized to be created by forces in society as mediated by access to and use of information technologies. From right to left social change is theorized to be caused by the use of cyberpower, cyberorganizers using cyber space to impact actual space. Each thesis discusses a critical aspect of this process. The critical research issue is how to create data sets that can accommodate such analysis.

The capacity-building research focus is on the historical logic of how Black people are becoming part of the information society. The dependent variable is cyberpower, a person or group's capacity to act in a virtual environment–to provide digital representations and take digital action, including linking the virtual and the actual. The main independent variable is social origin/background, especially social differences, both objective and subjective. This flow of influence/determination is mediated by access to the tools of information technology and the result and content of digital production.

Social polarities are discussed in terms of inequalities associated with class, color, gender, generation, residence, country, language, religion, and so forth. While an eBlack focus is based on the autonomous existence of a black social reality, all issues of social inequality are relevant.
The social change which this research examines is how Black people use information technology to consolidate identity networks and to mobilize resources to impart their reality–economic, political, social and psychological, and cultural. In general this research examines the impact of virtual reality on actual social situations.

The immediate instrumental goals are the most clear because of convenient empirical measures. Such goals relate to the realms of commerce, and many forms of social life. However, we are also interested in how cyberpower is changing the routines of political culture. This extends to such fundamental issues as the nature of democracy, the need for good connectivity, and digital skills.

This conceptual framework targets key research foci: society in general, the Black community, racism, and social change. This framework has the advantage of constructing a consensual work plan for students of eBlack studies and social informatics in general, as well as providing links to the broader historical literature on the Black experience that forms the backbone of research on that experience. In the end, the current stage of experience will be studied as a comparative historical point of reference. An example of this is Alkalimat (1996) which contrasts the impact of technology on the Black experience by looking at the production of cotton in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in tandem with automobile production in the twentieth century. This kind of analysis will have to be carried out in the twenty-first century, paying attention to comparable categories for analysis that can be sustained as part of studies of different technologies at different periods of time.

There is a classic tension in this literature between descriptive narrative and analytical causal analysis, the telling of stories versus statistical analysis of empirically measured

variables. Both are useful and have a role to play. Alkalimat and Williams (2004) give a model for how to utilize the strengths of both. This is a case study of a community technology center that presents a narrative of its stages of development and then disaggregates the story into key variables and reconfigures the analysis into tables and charts. eBlack studies does not have to reproduce the disciplinary wars in the social sciences and the humanities in which these two approaches have been pitted against each other. This can be a new moment in scholarship at which we reinvent our disciplines and rediscover the magic of the college sophomore year in which we synthesize grand ideas and major research traditions to meet our general education requirements.

The general theoretical propositions that are central to the sociology of eBlack lead us to gather and summarize diverse sets of empirical data. Our concern with capacity building and social change is fundamental. We focus on the four research theses (social polarity, Afrocentricity, racism, and cyberpower) because they constitute the main parameters for studying the Black experience in the information age. They will define whether democracy is possible in the twenty-first-century information society. This literature is an excellent beginning. Future research along these lines will make a contribution to scholarship and policy formulations.

One of the highlights has been the development of research websites. There are a variety of research websites, mainly to both report research analysis as well as to make data available for additional research. These data can be in all forms, from quantitative data bases to a digital collection of documents in text, audio or video format. The advantages of asynchronous universal access in time and cost should elevate the status of a research website to the highest priority for scholarship and training in Black Studies.

The standard for a research site has been set by the digital archive of the US census. As a data set of primary data it enables users to select, manipulate, and design quantitative analysis in a variety of tables and charts, as well as to utilize images to present spatialized graphics of the data as well. Building on this has been a research site developed at Northeastern to create a research website of demographic information about the Atlantic slave trade. In this instance since the data is incomplete. The research is allowed to program assumptions as to who was captured, mortality rates, and other variables, then be able to see what results would emerge. This helps to find high and low expectations and allowing researchers to stick to the facts and have their assumptions kept transparent.

The premier listserv in Black Studies is H-Afro-Am, a listserv set up in 1998 as part of H-Net at Michigan State University. This listserv has about 2,500 readers in countries all over the world. More than any other professional network or organized activity in Black Studies, H-Afro-Am links Black Studies participants (faculty, students, and community).

Some Black Studies programs are employing distance learning web based software. There are very few formal distance learning programs (e.g. there is a non credit course at Columbia and for credit courses at The University of Toledo). The most general use of web based curriculum software is to assist in the normal face to face classroom (e.g.

Temple and Northeastern). Otherwise, faculty at various institutions post syllabi on the web and use HTML hyperlinks to facilitate distribution of required course readings.

Black Studies librarians are key players in IT applications and research. While in the past a library has been primarily a spatially bound resource, except for inter library loan and courtesy fully text photo copying service, the web has enabled libraries to form a global network providing on demand reference information and lots of other content as well. In these ways librarians have been the early adopters of IT in the field of Black Studies. The webliography (mapping web content) has been the most popular activity taking the place of the more traditional bibliography, with key examples at Pittsburgh, Santa Barbara, and Michigan State. Some have sites that report on the history of their institution (Berkeley, Cornell) and some have targeted topics for digital research collections. The outstanding example of a website to bring IT to the field is at Cal State Long Beach. Some Black Studies IT work has been done as part of service to the community and on campus as service learning.

As mentioned earlier eBlack Studies is the major model for the paradigm shift made possible by a holistic embrace of information technology.

| | **Black Studies** | **eBlack Studies** | **The Toledo** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Professional Discourse** | Conference (face to face discussions) | 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 and 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 |

**Figure 2. eBlack as a Practical Project: The Toledo Experience.**

What is not explicitly stated in this graphic is the need to upgrade the skill set of faculty, students and staff as well as to make sure that computer equipment and high speed connectivity is available to everyone.

## *Best Practices*

One way to sum up the current state of IT use in Black Studies is to focus on a list of best practices, key outstanding examples as models for future lines of development. Again, the crisis is that most of these best practices are about the Black experience but not administratively or structurally in Black Studies. There are issues that require us to do

more than issue a call or mandate to emulate these best practices. These issues will be addressed in the proposal section at the end of this report.

These best practices are not an exhaustive list but are representative of excellent applications in key areas of work.

1. Digitization of African history and traditional culture
   Nubia Net
   Northeastern University
   http://www.nubianet.org/home/index.html

2. Digitization of African Diaspora political history
   Global Mappings: A Political Atlas of the Africana Diaspora
   Northwestern University
   http://diaspora.northwestern.edu/

3. Digitization of African American local history
   Race and Place: An African American Community In the Jim Crow South
   University of Virginia
   http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/afam/raceandplace/index.html

4. Digitization of African American ICONS
   The Booker T Washington Papers
   University of Illinois
   http://www.historycooperative.org/btw/

5. Digitization of African American popular culture
   The Hip Hop Archive
   Stanford University
   http://hiphoparchive.stanford.edu/

6. Digitization of African American community life
   Black Peoples Hair
   University of Toledo
   http://www.murchisoncenter.org/cyberhair/

7. Digitization of African American contributions to academic disciplines
   Mathematicians of the African Diaspora
   SUNY at Buffalo
   http://www.math.buffalo.edu/mad/index.html

8. Digitization of class assignments
   Fly Away: Black Migrations, North by South
   Kenyon College
   http://www.northbysouth.kenyon.edu

9. Digitization of research resources
   History of Race in Science
   Harvard University and University of Toronto
   http://www.racesci.org/index.html

10. Digital journal publishing
    The North Star: A Journal of African American Religious History
    University of Kentucky
    http://northstar.as.uky.edu/

## *PhD Programs in Black Studies*

There are at least seven PhD programs in Black Studies. However, there are no faculties large enough to maintain proper supervision of the current cohort of PhD students, hence the PhD in Black Studies is structurally linked to resources of many other disciplines, including the joint appointments of many faculty.

A recent analysis by Rojas (forthcoming) groups these seven departments into two groups based on what journals the faculty published in – Black versus mainstream orientation. This is the polarity of Black Studies as an academic profession. The first stage of social movement was propelled forward on the ideological dialectic of Marxists and Nationalists. In this second stage the theoretical polarity has been an Afro centric versus a post modern paradigm.

The current situation has changed, because ideological difference within Black Studies is no longer the main contradiction. There is a disciplinary crisis because the new dialectic is between offline and online teaching and scholarship. PhD programs have to lead the discipline by preparing generation cohorts to be the chief stewards of Black Studies scholarship as an online activity. This will require a radical rupture with 20$^{th}$ century methods.

The logic of a discipline requires sustainability. The curricular logic of the sustainability needed for Black Studies is a process: faculty teaches undergraduates, then some of these undergrads go to grad school for the PhD in Black Studies, then most of these PhD's get tenure track faculty positions in one of the 400 or so degree granting programs, and then the process is repeated over and over. The discipline we need will guide the field to stabilize. Market success requires innovation, meeting the expectations of others, and accountability. This is why PhD programs must play a leading role in the organized professional life of Black Studies.

The recruitment of candidates for the PhD degree is a key link in the transformation of the discipline. 50% of all new PhD students in the field should be recruited from math and computer science programs at historically Black colleges and universities. Our formula for a successful transformation needs bold, new revolutionary vision.

The key is a collaborative digital platform:

1. Unite everyone in open free cyberspace
2. Share resources
3. Create democratically based meritocracy

The PhD programs in Black Studies are without unity around generational mission. What has yet to be accepted is the power of digital technology and its utility for transforming the academic profession of Black Studies into a knowledge network. There are no specialized courses about IT applications in Black Studies at the PhD level. Intellectual productivity is created as commodification in opposition to a democratic commons where it would be free and shared by all.

There is a need for a distinct methodology for Black Studies. Information technology has enabled us to develop the D-7 method as a model for such a methodological framework.

Figure 3 is a framework for a new methodology that moves Black Studies research into a digital format. This is the D-7 method.

| | |
|---|---|
| D1 | Definition of the problem |
| D2 | Data collection |
| D3 | Digitization of data |
| D4 | Discovery of findings |
| D5 | Design of publications and presentations |
| D6 | Dissemination |
| D7 | Difference made in the world |

**Figure 3. D7 method.**

When data has been digitized as an asynchronous resource it is available to everyone thus opening up a democratic collaborative transformation of the research process.

## *Black Digital Media and a New Public Sphere*

One of the earliest institutions to adopt new IT is the media, especially all forms of electronic digital media. Video is the media of convergence, an art form that embraces all others. Recent new developments have made video production an active part of

public IT use, for example as part of commonly used cell phones—the video as email message. On the other hand, professional video production is emerging as a viable educational force at every stage of life long learning, from the classroom to the living room.

A major vehicle for delivering innovative and Black oriented new media has been all forms of public broadcasting, especially PBS. Moreover, to keep the work of Black videographers in front of the public, the National Black Programming Consortium was formed. They have an impressive track record and an extremely productive and influential network of new media activists.

Professionals in Black Studies have been advisors to most of the major Black content video/film projects. However, we do not have any Black Studies degree programs providing a specialization in this area. Such a project might result from joint film studies/Black studies collaboration at places such as NYU, UCLA, USC or any university where both programs exist.

## Proposals for Action

Based on this overview of the current state of how Black Studies is utilizing information technology it is possible to suggest potential directions for programmatic development. Each of these program areas is a strong candidate for resource allocation and institutional policy legitimation. Every institution faces the challenge of accepting digital scholarship as legitimate and worthy of recognition and academic reward, while either internal or external funding is required to jump start the process. In the end sustainability requires that these activities become part of the normal academic routine with statutory approval and inclusion in an annual recurring base budget (e.g. train, equipment, serve maintenance, and evaluation for hiring, tenure and promotion).

### 1. A National Commission on "Information Technology and Black Studies"

Every part of Black Studies is facing challenges with issues of information technology. However, at present there is to clearinghouse or hub that brings together the entire field of Black Studies. Today unity is possible even necessary to make the paradigm shift based on information technology, from Black to eBlack.

What is needed is a national commission on Information Technology and Black Studies based on the organized leadership of the field. Beginning with ASALH, NCBS, ABCC and H-Afro-Am, participation is required by disciplinary organizations (e.g. ) graduate degree programs (e.g.) and the major journals. Policy positions and reports issued under the aegis of this commission would be compelling legitimation for all scholars and students in Black Studies.

The paradigm shift will take at least one collegiate generation of four years. This commission would have to meet annually, with working session at the annual meetings of ASALH (October), NCBS (march) , and ABCC (November). Further this commission would have to network with other such efforts (e.g. the commission sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies).

**2. Centers of Excellence for "Cybertechnology and the Black Experience"**

The goal of this specific proposal is to provide an institutional base for the transition to a paradigm shift in the field of Black Studies that will incorporate IT into normal activities. The basic work to function as a catalyst for this can usefully be a group of centers focused on "Cybertechnology and the Black experience." Several resources are needed:

1. theoretical visionary leadership to set programmatic goals that can serve the entire field;
2. wide reaching subject specialists to link IT applications to basic issues in the field as well as subject specific specialization;
3. technicians that can write the necessary code and configure the hardware and division of labor for the necessary production facility; and
4. graduate students whose careers can be shaped and values normed by future sustainability.

The selection process to locate these centers should also take into consideration existing campus resources to provide the necessary cost effective synergy (e.g. Centers for digital history, libraries with active digitization programs, super computer centers, etc.). Funding will be necessary in multi-year increments with a nominal start up of four years, necessary to graduate one cohort of graduate students, selected and funded by the centers in relevant degree programs especially graduate degree programs in Black Studies.

The programs of these centers function as production and distribution mechanism. Production is about the digitization of existing material, the creation of first generation digital files, and the general formation of digital files to be easily accessed in cyber space. Distribution is about applications to make this digital material relevant to the teaching, research, and community service activities that constitute the normal program of a Black Studies program.

The centers should serve four constituencies:

1. the center staff and affiliated scholars (faculty and graduate students);
2. faculty and graduate students spread throughout the host institution;
3. scholars throughout the US and world working in Black Studies; and
4. the broader community, especially the local community.

While the initial funding will have to jump start services to each, each constituency is associated with a potential set of funding sources. This is necessary for sustainability.

Key priorities exist based on several important conditions:

1. there is a temporal fragility to existing archives, especially analog audio and digital tapes contained in archives that cover over 40 years of Black studies activities;
2. the vanguard generation of Black Studies has started to enter retirement age and their memory and archives are increasingly insecure;
3. the course syllabi of every new faculty in Black Studies is usually developed without reference to the previous decades of curriculum experience in Black Studies; and
4. journals that have only had short runs are usually only located in a few depositories and have not been routinely included as references in teaching and research.

**3. Programs for training Black Studies faculty and graduate students in applications of Information Technology**

We need a summer workshop designed to train individuals in information technologies that would assist them in their research practices. This would be a research oriented hands-on three week summer workshop.

This sort of experience would not only help increase the skill level of participants, but more important might be their socialization into a network of colleagues who are practicing eBlack Studies.

**4. Pre-conference technology days at major annual meetings**

As with most academic professions, Black Studies is organized around an annual schedule of professional meetings. There are three main national meetings: 1) October: Association for the Study of Afro American Life and History 2) November: Association of Black Cultural Centers and 3) March: The National Council for Black Studies. Each year several thousand scholars and Black Studies professionals gather in face to face meetings. This is an ideal, cost effective context for upgrading the IT skills of a vanguard in Black Studies.

Up to 30 individuals might easily be included in a one day IT workshop that would target key applications (e.g. the H-Afro-Am listserv or key Black Studies research websites) and as a support network help individual participants brainstorm about and have hands on experience applying IT tools to their individual projects. As individuals coming to the conference would only have one day increase in room and board, and a teaching lab might usually be available at minimum if any charge at a local camps, the only additional expense might be honorarium for the expert leaders of the workshop. After a couple of years based on external grant funds this is an activity that can be sustainable based on fees charged for participants. The primary audience for this would be graduate students and new faculty who could use start up funds and local campus funding sources.

**5. Development of virtual curriculum resources**

The main activity of academic work is teaching courses that lead to degrees. In Black Studies there are core topics found in the vast majority of institutions, just as there are specialized courses found only at a few institutions. The use of IT can address both kinds of courses by creating in each case a digital resource for general use.

A web portal can be a very useful cost saving resource for any given course. One might provide the following:

1. alternative syllabi;
2. guides to the most popular texts used;
3. a full and diverse set of supplementary materials (links and full texts);
4. Power Point slides (individual and thematically grouped as Power Point lectures);
5. bibliographical lists;
6. bibliographical links;
7. assignments for student projects;
8. guidelines for service learning projects;
9. teachers' password protected page that can include test questions; and;
10. a related listserv or bulletin board to facilitate a national dialogue.

The quality of a course usually improves based on the experience of the instructor. This kind of web portal would be a key source for new faculty and a key depository for virtual mentoring by senior faculty. While the main aspect of a web based curriculum portal is the long desired goal of curriculum standardization, the capacity of a website can insure unity without conformity.

**6. Development of a virtual Black Studies archive of research**

The topical areas of Black Studies research have been fairly stable but the shelf life of specific projects has often had a short life of visibility to scholars in the field. While research used to last a generation new research falls from view every 4-6 years. Your scholars are all too frequently not aware of the research of a previous generation, and if they are do not have access to data that can be used as the basis for comparison with historical specificity.

A work of research is published, but what it is based on often remains hidden in the personal collection of the author. An online archive is the best way to increase the transparency of research and increase collaboration between peers and across generations. We need findings, but we also need to examine the data on which these findings are based. Only when all data are available will all narratives be possible.

**7. Utilizing digital tools to establish a national/international cooperative research network**

Data collection is costly and time consuming. The proposal calls for creating a collaborative self help mechanism to routinely collect data that can drive research projects and build trend data for secondary analysis. This can be modeled on the annual general social survey carried out by NORC at the University of Chicago.

There are roughly 400 degree programs in Black Studies, in every region of the country. Using faculty and student researches a data collection network can be developed to collect local data. There are many ways this can be accomplished – work study, as part of training in research methods, as potential users of the data, and as volunteers. It is estimated that two to four collections can be carried out on an annual basis.

To implement this, a research committee will need to be set up to coordinate this activity. First, scholars and graduate students can make proposals to the research committee based upon specifications. A manual/handbook would be developed by the researcher as well as local human subjects review approval, and a design for analysis. A national coordinating staff will be needed to maintain a virtual system for training and supervising the local data collection staff on each campus. The data would be digitized and placed on a password protected page for six months and then when possible open for public use, otherwise made available to researchers with appropriate need and qualification.

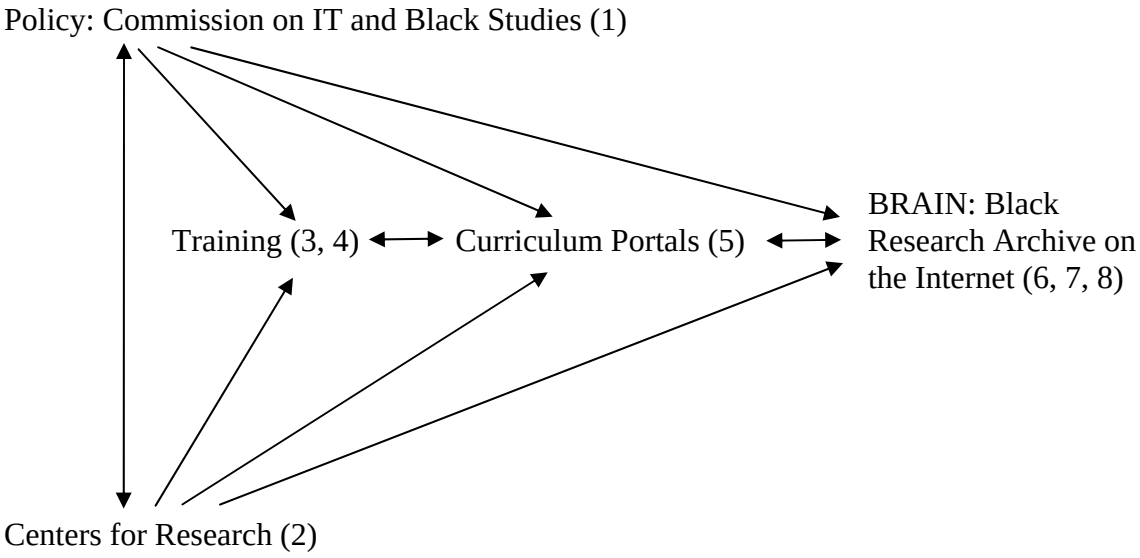
There are several projects to be included to capture the energy being invested in popular research topics: the history of Black Studies, the impact of Katrina, the history of Black power, issues of organization and leadership, and the history of popular culture.

**8. Developing digital tools for community service and service learning**

One of the major linkages necessary to build a bridge over the digital divide is between Black Studies and community technology centers. The biggest list of CTCs is maintained by CTCNet. A key task is building websites with local content, especially if wiki software is used for democratic participation. There is also a great need for local community listservs.

# Appendices

## *Model for Transforming Black Studies to eBlack Studies*




Numbers correspond to proposals for action described on pages 19-23.

## *Proposed Budget for a "Center for Black Studies and Information Technology"*

| **Budget** | |
|---|---|
| 1. Director (50%) | $ 50,000 |
| 2. Digital Specialist | $ 40,000 |
| 3. Administrative Secretary | $ 30,000 |
| 4. Graduate Students (4) | $ 40,000 |
| 5. Program Support | $ 40,000 |
| ***TOTAL:*** | $200,000 |

## *Proposed Schedule for an IT Pre-Conference Day*

8:30 Coffee and introductions

9:00 eBlack Studies: H-Afro-Am, searching strategies, review of template for a research website using Malcolm as example

10:30 Coffee break

10:45 General state of digital Black Studies: use of book (African American Experience in Cyberspace) to explore state of the art, what we have and what we need

12:15 Lunch assigned to eat in thematic groups

1:30 Discussion of how research by participants can use IT

3:45 Tea time

4:00 Summation general wrap up with key reps from NCBS leadership

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