

African American Studies: Vital, Transformative, and Sustainable

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INTRODUCTION

African American Studies is vital to the mission of the academy and transformative for students, educators, and communities. The discipline continues to evolve in the twenty-first century, is proven to be resilient, and should be sustained. The story of African American Studies has always been about finding a place to stand—securing a footing in the academy, finding a clearing (opening) for pedagogy, and being integral to the process of discovering, transmitting, and creating knowledge without the Black focus being assimilated, diluted or commodified by the (typically) White power structure within the academy.

Up to this point, much of the narrative of African American Studies is cast within the politicized frame of Black liberation and self-determination amidst White resistance and strategies that foster second-class citizenship or institutional vulnerability. But at its core, African American Studies is more than freedom as opposition; it is freedom as greater understanding and expression. It not only challenges the academy, but revitalizes it through its systematic enquiries into: (1) African modes of thought and traditions; (2) the international impact of the Diaspora; (3) American culture (past, present, and future); and (4) theoretical perspectives on race (forged experientially from the vantage point of the oppressed).

Maulana Karenga says the “very meaning of Black Studies” is “to speak African people’s special cultural truth and make their own unique contribution to the flow of human history”—not just as a “variant discourse,” but as a specific and unique field of study.¹ Kathleen Cleaver emphasizes

how the original commitment to Black self-determination and liberation resulted in

the push for academic recognition of our history and culture, brought about black studies programs through radical protest actions, promoted the Black Arts movement, insisted upon the values of our heritage, supported African independence struggles, and challenged American racist domination in political, economic and military spheres . . .²

This dynamic—resulting from speaking truth to power—remains and is a necessary ingredient of a vital university.

UNDERSTANDING THE DISCIPLINE'S RANGE

The various names used for the discipline—African American Studies, Black Studies, Africana Studies, Diaspora Studies, Pan-African Studies, African and African American Studies—describe departments or programs within universities that tend to be inter-, cross- or transdisciplinary,³ but share common ground in research, historical perspective, service learning, and community involvement. Over time, several foci have developed in African American Studies in higher education with varying degrees of emphasis on diversity variables of class, gender, sexual orientation, and identity and varying political or cultural orientations. One result of a synthesized, interdisciplinary education like African American Studies is a well-rounded, contextualized scholar who thinks outside the boundaries of a singular discipline, which can be very useful in a complex world.

The development of African American Studies over the past fifty post-civil rights years has been impacted by several factors, including the (usually racially charged) history of the university in question: geographic location; choices made by faculty members within these units, related to philosophical stances and political ideology; and the organizational politics of making resources accessible. These factors have all influenced whether units within universities have flourished or withered.⁴ In some institutions, African American Studies has departmental status, while some units are configured structurally as programs (with or without specific tenure lines for faculty). Some have very high visibility and considerable resources in faculty membership and financial support. Others have moderate

resources. Many struggle with minuscule budgets and mostly part-time faculty members or members borrowed from other departments.⁵

On a theoretical level, there is critical, even fractious dialogue among some Black intellectuals and there are major competing paradigms regarding the proper perspective and content that African American Studies should take. The different voices reflect the energy and potential of the discipline.⁶ Some departments or programs champion certain portions of the vast body of Africana literature and de-emphasize or ignore some of the material favored by other institutions and other intellectuals. Some studies are nationalist, others are pan-nationalist. Some are more contemporary, others more classical. Some focus more on the humanities, while others have more of a focus on the social sciences. Some are faithful to the original notion of Black Studies' ties to liberation and community activism. These various emphases are understandable when there is such comprehensive subject matter to be examined. The *sine qua non* of African American Studies is praxis—an intellectually rigorous human activity, emerging from Black traditions, experience, and culture that consists of “reflection and action” intended to “transform the world.”⁷

To maintain viability and distinctiveness, the discipline needs, as Ronald Bailey puts it, a paradigm of “unity without uniformity”⁸ and a consolidated framework that continues “to make the broad, social transformational contribution that we intended when we stormed the barricades to create the field.”⁹ Jacqueline Bobo, Cynthia Hudley, and Claudine Michel emphasize that African American Studies is fundamentally “expansive” and “inclusive” of many disciplines within the “social sciences, humanities research, and natural and physical sciences”¹⁰ and is the “progeny of centuries of research that seeks to redress long-standing misconceptions of Black inferiority, African heritage, and cultural significance,” but is unified in its purpose as “a socially engaged field of scholarly enquiry.”¹¹ Leadership within the discipline needs to be savvy enough to position African American Studies in as adaptive a fit as possible within a given university, without compromising the subject matter and transformative purpose of African American Studies.¹²

Karenga identifies the classic core areas of the discipline as (1) Black History, (2) Black Religion, (3) Black Social Organization, (4) Black Politics, (5) Black Economics, (6) Black Creative Production (including but not limited to art, music, dance, and literature), and (7) Black Psychology.¹³ Nell Painter notes that in recent years the discipline “has experienced extraordinary intellectual growth over the span of a generation” with

“interdisciplinary work of stunning sophistication” and has grown into a “field that encompasses the histories and cultures of people of the African Diaspora, in particular, and the meaning of race and difference, in general.”¹⁴ Even though every department or program may not be able to provide a comprehensive portfolio of educational foci, the sustainable goal is to build on core content and continue to expand the multidimensional reach of the discipline, according to available human and economic resources within a particular university.¹⁵

FRAMING THE DISCIPLINE’S LEGACY

Robert Harris¹⁶ describes four stages of intellectual development in the academy relating to Africana traditions, experiences of the Diaspora, and African American life. The first two stages pre-date formal African American Studies in predominantly White universities. The stages and approximate dates Harris details are:

1. early Black literary and historical associations in the 1890s through the 1930s, as well as W. E. B. Du Bois’ research program on African American life at Atlanta University;
2. predominantly White political and sociological analyses of Black America from the 1940s into the 1960s;
3. the intellectual manifestations of Black power and Black consciousness within universities (accompanied by the morally persuasive power of the Civil Rights Movement within society as a whole)¹⁷ in the mid-1960s into the mid-1980s; and
4. the process of legitimization and institutionalization of the discipline within the academy in the latter half of the 1980s to the present time (with the discipline becoming more theoretically refined and sophisticated).

In stage one (e.g. Du Bois, Woodson, Frazier) and stage three (e.g. Karenga, Hare, Davis, Asante) Black leaders took charge of the content and application of the discipline and developed scholarship. In stage one, educators in Black colleges and universities were so markedly separate from predominantly White universities that their work was not subject to the same censor and control as it might otherwise have been. Some Black scholarship during this period was supported through White patronage, and modes of thought were influenced by Eurocentric traditions and White cultural

productions and authorship, but a significant amount of Black historical research and field studies was mostly ignored or dismissed as inconsequential by those outside of Black intellectual life who might otherwise resist and dismantle the efforts. In contrast, in stage three, Black educators initiated the change process in the academy and did so with much controversy and determination to present educational content that originated from and was meaningful to Black culture and experiences. White respondents and power-mongers (including corporate, political, and academic leaders) often strongly resisted the development of African American Studies within “their” universities and the clash of driving and restraining forces was dramatic. In stage three, Black scholar-activists pushed their way into the academy against the odds and in the face of great resistance, and the formal discipline of Black Studies—the term generally used at the time—was formed within a few predominantly White universities.

Stage two is not seminal to African American Studies as we conceptualize the discipline today, but it was dramatically influential in how academics in predominantly White universities approach the discipline. Widely disseminated information about African American experiences was produced by White academics operating from, as Harris puts it, a “Eurocentric focus” that “excluded people of African ancestry or studies them through a European filter.”¹⁸ In the final analysis, in stage two, Black culture and life were seen by many of these White scholars as problems created by racism and conditions of oppression and needing to be managed by White elites; or as culturally pathological and/or intellectually inferior; or as phenomena “over there,” to be studied and improved upon by the wit and largesse of White progressives. Black scholars during this era were marginalized, to say the least. During this era, the intellectual thrust of the White academics, at its best, created pathos and at worst reinforced an image of Black people as a helpless, hopeless, hapless group and ignored Black scholarship and excellence. The unfortunate legacy today is that some White academics are still busy studying and making scholarly commentary on Black experience from either the allegedly “helpful” posture of the Left or the typically “hostile” posture of the Right.

Today, in stage four, personnel in leadership positions in predominantly White institutions still at times try to restrain the advancement of African American Studies as a central part of the organizational life of the academy. White academics (and some Black academics) also sometimes act to alter the achievements that were fought for and realized in stage three and beyond. The result is that Black scholars with a commitment

to African American Studies must try to balance building the discipline's knowledge-base, community involvement, and research agendas while surviving organizationally as intact units within the academy. Just as in stage two, White educators still try to dominate the intellectual life of the university.¹⁹ Even so, Black leadership now is often strong enough and African American Studies is legitimized enough to create its own driving force within the academy, but it is not easy and in most cases the structural inequities that are embedded in the university system prevail.

Unfortunately, the tangled legacy of racism still exists in the academy in the twenty-first century. Old, out-of-date, embedded messages still sometimes crop up when the subject matter is African American Studies as if it was still 1910 or 1960 (e.g., the scholarship is unimportant and should be ignored; the intellectual products are inferior; the advocates of these studies are troublemakers and always complain of inequities; "they" (i.e., Black spokespersons) are trying to take over; the instructors of African American Studies need to be vetted by faculty from traditional disciplines (i.e., generally White faculty) to ensure their credentials are up to standard and their presence on campus is not merely the result of affirmative action, etc.). Even so, there is a sufficient legacy of resilience and accomplishment and a destiny of promise from within African American Studies to suggest that White, Black, and other under-represented racial and ethnic groups in the academy can build the future university together on equal terms. To move forward, however, the old problems of White domination and negative stereotypes about Black scholarship need to be eradicated and more emphasis placed on solutions, parity, and solidarity as a community of scholars that finds its strength in diversity.

FACING STRUCTURAL INEQUITIES

Structural inequities that need to be addressed in the academy include but are not limited to: (1) a scant focus on African American Studies faculty and Black faculty in general regarding hiring, retention, promotion, and positioning with powerful roles within the university; (2) disregard or marginalization of the subject matter; (3) disparities in funding African American Studies compared to other disciplines; and (4) overview and control of processes and initiatives in African American Studies by uninformed or peripherally involved White faculty via committee structures external to the unit. Most of the structural inequities are so embedded

in the academy that they go unnoticed by many White faculty (cf. Peggy McIntosh's concept of White privilege and "obliviousness"²⁰) while being blatantly obvious to most Black faculty. Following are a few more details regarding these structural inequities.

On Faculty

Many students pass through predominantly White institutions without ever having a Black instructor. This is a serious social problem and one where African American Studies, if properly endorsed by the leadership of the university, can provide assistance. On the surface, hiring practices at universities appear inclusive of all races, but in practice Black applicants for tenure-track positions can be included in the first pool of qualified applicants, only to be systematically removed from the applicant interview process as the hiring cycle unfolds. Black instructors throughout the nation struggle for full inclusion in the academy as tenured faculty; tenure protects academic freedom and increases rights to participate in faculty governance (e.g., voting on new hires and other people's tenure, developing curricula, and being promoted to leadership roles). African American Studies represents a core group of scholars who should be a key part of the academy's development of Black human resources. There needs to be a critical mass of Black faculty to help attract other Black scholars to the campus.

On Subject Matter

Studying race relations and Black culture is sometimes critiqued by White academic colleagues as "ghetto" scholarship and results in a sense of workplace dissatisfaction when a person's research interests are devalued or treated as unimportant or less worthy of the academy. Black faculty routinely are faced with decisions on whether or not to leave an institution based on some of the hidden, racially biased, informal rules and negative judgments in departments and colleges and an unsupportive work environment. In the classroom, African American Studies is unevenly criticized by faculty members of other disciplines as not rigorous enough, partly because of its inter- or transdisciplinary approach, but mostly as a way of intimating that the subject is not serious enough or pertinent. This all too common inequity rests squarely on the shoulders of worn-out racial bias and provincial disciplinary reactions.

On Funding

Under-funded programs and budgetary restraints for African American Studies are more often the rule than the exception. Many chairpersons and faculty members do not find the university is truly supportive of their initiatives because their funding does not match that of other units. This manifests in too few faculty lines; less than preferred classroom sites; many times, “soft” (i.e., temporary) money is used to fund programs, program development, and faculty positions rather than “hard” money dedicated over the long term to the discipline.

On Overview and Control

Faculty governance within departments over disciplinary content is almost sacrosanct in the academy. To be sure, there are hierarchical management controls at the college and university level, but at the department level there is an understanding that faculty will exercise academic freedom and accept responsibility for their research and teaching. In contrast, on too many campuses, there remains an oversight mentality from inter-departmental reviews or committees as African American Studies develops its curricula and selects its instructors. Faculty members in traditional departments (history, sociology, fine arts, literature, etc.) often think they “own” certain subject matter (even if they do not emphasize or even include Black scholarship in their disciplines); and if they see African American Studies instructors successfully teaching content, which they then determine should be “theirs,” they will try to co-opt it and insist they are “qualified” to teach it even when not culturally competent to do so. Similarly, when research, travel abroad, and teacher or student exchanges involve Africa, or countries heavily impacted by the Diaspora, or African American life, African American Studies faculty members are often not recognized as the obvious principal participants and expert voices in these matters.

These brief references to some of the inequities in the academy are not new. They have been brought up in university after university for decades. The issues generally are framed in terms of a demand for accountability and such moral notes are still legitimate; but the cacophony in the academy in reaction to yesterday’s insistence on fairness, inclusion, and parity should not drown out what must be heard today. A deontological ethic (based on what is right) may not have been as persuasive in the past as it needed to be, but a teleological ethic based on consequences might result in greater

recognition of the importance of African American Studies. White elitism, domination, and privilege will not continue to work in the real world. If the academy wants to be relevant, it must provide an example and leadership in broadening worldviews—including pride and more support for all levels of Black scholarship (as well as other racial and ethnic populations).²¹

Formally, if or when the academy finally decides to buttress African American Studies, this decision will translate into:

1. an increased number of tenured lines and departmental or program visibility on campus;
2. more financial support for programs and departments (e.g., faculty awards with honors; more fellowships, grant priorities, foundational and philanthropic support);
3. movement from program status to department status, with the increased autonomy that comes with that status;
4. expansion from undergraduate studies to master and doctoral programs, with research assistant support for graduate students; and greater locus of control coming from Black scholars, with cooperation from White academic allies who have an investment in African American Studies as a discipline rather than vested personal interests in their own projects (e.g., research in Africa or places of the African Diaspora).

Informally, structural inequities will be known to have decreased when there are no more reminders of the demonizing policing orientation of the past with White academics acting superior in reference to the discipline; the White pecking order on everyday matters throughout the academy is eradicated; and good things in African American Studies stay with the program or department (e.g., a popular dance class, a grant opportunity in an African setting, a campus-wide colloquium on race, creation of a community project, etc.) and are not seen as fair game to be commodified.

DEVELOPING INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

Black intellectual capital is an important resource to be explored and developed. African American Studies rescues, reconstructs, and revitalizes vital truths of Black heritage and provides a much-needed revelatory perspective on contemporary experience at a national and international level. In so doing, it provides a clearer, more encompassing view, not only of Black

culture and life, but of humanity as a whole. On one level, the discipline provides an academic antidote to counteract the bias and dominant narratives of White Supremacy and the Eurocentric inclinations that are so infused within the academy; but, just as sunlight is a good disinfectant, even more so it is necessary for life and growth. Thus, as an important part of any vital university system, African American Studies should be encouraged by power-brokers within the system to fulfill a key role in developing and investing in the intellectual capital of Black scholarship, thereby helping the academy thrive as it fulfills its true mission to be an expansive, universal community of scholars.

Three key themes regarding intellectual capital in African American Studies are: (1) the intellectual investment in students of all races and ethnicities that occurs; (2) the establishment of a socially elevated setting for Black intelligentsia; and (3) the kind of intellectual product that is often created.

On Investment in Students

Paulo Freire's message to educators²² is to invest in learners' potential and to draw on students' collective knowledge and experiences. This is at the heart of African American Studies, particularly when the focus is on contemporary experience in African American life, or is on race relations in the United States. Freire sees effective pedagogy as different from depositing large sums of elitist knowledge into a poor learner's bank, with educators feeling good about themselves for their patriarchal munificence. Progressive instructors know that students need to be encouraged, inspired, and challenged by the content in the classroom and that the subject matter is meaningful to their life experiences.

The educator's legitimate domain is knowledge drawn from research and theory—and to some degree his or her subjective, lived experience. Effective pedagogy includes a scholarly presentation of facts and reality checks; descriptions of the subject matter in ways that students can appreciate and learn from the process; articulation of useful analytic keys for students to apply in real-world settings; and methods that facilitate students' deeper self-understanding. However, in addition to the academic content to be explored in the classroom, education must also “begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students.”²³ In African American studies, the “contradiction” that Freire references can be complicated further by the racial dynamic between the teacher and

students. If the instructor is White and the students are Black (or from other under-represented racial groups), the dynamic is different compared with if the instructor is Black. All the other possible variants impact how the “contradiction” can be resolved too: if the instructor is African (Black or White), if the instructor is Hispanic, Asian, bi- or multiracial, gay or lesbian, traditional or alternative in lifestyle, is strongly identified with a religious group, has an accent that is different from that of the students, is interracially married with some experiential knowledge of African American life, has working knowledge of African countries by virtue of having lived, worked or researched on the continent, or is Black and from a colonized country or from a European colonizing country.

When the professor is Black and teaching Black students, those students may have a deep, tacit knowledge by acquaintance of the material under discussion, while students of other racial and ethnic backgrounds may resist the expertise of the instructor and wonder if the Black students are being unfairly advantaged. In a multiracial classroom, there will be students who do not have an immediate or tacit knowledge of the Black experience but have *parallel knowledge* of Black life and culture or *obscured knowledge* of race relations, based on their own lived experiences and (perhaps) racial privilege within society as a whole. In following Freire’s approach, this means the Black instructor must be able to learn from every student without letting dominant White modes of thought or privilege prevail and then must help students move forward in their understanding of race, oppression, and privilege in a transformative way. This is not easy, but is part of the everyday challenge of teaching African American Studies.

In a multiracial classroom, something relatively intangible but recognizably valuable transpires when Black instructors invest in their students. That “something” is more than just helping students work through issues of privilege and bias on a cognitive level. Since there are so few Black faculty members in the academy, the Black African American Studies instructor may be the first and only Black teacher that students in predominantly White universities experience. The influence of that student-teacher relationship can be life-altering. The positive impact of a Black instructor discussing race and Black culture and life in a constructive and knowledgeable format is very valuable to the overall educational experience. Students of all races are likely to be socially influenced by the instructor’s referent power and find points of psychological identification with their teacher, not to mention the value of recognizing a Black instructor’s legitimacy and expertise as a member of the academy.²⁴

The best teachers stimulate a student's intellectual curiosity by thorough and scholarly attention to the subject matter under discussion from a Black perspective. For many students, steeped in Eurocentric perspectives and believing that their perspective is a universal, all-encompassing point of view, the result can be liberating intellectually. African American Studies helps students think about who they are—their meaning, significance, place, and agency in the world. It is then that students are better equipped to move from reflection to action to make the world a better place.

Two typical classroom results from this approach to investing in students are improved critical thinking and emotional reasoning. Since the classroom is not a therapy setting, better critical thinking is probably a more recognizable objective for an instructor than enhanced emotional reasoning, but both are desirable.

In African American Studies, critical thinking:

- puts to use new data and observations about Africa, the Diaspora, and African American life;
- promotes a higher order of reflection, based on conceptual models within the field while examining Eurocentric assumptions;
- broadens points of view historically and contextually so that the predominant White accounts are not privileged;
- promotes insights about other racial groups and cultures;
- challenges media representations and stereotypes that shape race-based messages;
- helps reverse internalized prejudices and examines group norms, beliefs, and identities with a judicious eye; and
- reduces the tendency to be culture-bound (i.e., placing one's own group above others').

Improved emotional reasoning may be even more valuable than critical thinking for the majority of students in African American Studies. Talking about race stirs emotions, and concentrated studies on Black experience at least bring the subject from a suppressed and naïve consciousness to some level of externalized narrative. More than this can occur on an emotional level if instructors continue to nurture students' self-awareness and expand their worldview. Enhanced emotional reasoning can be measured when there is:

- a heightened awareness of one's emotional reactions and their effects when talking (e.g., about race, privilege, oppression, identity);

- a greater sense of self-control when negative emotions and impulses are triggered if someone in class is disagreeing or disagreeable;
- the ability to be more flexible and adaptive when new information is presented, some of which in African American Studies may genuinely shake basic presuppositions (e.g., about culture, history, politics, gender, poverty, etc.);
- clear evidence of having empathy and being able to sense others' feelings and perspectives in a respectful way, but not acquiescing to White dominant views or being tolerant of intolerance;
- motivation to do something constructive, based on what has been learned (whether locally or globally);
- a sense of classroom synergy as students develop a feeling of being together, irrespective of their differences; and
- some adeptness in constructive persuasion as students become more knowledgeable and articulate in their understanding of the discipline.

On the Vital Role of a Black Intelligentsia

If all that African American Studies accomplished for Black faculty is a political sanctuary and a niche to have collegial relationships with other Black faculty, it would be worth it for the university. African American Studies departments and programs provide more than this, however. And there is important work to be done. Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua emphasizes that African American Studies is an "intellectual and artistic socioeducational project" with a "dual purpose": "(1) to recover subjugated knowledge, that is, to reconstruct research and instruction on the Black experience; and (2) to rewrite the historic relationship between the campus and the Black community."²⁵ Marable cogently defines the intellectual work of African American Studies as descriptive, corrective, and prescriptive.²⁶

African American Studies endeavors to make a difference to how Black people are understood and gain from the collective wisdom and genius of generations of scholars whose work otherwise is lost, ignored or forgotten. Karenga argues that if we allow just "the progressive Europeanization of human consciousness" without any other worldviews in the marketplace of ideas, then

at least three things occur: (1) the progressive loss of historical memory [e.g., of the people of the African Diaspora]; (2) the progressive disappreciation of themselves and their culture; and (3)

the progressive adoption of a Eurocentric mode of assessment of self, society and the world, inducing cognitive distortion and deprivation and the destruction of the human richness we find in human diversity.²⁷

The sad fact is that, even in the twenty-first century, many Americans do not equate intelligence with being Black. Yet Black intellectuals know that their work is undertaken not to prove that they are smart, but to “focus on contradictions in society, especially those of race, class, and gender, looking again not only for what is present and distorted in the discourse but also for what is absent and undiscussed, not only for codified ignorance but also for canonized illusion.”²⁸ In prophetic form, Cornel West indicates that the future of a Black intelligentsia will be in “regimes of truth” that are “inseparable from the emergence of new cultural forms that prefigure (and point toward) a post- (not anti-) Western civilization.”²⁹

Because of the clash of Eurocentric and Afrocentric worldviews and centuries-long diminution of not only Black contributions to civilization, but Black capacity to contribute, the intellectual project of African American Studies is necessarily political. From Du Bois on,³⁰ the discipline has coupled information with transformation. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. is not a strong advocate of an activist agenda within the university, but he too asserts that the “tools of black studies scholarship could not be narrowly confined to the traditional apolitical approaches set by Euro-American intellectuals.”³¹ The historical roots of the discipline feed on the relationship of academic knowledge and social power, and, as Joy James states, the “future of black studies is tied to past and present political battles.” James emphasizes that these battles should not be conceptualized as “political performances” within a sterile academic environment, but as intellectual work that addresses “critical issues for the future of black studies seeking political communities outside of academic carceral.”³² Just as pedagogy in the classroom is geared to be transformative for students, the writings of Black scholars in the discipline are inclined toward transformation within communities.

On the Intellectual Product

There is no one way to conduct research in African American Studies, but there is a tradition that derives from an investment in the community (and now, more often, the broader international community of people of African descent) and the need for action.³³ Points to consider here include:

1. In James B. Stewart's words, "reservations about excessive commitment to quantification at the expense of conceptual clarity."³⁴ Numbers require context.
2. Rather than a collection of facts, there is an interest in the hermeneutical function of the facts—i.e., what the meaning and impact of the facts are for real people.
3. There is an attempt "to be careful of the fragmentation of knowledge" as Ronald Bailey describes it, because of the more effective and powerful method of bringing multiple levels of "knowledge creation in creating a better world."³⁵
4. A "high valence" is "placed on artistic and humanistic modes of understanding"³⁶ because the emphasis is on people's lives and experiences, and the narrower confines of positivistic science can be reductionistic and miss the human narrative.
5. As Cha-Jua indicates, the intellectual product provides "relevant research for community activists and progressive politicians"³⁷ to support their efforts to confront everyday struggles in Black communities.

This unfettered, yet focused approach to scholarship is one of the reasons why African American Studies is presently pushing forward to include many new areas related to Africa and the Diaspora, the social sciences, contemporary culture, gender, sexual orientation, institutional and societal problems, theories and practice, policy and service delivery, and the study of African languages, to name only a few.

HONORING A TRANSGRESSIVE³⁸ IMPULSE

The question of "transgressing" is crucial to understanding the discipline's past and future. To what degree should African American Studies be militant, rebellious, stand firm, and press against White domination and elitism? As previously intimated, the academy did not welcome African American Studies in its infancy in the 1960s. Activists had to storm the gates of the ivory tower. In fact, if Black scholars and activists had not breached the boundaries of propriety and dominion set by White academics, it is very likely that the discipline would not exist in its present institutionalized form. As it is, African American Studies continues to fight for its integrity as a discipline in its own right; to challenge external efforts to turn the subject matter into "Black-lite" courses; to contend with empty

promises to infuse other established disciplines in the university with Black intellectual contributions (realizing that this is not often done in any measurable, knowledgeable or sustained way); and to see faculty co-opted and courses poached by other departments once it is discovered that the subject matter attracts students. Often, the academy has resisted African American Studies, minimized its role through lack of funding; dissolved programs by acting as if other traditional departments will include Black content; or tried to reconstitute African American Studies as a minor area of ethnic studies to be examined from a Eurocentric perspective; or simply eliminated it.

Reflecting on her experiences as a Black intellectual in the academy, hooks describes the situation accurately when she maintains that “the university is basically a politically conservative framework which often inhibits the production of diverse perspectives.”³⁹ While many pundits today conclude that the academy nurtures progressive indulgences, many administrators and teachers in African American Studies know that, in matters related to race relations and Black life and culture, there can be a “major backlash” in the academy “that seeks to delegitimize progressive pedagogy” from either the Left or the Right; indeed, there seems to be a tacit recognition by many in positions of university leadership, in hooks’ words, that “the focus on difference has the potential to revolutionize the classroom” and many academics who resist change or educational reform “do not want the revolution to take place.”⁴⁰

Another theme that hooks develops concerns being at “home” in the academy. She argues that the very meaning of the term changes if the university system is functioning with a colonial mindset. “Within complex and ever shifting realms of power relations, do we position ourselves on the side of colonizing mentality? Or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed?”⁴¹ hooks adds that the “experience of decolonialization, of radicalization” means that at times home is “nowhere” and the transgressive rebel will have to come to terms with “extreme estrangement and alienation” and will need to confront and accept “dispersal and fragmentation as part of the construction of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become . . .”⁴² Faculty in African American Studies need to take hooks’ analysis seriously and make sure that our “home” in the university is not only somewhere, but somewhere we want to be, because she is right—it would be better to be on the margins and dispersed than on the side of White domination, ignoring the serious problems of racial supremacy in the academy and society.⁴³

However, it seems in many cases now that our challenge as programs and departments of African American Studies is to make ourselves at home within the academy, without abandoning our commitment to free expression, without forgetting our past, with an allegiance to oppressed populations, and with responsibilities to the communities. As a discipline that is already established within the academy, we must assert “homeowner rights” and “homeowner responsibilities” for the way we want our discipline to function. Some departments and programs are relatively secure, while others experience great instability. For programs that are struggling, protests for inclusion are needed. For programs that are more ensconced in a particular university, the protests can be directed more toward protection of the subject matter and promotion of the discipline’s agendas and modes of thought and to provide more solidarity to colleagues whose programs and departments are in jeopardy. Colonizers create circumstances that call for revolutions; once progress is made, as it has been with African American Studies, transgressive rebels need to secure their place (“home” in hooks’ sense) and then continue to advance. The goal is an inclusive university and a constructive department.

Bailey suggests that there have been three stages of development for Black Studies since the 1960s: (1) *innovation*—a time of social disruption and activism embraced by scholars within the discipline; (2) *experimentation*—a period of disciplinary differences and ideological demarcation; and (3) *professionalization*—a mild-mannered, go-along-to-get-along shift motivated by self-preservation in the academy, with an inclination to perpetuate the status quo rather than fulfill its historical mission of social transformation.⁴⁴

In keeping faith with the transgressive image, the stage of “professionalization” that Bailey describes needs to be reframed in those settings where the tasks of resistance have been compromised for ease of survival. The discipline has already established a sustainable place in the academy, but only if we continue to push for an indispensable and integral (not assimilated) Black presence and worldview within the university system (i.e., “innovation”) and continue to develop frontiers of knowledge about Black culture and life (i.e., “experimentation”). We have no interest or need to “assimilate to succeed” or become “honorary Whites.”⁴⁵ In fact, self-preservation is best served by continued institutional transformation, strategic social disruption, and more demarcation and expansion of the discipline’s boundaries. The transgressive impulse of African American Studies needs to be sustained in the twenty-first century—not to be mired

in discontent, but to stimulate change within the academy, to nurture growth of the discipline, and to serve better the Black community and oppressed populations anywhere. As Karenga puts it, “Our defense lies essentially in our development.”⁴⁶

Honoring the transgressive impulse today means we:

- *resist* commodification of Blackness, whenever White intellectuals try to function as owners, interpreters or overseers of Black ideas and images;
- *reject* the role of servant or hired-hand in the academy and assert ourselves in positions of power (intellectual and leadership roles, rather than being limited to administrative assistants, human resources, or service-oriented capacities);
- *erase* old, colonial, racist images through continuous, multi-dimensional, interesting, free expressions of Black culture and life;
- *affirm* our presence on campus as our home to be invested in and preserved, collectively and collaboratively, and through our physicality and bodily presence; and
- *transform* structures within the academy that perpetuate White domination and do so in a way that moves beyond complaint to reconstruction.⁴⁷

VALUING TRANSCENDENT EDUCATION

The irony of the aforementioned descriptions of structural inequities, protests, and struggles within the academy is that African American Studies is, by its very nature, incredibly valuable to the academy. If all that African American Studies did was bring scholarly attention to an entire continent and the impact on the world as people moved and were removed from Africa, it would be worth the effort. If all the discipline offered was a deeper understanding of race in a country limited in its greatness by the seminal problem of racism, it would make a priceless contribution to the university and society as a whole. If all that was achieved was the creation of a vital connection between the campus and Black communities, the financial commitment of the university to the discipline would pay off in terms of the university fulfilling its mission to contribute to social well-being, commerce, and the development of human potential. If all that happened was an enhanced and integrated focus on Black culture, arts, humanities, philosophy, religion, and other creative productions, African American Studies would easily match the inherent value of many programs and

departments across campus. If all that African American Studies could offer to the university was a place to encourage and to engage Black faculty and where Black students could experience a profound sense of being welcome and belonging on predominantly White campuses, the money supporting the initiative would be more wisely spent than many other initiatives to recruit and retain Black faculty and students.

There is a transcendent (surpassing, more than exceptional) dimension of education in African American Studies that may go unnoticed by external observers. Transcendence can be described in several concrete ways. The discipline (1) transcends the racial divide in the classroom; (2) transcends elitism through commitment to oppressed populations; and (3) is transcendent in terms of being guided by moral prerogatives.

On Transcending the Racial Divide

African American Studies crosses the color line by design. Although the study is focused on Black people around the world, students of all races come together in African American Studies classes, and though it is generally the case that Black faculty are the most likely teachers, faculty of various races and backgrounds do teach in the discipline. On predominantly White campuses, multiracial interchanges in the classroom often turn out to be consciousness-raising experiences for the participants just by virtue of being there in a setting with subject matter that is not White first and Black second or even invisible. As Painter says, “black studies offers the most hospitable setting for the pursuit of racial issues” partly because “most teaching about American history and culture still ignores racial themes,” whereas academics in African American Studies are teaching from “a scholarship of struggle,” with an intellectual mission “to correct erroneous and pernicious notions about African Americans” and Black populations in general.⁴⁸

Marable says it is time to “redefine America” in a transformative way⁴⁹ and the classroom can be a microcosm where this change is generated. Marable uses the phrases “radical democratic multiculturalism” and “a transformationist cultural critique”⁵⁰ to describe a multiracial movement that is not bent on assimilation, or accommodation of privileged interests and values, or self-segregation, but is based on “collective efforts of Black people . . . to transform the existing power relationships and the racist institutions of the state, the economy and society.”⁵¹ Our contention is that the classroom can sow the seeds for this multiracial, transcendent

objective. The emphasis on race modeled in African American Studies is meant to stimulate solidarity with oppressed people and promote social change. From this stance, by its very makeup, it demands egalitarian ideology rather than privileged perspective. It is not just a place to air various interests and compare ethnic styles and values, is not simply a venue to claim a cultural identity, and is not just an environment where various racial groups gather. It aims “to rethink the entire history of this country, redefining its heritage in order to lay claim to its future.”⁵²

On Commitment to Oppressed Populations

In a 1963 freedom rally, Martin Luther King, Jr. articulated a vision of brotherhood and sisterhood that resonates to this day in African American Studies, captured in the famous quote: “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”⁵³ A sense of unity with the oppressed keeps African American Studies on target with its mission to vulnerable people in communities that exist outside of the relatively safe confines of the campus.

An academic-only approach to injustice and oppression is rightly criticized by activists who sense that “elitist” university accounts of “non-elite Black life” pale into insignificance when the problems on the street and behind the scenes are so intense, desperate, and multilayered (e.g., a growing penal industry with prisons full of poor people and over-represented by African Americans and other people of color with harsh sentences; immigration detention centers with insufficient protection of human rights; toxic waste sites near neighborhoods of color; workfare that keeps wages so low that social and health problems are guaranteed; the difficult circumstances and vulnerabilities of poor women, or youth without a sense of promise, or the pervasive discrimination levied against gay and lesbian people).⁵⁴

The challenge built into the *raison d'être* of African American Studies is to insist that academic theorizing remains tied to the realities of Black lived experience and the struggles of all who are oppressed, and that students are inspired to be activists. Community-based projects connected to the campus through internships and service-learning classes provide an immediate interface between students and real-life situations. The impact on learning is transcendent. With effective teaching in the classroom, the activity in the community will be hands-on and mind-alert, with students better prepared both to question the power that dominates and controls oppressed people and to improve the environments that prolong their suffering.

On Moral Prerogatives

Marable writes that “Black Studies must project itself not just as an interpretation of reality, but as a projection of what should be and must become.”⁵⁵ Students should not be reduced to consumers of an educational product, particularly not in African American Studies, where a moral mission undergirds the knowledge being pursued. Karenga describes one desired outcome of African American Studies to be a “mutual commitment to an ethics of sharing: shared status, shared knowledge, shared space, shared wealth, shared power, and shared responsibility for conceiving and building the world we want to live in.”⁵⁶

It would be unrealistic to think that every student who reads of colonial exploitation through the slave trade and of sacrifices made during the African American freedom movement, or is inspired by the ethical courage of Harriet Tubman and Malcolm X in the face of grave danger or by the deep understanding of womanhood from the spiritual encouragement of Mary McLeod Bethune or the righteous defiance of Angela Davis, or catches a glimpse of the moral bearing and perseverance of Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois, or is moved by the poetic grasp of human pathos from James Baldwin or Maya Angelou, will fully embrace the moral prerogative of liberation so interwoven through African American Studies; but exposure to these and other great moral and intellectual leaders in the discipline should help to develop that more magnificent outlook. Then, that transcendent benefit of education becomes more a gift to be passed on than a commodity to be consumed.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

A strengths-based analysis of African American Studies suggests that the twenty-first century will be a promising time for sustainable growth of the discipline. That growth is likely to be based on the extensive intellectual development regarding Black experience at home and around the world in so many areas where the possibilities of scholarship are limitless and interdisciplinary; and hopefully the growth will manifest itself in a renewed commitment to an activist impulse for social justice, lest the discipline become more and more cerebral with less and less heart.

It is not surprising that African American Studies has struggled to gain support in the academy despite its salient and transformative dimensions.

Even though the academy is one of the best institutions in society, universities are still part of the greater social order which has been marred by racial inequality, domination, and privilege. This is the reality of American life, but the fight is not over and there is great potential for positive developments in universities across the nation. In a speech in which Martin Luther King, Jr. was celebrating the 1954 US Supreme Court decision to allow Black people voters' rights but many states were defiantly opposing the ruling, King set the tone for a solution to this profound human rights issue which applies to our lesser battles to advance and to sustain African American Studies within the academy:

We must respond to every decision with an understanding of those who have opposed us . . . We must act in such a way to make possible a coming together . . . on the basis of real harmony of interest and understanding. We must seek an integration based on mutual respect. I conclude by saying that each of us must keep faith in the future.⁵⁸

NOTES

1. Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*, 3rd edn. (Los Angeles, CA: University of Sankore Press, 2002), 27–8.
2. Kathleen Nell Cleaver, “And the Beat Goes On: Challenges Facing Black Intellectuals,” in Manning Marable, ed., *The New Black Renaissance: The Souls Anthology of Critical African-American Studies* (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 288.
3. Karenga describes “intradisciplinary foci” recognized as “separate disciplines when they are outside the discipline of Black Studies. But inside the discipline, they become and are essentially subject areas or fields which contribute to a holistic picture and approach to the Black experience. Moreover, the qualifier Black, attached to each area in an explicit or implicit way, suggests a more specialized and delimited focus which of necessity transforms a broad discipline into a particular field” (*Introduction to Black Studies*, 28). Stewart notes that the “multi-disciplinary or interdisciplinary status” can also be “only loosely connected collections of studies performed by specialists in different disciplines” (94) and encourages “Africana Studies proponents” to “endorse a unified social-science approach that synthesizes perspectives from various disciplines to identify as many factors as is feasible that affect a particular phenomenon and decipher how these various influences interact” (83). See James B. Stewart, “Social Science and Systematic Inquiry in Africana Studies,” in J. Conyers, Jr., ed., *Afrocentric Traditions: Africana Studies*, Vol. I (London: Transaction Publishers, 2005).

4. The programs and departments referred to in this chapter are on predominantly White campuses throughout the country.
5. Kendra Hamilton comments that a focus on “high profile African American studies departments . . . and their ‘stars’ . . . offers a pretty distorted picture of what’s happening ‘on the ground’ in the field,” and that while “departmental status represents the pinnacle of academic success . . . it’s also a fact that African American studies remains a discipline dominated by programs” often “trying to offer full course coverage with what’s essentially part-time faculty.” See “Under the Media’s Radar,” *Black Issues in Higher Education* (October 9, 2003), 32.
6. Marable writes: “The scholarship of African American studies must reflect the full diversity and conflict of theoretical perspectives that currently exist. No voices should be suppressed in the pursuit of knowledge.” Manning Marable, “Introduction: Black Studies and the Racial Mountain,” *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 24.
7. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970, 1993, 2003), emphasizes that when education is focused on populations who have been marginalized and silenced, educators must bring together the full force of theory, research, experiential learning, and involvement with the community to achieve authenticity. He also argues that there must be “radical interaction” between the two dimensions of “reflection and action” because “if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus to speak a true word is to transform the world” (87) Marable adds: “To have any practical relevance to the actual conditions and problems experienced by African-American people, Black Studies must conceive itself as a type of praxis, a unity of theory and practical action . . .” Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics* (London: Verso, 1995), 112.
8. Ronald W. Bailey, “Black Studies in the Third Millennium: Reflections on Six Ideas That Can Still (and Must) Change the World,” *Souls* (Summer 2000), 88.
9. Bailey, “Black Studies in the Third Millennium,” 77.
10. Jacqueline Bobo, Cynthia Hudley, and Claudine Michel, “Introduction,” *The Black Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3.
11. Bobo, Hudley, and Michel, “Introduction,” 1.
12. See the interview in this volume, Chapter 6, where Marable discusses working with the strategic goals of the university.
13. Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*, 28.
14. Nell Irvin Painter, “Black Studies, Black Professors, and the Struggles of Perception,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (December 15, 2000).
15. Karenga says that “Black studies . . . has shown a remarkable capacity for development and expansion in spite of its critics” and touts the advantage of a discipline that is “an open-textured and open-ended project” not held back by “long-term entrenched contentions grown hoary and semi sacred with age.” See “Black Studies: A Critical Reassessment,” in Marable, *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience*, 163.

16. Robert L. Harris, Jr., "The Intellectual and Institutional Development of Africana Studies," in Bobo, Hudley, and Michel, *The Black Studies Reader*, 15–20.
17. We agree with Lea Redmond and Charles P. Henry, "The Roots of Black Studies," in Conyers, Jr. *Afrocentric Traditions: Africana Studies*, Vol. I: "Histories of Black Studies often view its development as emerging from the Black Power Movement with no link to the Civil Rights Movement. At worst, they present civil rights and Black Power as opposites. Our analysis links the two movements together as essential to the formation of Black Studies" (165).
18. Harris, "The Intellectual and Institutional Development of African Studies," 18.
19. One development in the academy is a movement to include "White Studies" alongside Black Studies and other under-represented racial and ethnic groups. Karenga makes several strong points: "studies of 'Whiteness' as a concept as distinct from White supremacy as thought and practice of domination can end up psychologizing White domination in counterproductive ways. This begins with rediscovering and trotting out the old liberal argument that Whites are victimized like the people of color they victimize. This leads to comparative victimization discourse . . . it tends to diminish the necessary moral and social distinction between oppressor and oppressed . . . also, focusing on Whiteness as a concept can degenerate into a project that results in treating Whiteness as simply an intellectual problem of abnormal and contradictory thought and 'invention' rather than a social problem of domination, unequal wealth and power, injustice and unfreedom. The central problem is not White attitudes but White domination . . . [What is required is a] 'focus on concrete expressions of White power rather than on muddled and mistaken conceptions of self by White people . . . [There is a need to] focus not on Whiteness as a concept, but on White supremacy as a social problem, a problem of thought and practice which destroys human lives, human cultures, and human possibility and requires radical treatment on a global scale" (2). "[C]learly one of the main focuses of Black Studies and other ethnic studies is a critique of White supremacy—its origin, structure and functioning, as well as the possibilities of social initiatives to end it. In fact, in the four fundamental aspects of the Black Studies mission, the critique of White domination plays an ongoing role. These are: 1) the ongoing critical search for truth and meaning in society and history; 2) a radical alternative to the established order's ways of viewing and approaching the world; 3) a moral critique of constraints on human freedom and dignity, especially those based on race, class, and gender, 4) a critical contribution of correctives and models of possibilities toward creating the just and good society, and the maximum conditions for human freedom and human flourishing in the world" (3). See Maulana Karenga, "Whiteness Studies: Deceptive or Welcome Discourse," *Black Issues* (May 13, 1999).
20. McIntosh describes pervasive cultural patterns in society at large, and in the academy *per se*, that "over-reward" White constituents with "unearned assets" (1) and an illusory sense of having achieved success based on hard work and talent ("the myth of meritocracy") (9), while systematically leaving people of color in disadvantaged, less powerful positions. Peggy McIntosh, *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Having Come to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies*, Working Paper No. 189 (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College Center for Research on

- Women, 1988). See also Jeanette Davidson, Tim Davidson, and Judy Crain, "White Skin and Sheepskins: Challenging the Status Quo in the Education of Helping Professionals," *The Journal of Intergroup Relations*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Winter 2000–1): 3–15.
21. Marable makes a corollary point if the academy does not move forward into the twenty-first century and does not more fully embrace perspectives other than the traditional White *Weltanschauung*: "if Black Studies does not consciously seek to transform these elitist institutions, which are essentially designed to reproduce the daughters and sons of privileged social classes and racial groups, African-American Studies programs and departments will inevitably atrophy, becoming marginal appendages of the closed university system." See *Beyond Black and White*, 115.
 22. Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, esp. 72–6.
 23. Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 72.
 24. See John R. P. French and Bertram Raven's classic discussion in "The Bases of Social Power," in Dorian Cartwright, ed., *Studies of Social Power* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1959): 150–67 on social influence and various forms of power in helping relationships and other dyads (e.g., teaching in higher education). The same point can be made in reference to White instructors who seem knowledgeable about African American Studies, care about the subject matter, and relate positively to their multiracial students. But at this stage of the academy's racial evolution, the under-represented Black instructor (of every national origin) in African American Studies really can bring a dimension that is desperately needed to the educational experience of predominantly White institutions.
 25. Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, "Black Studies in the New Millennium: Resurrecting Ghosts of the Past," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, vol. 2 (Summer 2000), 44.
 26. Marable's fuller quote in *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower* is rich and worth repeating: "First, the black intellectual tradition has always been descriptive, that is, presenting the reality of black life and experiences from the point of view of black people themselves. Instead of beginning the logic of intellectual inquiry standing on the outside of the lived experiences of the people, the black intellectual tradition at its best has always presumed the centrality of black life. The scholar was a participant-observer who was challenged to undertake a thick description of cultural and social phenomena. Scholarship was therefore grounded in the very subjective truths of a people's collective experience" (1). "The black intellectual tradition has, second, been corrective. It has attempted to challenge and to critique the racism and stereotypes that have been ever present in the mainstream discourse of white academic institutions" (2). "And, finally, the black intellectual tradition has been prescriptive. Black scholars who have theorized from the black experience have often proposed practical steps for the empowerment of black people. In other words, there is a practical connection between scholarship and struggle, between social analysis and social transformation. The purpose of black scholarship is more than the restoration of identity and self-esteem: it is to use history and culture as tools through which people interpret their collective experience, but for the purpose of transforming their actual conditions and the totality of the society all around them" (2).

27. Karenga, "Black Studies," 165–6.
28. Karenga, "Black Studies," 167.
29. Cornel West, "The Dilemma of the Black Intellectual," *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Basic Books, 1999), 313. West develops many key concepts relating to Black intellectuals in this much cited text. His comment at the end of the chapter is instructive for many thinkers who want to avoid Eurocentric modes of thought in favor of Afrocentric ones (while recognizing their epistemological foundations, formally and informally, are laid in a Black and White world): "The future of the black intellectual lies neither in a deferential disposition toward the Western parent nor a nostalgic search for the African one. Rather, it resides in a critical negation, wise preservation and insurgent transformation of this hybrid lineage that protects the earth and projects a better world" (315).
30. Stewart writes in "Social Science and Systematic Inquiry in Africana Studies: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century," that "despite his continuing commitment to the type of systematic inquiry [of the social sciences] by the first decade of the twentieth century, Du Bois had already recognized that social science studies were insufficient to alter broader patterns of social construction of race and patterns of political and economic domination. This realization led him to seek ways of integrating political advocacy and systematic inquiry" (88).
31. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Manning Marable, "A Debate on Activism in Black Studies," in Marable, *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*. Marable makes his fuller point on politics in the academy by noting: "In truth, the ideal of wholly disinterested scholarship—in any field of research—will probably remain an elusive one. But it's one thing to acknowledge the political valence of even the 'purest' scholarship; it's another to demand of it immediate political utility the ideal of knowledge for its own sake . . . may be unfashionable, and even unrealizable; but it should command our respect all the same. For it remains the basic rationale of the university . . . those who would enlist the academy in the cause of activism must confront the awkward fact that the political views of academics can no more be regimented than their scholarly opinions" (187).
32. Joy James, "The Future of Black Studies: Political Communities and the 'talented Tenth,'" in Marable, *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*, 156.
33. Marable makes the valid point, in *Beyond Black and White*, that there "are Black Studies programs at major universities which are conducting impressive research projects, producing monographs on various aspects of the black experience. Yet, much of this work is abstract and disconnected; it is framed in a discourse which is literally indecipherable except to a small body of scholars. It replicates the stilted, obtuse language that characterizes much of the Western intellectual tradition" (112). The emphasis we make here is on activist, community oriented intellectual products with more of a utilitarian purpose.
34. Stewart, "Social Science and Systematic Inquiry in Africana Studies," 88.
35. Bailey, "Black Studies in the Third Millennium," 81–2.
36. Stewart, "Social Science and Systematic Inquiry in Africana Studies," 84.
37. Cha-Jua, "Black Studies in the New Millennium," 49.
38. This term is borrowed from bell hooks in one of her discussions about being marginalized as a Black scholar in the academy: "Making a space for the transgressive

- image, the outlaw rebel vision, is essential to any effort to create a context for transformation. And even then little progress is made if we transform images without shifting paradigms . . ." *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 4. W. E. B. Du Bois also observed: "education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent." *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1986/2009), 28.
39. bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 7.
 40. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 145. Studying transgressive activity within the discipline itself, Karenga observes that African American Studies is more likely to be "constantly confronted with challenges of the reactionary right" because programs and departments have a "commitment to raise and pursue issues of both intellectual and social significance"; he warns that the discipline needs to be ready for "the larger effort to contain, compromise and essentially defeat the ongoing struggle for an expanded realm of freedom both in the academy and the society." See "Black Studies," 162.
 41. bell hooks, *Yearning*, 145.
 42. bell hooks, *Yearning*, 148.
 43. In the "Introduction" to *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*, Marable notes that: "Fundamental social change is usually achieved at the boundaries of society and not from the center. The classical black intellectual tradition was largely constructed at the margins of white society, in segregated black institutions with close proximity to the daily struggles of African American people. It was no accident that the character of black intellectual work was frequently passionate, informed by the urgent tasks of black survival and resistance" (23).
 44. Bailey, "Black Studies in the Third Millennium," 79.
 45. hooks, *Yearning*, 189.
 46. Karenga, "Black Studies," 163.
 47. Davidson and Davidson, "bell hooks, White Supremacy and the Academy," 72–5.
 48. Painter, "Black Studies, Black Professors, and the Struggles of Perception," 2–3.
 49. Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, 124.
 50. Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, 123.
 51. Marable, "Introduction," *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*, 19–20.
 52. Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, 124.
 53. Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard (New York: Warner Books, 2001), 69. In the speech referenced, which King delivered over fifty years ago in Detroit, he emphasized three areas of injustice: *de facto* segregation of public schools; employment discrimination; and housing discrimination based on race. He also tested out his "I have a dream" phraseology, made famous in the march on Washington, DC two months later, wherein he expresses the hope of greater social gains by the time his four children became adults. The fact that a half-century has passed and the social justice agenda of African American Studies is still aimed at many of the issues that

King addressed attests to the structural and institutional problems of race within the US.

54. See Joy James' account in "The Future of Black Studies: Political Communities and the 'talented Tenth'," in Marable, *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*, where she argues that African American Studies needs to remain true to its activist roots and work to strengthen "radical political communities" (156)
55. Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, 116.
56. Karenga, "Black Studies," 168.
57. Marable, "Introduction," *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*: "The classical scholarship in the black intellectual tradition suggests that knowledge exists to serve the social welfare of black people and, by extension, humanity as a whole. Therefore, knowledge should not be seen as a commodity, even in a capitalist environment" (5).
58. King, *A Call to Conscience*, 54–5.