

1-2013

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Recommended Citation

Vaught, Seneca. "Leading from behind the gap: post-racial politics and the pedagogy of Black Studies." *Afro-Americans In New York Life And History* no. 1 (2013): 145.

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Leading From Behind the Gap: Post-Racial Politics and the Pedagogy of Black Studies

Seneca Vaught¹

Introduction

An Associated Press Poll released on the eve of the 2012 presidential election revealed that more Americans are overtly racist today than four years ago.² The implicit conclusion that many pundits made was that a black president caused more racial divisiveness, not less, than a white one. This is a particularly troubling paradox considering the wide-spread editorializing of the Obama presidency as the advent of a prejudice neutral era of post-racialism in America.

This poll is also particularly troubling given the results of a recent study that found a greater number of white Americans feeling that they are victims of racism than blacks.³ Both of these studies collectively reveal a complex development in the political, historical, and psychological landscape of the United States that would be best analyzed by academically trained experts on race rather than political pundits. These perspectives however, whether legitimate or not, have certainly influenced the political process and leadership agenda of the nation.

For example, in 2009, House Republicans accused President Barack Obama of "leading from behind," in

reference to his preference for Congress to be proactive in the process of legislative reform. Obama's background as a professor of constitutional law and his criticisms of the Bush Administration's expansion of executive power have certainly impacted his deference to the legislative branch. Obama is one of the few presidents (alongside Warren Harding and Abraham Lincoln) to be accused of not taking a hands-on role in the leadership of the nation while at the same time being accused by his adversaries as being overbearing.⁴ Lincoln, considered one of the greatest American presidents, drew criticism during his day for suspending *habeas corpus* during the Civil War but he was also criticized by generals for his *lack* of leadership prior to 1863 on the emancipation question. Harding, considered by many to be one of the worst presidents, was characterized as being a weak leader for allowing his appointees to engulf the government in a series of scandals but was also criticized for his unpopular progressive views on civil rights and his "civic booster" approach to economic matters that put him at odds with the *laissez faire* mentality of his party.⁵

Obama's presidency is likely to fall somewhere between these two extremes when historians looking back write the chapters of his story. However, we can be certain that race will play a key role in the chronicle of his leadership. It will be a challenging undertaking for chroniclers less adept in the parlance of structural racism to assess whether the difficulties Obama encountered were politics as usual or unique challenges of African American leadership maneuvering the landscape of race in a "post-racial" era. Paradoxically, many blacks today view the Obama presidency as not doing enough for black constituents while simultaneously he has been assiduously criticized by a white conservative segment of the electorate as catering only to the needs of blacks and Latinos.

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Despite one's perspective on this question, the characterization of "leading from behind" is an appropriate metaphor for another phenomenon—a gap of difference and distance in American politics and black leadership.

Black leaders in the era of post-racialism face higher expectations from increasingly diverse constituencies that put them in power but face these challenges without adequate resources or mechanisms to address them. Well aware of these challenges, growing numbers of Black Studies academics have been very critical of Obama's leadership, citing his disregard for a black policy agenda amidst of a variety of other complaints.⁶ Leading the chorus of criticism, public intellectuals like Cornel West, Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., and Tavis Smiley have bemoaned the lack of targeted policies to address systematic injustices perpetuated against communities of color in general and black communities in particular. Paradoxically, a small but vocal minority of black conservatives have also heard their voices amplified in this discussion as a new survey conducted by the University of Washington reveals that blacks are feeling less politically empowered during the Obama years--particularly those who are very religious, conservative, and the poor.⁷

Considering this gap between black academia and black political power, what role does (or should) Black Studies⁸ play in addressing the gap of understanding between ordinary Americans of different racial and ethnic backgrounds regarding the workings of American government? Particularly what role can Black Studies play in training leaders to address the dilemma of racial (in)difference in post-racial America? The current challenges faced by today's youth are greater than any since the civil rights era and have emerged in an era where limited leadership and the deadlock of group-think have neutralized the momentum for broad-

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based policy changes in American politics despite seismic shifts in the demographics of the electorate. Amidst shifting political sentiments and electoral possibilities, many Black students and Black Studies programs are less empowered to deal with these socioeconomic challenges due to a lack of resources, lack of intention, and lack of coordination. These shortcomings have converged amidst concentrated efforts to delegitimize historical models of black empowerment in the so-called age of post-racialism.

This article discusses some of the historical challenges and contemporary opportunities for race-conscious leadership in the Black Studies curriculum. Specifically the paper speaks to the challenges of developing a pedagogy—a method and practice of teaching theoretical concepts—that addresses the unique challenges encountered by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) “millennial” cohort of Black students (and white students enrolled in Black Studies courses) on college campuses.

This cohort of students began or completed a significant part of their education under the NCLB testing regime in 2003, are aged 13-29, are more politically progressive than any generation in the past 30 years, interact with digital media and technology at higher levels than prior generations, are less religiously observant than their parents, and espouse a deeper trust in institutions. In 2008, the number of 18-24 year old African Americans in college and those receiving graduate degrees increased, the same year the nation elected its first black president.

The paper concludes specifically addressing some of the troubling findings in *Academically Adrift* that students of color are learning less than their white counterparts and what students and educators sensitive to the unique demands and responsibilities of Black Studies programs can do to address

this "gap" in leadership and learning outcomes.

Historical Context for "Leading from Behind" Black Studies

Black Studies programs were developed in the 1960s to develop leadership to address educational and community crises facing African-Americans and from the beginning have faced a sustained effort to undermine the purpose of their existence. These problems were highlighted by a new generation of race leaders including Nathan Hare, Robert Chrisman, Ron Karenga and many others whose intellectual predecessors W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary McLeod Bethune, Benjamin Mays recognized that educational access and political power were central to the destiny of the race.⁹

They oversaw the emergence of programs at a time when black political and social leadership were under attack intellectually, culturally, and physically. Intellectually, scholars like Harold Cruse were coming to terms with the challenges of political movements, racial identity, and academia in the *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967).¹⁰ Culturally, African American intellectual and political leadership were crafting divergent and overlapping nationalistic responses to persistent themes of racism while being buffeted by a rising sentiment of white cultural and political backlash. The cultural and intellectual assaults on black leadership were also accompanied by the very real and persistent threat of physical violence in the high-profile assassinations of Malcolm X (1965), Medgar Evers (1965), Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968), Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter (1969), and Fred Hampton (1969).¹¹

Amidst these challenges, the earliest programs in Black Studies strived to develop leadership that would directly confront the challenges of being black in racial society. From

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the first program established at San Francisco State in 1967 to the proliferation of these programs across the country, many of them relied upon this common and overarching goal that is implicitly central to every discussion, strike, and protest of the era. The black protest leadership cooperated with academic leadership to clearly articulate a vision of a new direction in which African-Americans would not only become part of the broader American educational system but would also define curricula on a collegiate level that would ultimately help shape a new social order.¹²

For example, Nathan Hare who wrote "Conceptual Proposal for a Department of Black Studies," outlining the first Black Studies department at San Francisco State, emphasized the significance of this dynamic. Hare was a proponent of a new institutional phase of black academic inquiry. Having recently taught at Howard University, he recognized the need to create black centers of intellectual inquiry on college campuses but was well-acquainted with the challenges of establishing such programs at predominantly black institutions. Hare implied that this was more of an issue with administrative leadership than with students, asserting that the mindset and quality of the students enrolled was intellectually and socially poised for change and leadership. Hare summarized his confidence in student leadership, "Black students had an amazing sense of self-confidence in their ability to run things."¹³

Hare's curriculum reflected a variety of concerns, largely based in remedying the social problems encountered by African Americans. He outlined core concentrations in history, psychology, arts and humanities, and proposed a course to specifically address the leadership gap entitled "Development of Black Leadership."¹⁴ He affirmed:

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“Aside from the matter of intensified motivation (and increased commitment), the struggle to build the black community, students who have mustered even a smattering of black studies courses would be advantaged in their post-college work in the black community. They would be armed with early involvement and experience in the community superior to that of students not so trained.”¹⁵

Integrationists and nationalists both agreed to some extent with Hare’s formulation. According to Noliwe Rooks, whose recent work on the funding of Black Studies has been widely acclaimed, there also was debate on whether the emphasis should address deficiencies in the curricula and the lack of content related to black people or broader problems regarding the structure and function of education itself.¹⁶ Problematic from its origins, traditionally trained academics hailing from the established disciplines of history, sociology, and English thought the role of the emerging curricula were to complement existing offerings and provide content for racially-enlightened acculturation of black students into mainstream American society.

On the other hand, a significant contingent pointed to the responsibility of the discipline to craft new forms of knowledge and provide leadership and solutions for the social problems facing black Americans—a linking of theory with praxis.¹⁷ They assumed that the students enrolling in these programs would be mostly black, although an interracial coalition was responsible for the first program’s founding. Early advocates and architects of Black Studies often disagreed to what extent non-blacks should be allowed to

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teach in the programs but most agreed that the best and brightest of black graduates would go on to take up positions of leadership within the black community.

Some of the earliest Black Studies programs were funded in a racially-hostile climate by external support. As Noliwe Rooks' recent work on the early funding of Black Studies programs and their relationship to the Ford Foundation suggests, some white academic stakeholders saw these programs as playing a major role in leadership development but also to transform college and university campuses.¹⁸ Rooks has shown that the Ford Foundation, which assisted in funding many Black Studies programs, influenced college administrators' acceptance of these programs. Administrators saw Black Studies a quick solution to address the racial problems on campuses and throughout the country at large.¹⁹

There was a vacuum of activist-minded black academic leadership throughout the nation. As students voiced their grievances in a series of campus protest during the late 1960s, they called for a restructuring of the college experience in a way that would be sensitive to their unique concerns and attentive to addressing societal ills. Even as these programs came under federal and national scrutiny by 1974, according to Rooks, one of the most common justifications for their continuation was that they provided a mechanism of social change and helped students thrive in a racially complex society.²⁰ The implied argument being promoted here was that a highly-trained cadre of black leadership would emerge from Black Studies to address the racial problems of the university, the black community, and the nation. However, the targeted emphasis on black leadership and the black community presented a whole new array of challenges that remain to the present.

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Black critics like Martin Kilson, the first African-American full professor at Harvard, harshly criticized the Black Studies movement's alienation of white scholars but also its community-based programming. Kilson argued that many of the community-centered programs were self-serving platforms for a group of self-interested Black Nationalist groups that did little to address the real problems of the black community. Kilson argued that these needs could best be met at two-year technical institutions dedicated to developing skills of high-demand areas (e.g., nursing, mechanics, etc.).²¹ Said Kilson:

"I frankly doubt the intellectual and practical value of black studies programs seeking to make "relevant contributions" to the Negro community. Such contributions would be better made through technical or quasi-professional two-year colleges which would train nurses and other sundry technical workers. A black studies curriculum should in the main be organized and operated like other disciplines in a liberal arts college. A Negro student emphasizing economics within a black studies curriculum simply cannot afford such uses of his time that would be required in a black studies program of the "relevant" type. Mastering the mathematical techniques of economics, for example, requires the full time and attention of the brightest student--white or black. And since a sizeable number of the new crop of Negro students on white campuses are not adequately prepared when they enter, they can hardly afford to partake of the so-called "relevant" social science

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curriculum being demanded by militant advocates of black studies."²²

Kilson's perspective was certainly one view that resonates with modern critics of Black Studies but there were also other significant counterexamples of the era that reveal why a racially-conscious approach to social problems was justified as a central theme in the Black Studies curriculum. In 1971, Morris Freedman published an article entitled "Black Studies and the Standard Curriculum." Freedman argued that Black Studies programs were filling an intellectual gap in the field and diversifying the curriculum. However, Freedman also suggested that Black Studies was filling a need for concentrated academic efforts in an underdeveloped but strategic manner the same way that the rise of Slavic and Eastern European programs developed in the United States after Sputnik and throughout the Cold War. Freedman was suggesting that Black Studies had a strategic leadership role to play in resolving social problems through targeted and applied knowledge in a way that the existing configurations of college curricula had failed to address.²³

Freedman's perspective on the pedagogy of Black Studies foreshadowed new opportunities and serious challenges. Black Studies programs born during the 1968-1971 period faced a national white backlash evidenced by court cases such as *Bakke*, anti-black urban riots, counter-protests in the northeast, and a shift to the right in the political landscape. Collectively this backlash presented serious strategic and tactical decisions for Black Studies.²⁴ New established programs found themselves spending a substantial amount of time justifying themselves to a hostile academic community and a cynical public.²⁵ Through the 1970s and 1980s, Black

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Studies programs faced challenges that have become recurring and somewhat cyclic themes over the last 30 years: assaults in the media by conservative activists, turf wars with traditional disciplines and emerging fields, battles with administrators over resources and viability, and challenges to affirm academic authenticity amidst widespread skepticism.

The 1980s marked new developments on the educational horizon, as well as shifts in the socio-economic conditions of the nation, presenting a host of unique problems that neither the old guard civil rights leadership nor the ivory tower were prepared to address. A new class of students was coming to college campuses whose experiences were shaped more deeply by drug culture, inner-city violence, pop culture, and technological innovation. New Black Studies programs and older ones struggled to make meaning of the hip-hop generation and the host of social problems they encountered while simultaneously addressing renewed racial animosity under a newfangled guise of colorblindness.²⁶

During the 1980s, Black Studies programs were coming to terms with a phenomenon coined "yuppie racism" by Richard Lowy. According to Lowy "yuppie racism" was a "generational ignorance of university students regarding the historic struggles of the Civil Rights Movement and the continuing reality of racism." Lowy wrote during the 1980s of serious individual, cultural, and institutional problems that arose from this mindset and which is the intellectual predecessor of post-racialism.²⁷

The blissful ignorance of "yuppie racism" was responsible in part for a rising sentimentality of young white professionals of the Reagan era whose experiences were out of line historically and economically with the realities of black America. According to Lowy, the paradox emerged from convergences between misinformed group-think about the

meaning of race derived from misaligned institutions—including education and media—and an ignorance of structural inequality.²⁸

Learning from Behind the Gap

Facing a recurrent host of racial, curricular, and institutional problems, Black Studies programs are less empowered to deal with these challenges today than they were twenty years ago. This gap of empowerment stems from a lack of resources, collective intent, and coordination. Several major problems at the center of this gap reflect a crisis of organizational learning and a dilemma of pedagogy.

In addition to the generational changes in higher education ushered in first by the hip-hop generation and most recently by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Millennial cohort, Black Studies faces serious challenges in the present. Programs find themselves attempting to bridge significant gaps between the cultural norms of the students and the design of the curriculum, between the historical role of the discipline and the contemporary demands of the university. In sum, Black Studies educators find themselves facing a gap between outcomes and expectations. A broader realignment of American values around the role of public education and the responsibility of educational leadership challenges the very notion of higher education that made the creation of Black Studies possible. At the dawn of the modern Black Studies era, students enrolled in colleges in general and in Black Studies programs in particular to become leaders, to transform themselves, so that they could act as agents to develop and uplift their communities. Today, overwhelmingly students attend college to receive, to obtain degrees and diplomas, which are more of a receipt verifying time served than an affirmation of intellectual fulfillment.

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Differing from the expectations of the architects of Black Studies during the 1960s and 1970s, today a growing number of students enrolled in and teaching in Black Studies programs are non-black.²⁹ The exposure of larger numbers of non-black students and faculty to Black Studies is certainly a positive development but the transition may have come with some unintended consequences. Black Studies instructors in the past, regardless of subject matter, were more likely to teach the constructive engagement of racism—prescribing, engaging, experimenting, and interrogating methods to dismantle racial oppression in a variety of forms.

Today, the instruction of larger numbers of white students in Black Studies has tended to trend towards the deconstruction of racial concepts. For most black students race is a fact of American life, for many whites—much less so. Instructors with larger numbers of white students enrolled must spend more class time and resources establishing the fact that racism does exist and its effects are real rather than addressing the broader and more fruitful questions. This pedagogical shift is a significant difference between the founding era of Black Studies and the present that has major consequences on youth leadership.³⁰

While the full ramifications of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this paper, the trend does not necessarily represent a problem in the short-term, in the long-term however, it poses some significant questions about the epistemology, purpose, and trajectory of the discipline. As Rooks and others have shown, a sampling of schools offering the major in Black Studies reveals that the vast majority of black students in college are not enrolling in Black Studies programs.³¹ So as increasing numbers of Black Studies majors and minors are not black students, what does this say about the meaning of the field in a “post-racial world?” In other

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words, the problem is *not* that white students are taking Black Studies courses at increasing rates, but rather have Black Studies educators thought carefully about what this means for the training of race-conscious leadership of the next generation?

In addition to this dilemma, the recently published study on learning in colleges and universities, *Academically Adrift*, has confirmed suspicions of educators and the broader public that undergraduate learning is disturbingly low and that there is a persistent and growing inequality of learning outcomes.³² African-American students are entering higher education with lower abilities to think critically, reason analytically, engage problem solving, and write effectively than their white peers but they are also gaining less overtime.³³ The authors pointed out that African-American students scored 47 points lower on the College Learning Assessment (CLA) at the end of their sophomore year than did white students despite having educational experiences that were more conducive to learning (e.g. fewer hours and fraternities and sororities, higher proportion of college costs covered by grants and scholarships, etc.). Less than one third of African American students take classes that require them to read more than 40 pages a week and to write more than 20 pages during the semester.³⁴

Already beset by underdeveloped writing and critical thinking skills, students enrolling in college today reflect a broader "gap" in learning on college and university campuses because many arrive with no clear goals, purpose, or plan other than the receiving of credentials. Often Black Studies students come to the major after attempting other fields or deciding to make the move after experiencing a "racial awakening" on campus. Already facing the challenge of a leaning gap, teaching students what to "do" with a degree in

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Black Studies can be particularly challenging when a student is set on graduating in a short amount of time without ample consideration on how to apply a broad-based liberal arts degree in the workforce. Ironically, Black Studies programs have been unfairly blamed for graduating unemployable students while playing a key role in retention—illustrating a gap between what the programs contribute to college campuses and how they are perceived by the broader public.

Facing the challenge of running an interdisciplinary and academically rigorous program originally designed for black students but catering to a more racially diverse cohort, while engaging academically disadvantaged students in an institutionally hostile environment, Black Studies departments and their faculty are sorely underfunded in relation to the challenges they face and the contributions they make to campus life. Black Studies faculty provide programming, advising, racial crisis resolution, retention services, media relations, and counseling to non-majors that make them a vital organ in campus life. However, an increasingly popular trend of splitting responsibilities of Black Studies faculty across multiple departments or units undermines their effectiveness and the sustainability of these programs. The practice of jointly-appointing faculty to Black Studies programs and other units often supports strategic university goals of securing a racially-diverse faculty presence in multiple departments. Unfortunately these practices and procedures place undue stresses on faculty members and exploit institutions that are already underfunded.³⁵

Furthermore, the true value of Black Studies programs and faculty that have not been fully accounted for in the institutional budget or in the academic culture. A jointly-appointed faculty in theory should have half of the responsibilities expected of a full-time appointment to each

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unit but in reality faculty of color, studies show, already facing higher workloads due to their unique nature of their positions are carrying a heavier workload than their counterparts and often for less pay.³⁶

Disparities in funding and pay have long been a source of contention in the historical evolution of the discipline. Rooks' study revealed how with the support of the Ford foundation, namely under the direction of George McBundy, grants totaling some \$10 million were dispersed to 24 Black Studies programs between 1968 and 1972.³⁷ This financial support, in the assessment of Rooks, stabilized the nascent Black Studies programs and helped him secure a momentary grasp of legitimacy.³⁸ Ironically, that same year marked a decline in the number of black students enrolling and the beginning of a counterattack on the emerging field from a variety of opponents inside the academy. According to Allen, austerity measures and department cutbacks soon followed during a shift in the political mood of the country. By 1973, budget shortfalls and program cutbacks had derailed the trajectory of the nascent programming efforts and would impact the enrollment of black students on college campuses for decades.³⁹

Today, after a brief period of expansion during the early 2000s, economic support for Black Studies has once again faltered. Not accounting for private sources of funding, it has been overwhelmingly clear at the institutional level that Black Studies programs are entering a new era of crisis. Schools that were once at the forefront of the Black Studies movement have seen their institutional structure and economic support challenged. Administrators seeking to cut costs have pursued a policy of consolidation, often creating departments that include a variety of ethnic and cultural studies programs or the diminishment of organizational autonomy of Black Studies.

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Examples of these reorganization developments in New York have already taken place at Cornell and the State University of New York—Buffalo. These changes have affected a variety of Ivy League institutions (albeit to a lesser extent), state universities, and community colleges across the country.⁴⁰

Black Studies programs during the 1980s were encouraged to consolidate, become more interdisciplinary, and "goal displacing" in their requirements according to Carlos Brossard.⁴¹ As top programs increased their ability to attract intellectual superstars like Cornel West and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the focus shifted from community development to public intellectualism. Programs that struggled to maintain a strong community-centered agenda were beleaguered by colleagues who down-played the academic rigor of the field and the tenurability of their colleagues.

Creative accomplishments in Black Studies were denigrated even as they provided muse for an intellectual rebirth of decaying traditional disciplines, enthralled with the endless opportunities for engaging the questions of race. West himself came under scrutiny at Harvard in 2001, when president Larry Summers questioned the academic viability of his public scholar projects. If West was under siege at Harvard, what were the prospects for scholars and leaders in far less prominent institutions?⁴²

In the post-racial era, Black Studies departments shoulder an additional burden of justifying their courses and scholarship in ways that other departments do not. Consider the firestorm caused by Naomi Shaffer Riley's 2012 article "The Most Persuasive Case for Eliminating Black Studies" and David Horowitz's dangerous professor list.⁴³ In both of these examples, non-specialists in the field were accorded an academic platform to critique the whole discipline without

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evidencing even the most rudimentary knowledge of the subject matter. The media news cycle contributes to this dilemma by consulting analysts in the field who purport to be experts on race but are usually far less-qualified to opine authoritatively in the specific areas of inquiry than they proclaim. This tendency persists amidst a record number of Black Studies graduates and academics with technical expertise in a variety of fields. Thus, anyone can be an expert in all things black, while attempts to proclaim such proficiency in other fields would be more thoroughly examined. While this happens infrequently across other disciplines, few disciplines are compelled to engage non-academic nay-sayers to the extent that the scholars in Black Studies must.

These gaps between outcomes and expectations are much more serious than many Black Studies academics have assumed. A list of the top citations and searches in the Black Studies literature presents a list of priorities quite different than the concerns listed above. The emphasis on a host of themes unconnected to the public square and problem-solving in the black community may have been worthwhile and intellectually stimulating but unfortunately has broadened the gap and the effectiveness of the discipline.

The most common rejoinder to criticisms of the irrelevance of the discipline was provided by a slew of scholar activists, whose work, they argued, was a form of political engagement that fueled protest and social change. These scholar activists fought the good fight but introduced a new problem: Is activism the only pragmatic outlet for Black Studies scholarship? Certainly today, Black Studies curricula lists a host of important courses that address the activist strain but now more noticeably than ever, there is a lack of courses that teach students about social change *outside* of the avenues

of political and social activism.

Apparently the prospects of becoming a full-time activist is not appealing to black students of the post-civil rights generation. Several studies, also summarized in Rooks, point to declining numbers of black students in African American studies programs largely because of shifts in the economic climate. From the 1990s well into the present, black students increasingly have focused on developing their own careers at the expense of all other intellectual and community pursuits.⁴⁴ Some would argue that greater economic mobility of black students, regardless of the major, would benefit the race as a whole, thus Black Studies has diminishing significance in emphasizing community development. However, a stream of literature has illustrated that racial inequality is not the function of income alone but is a complex outgrowth of social isolation, historical disadvantage, and cultural alienation. These are problems that were created by individual effort and nor can they be solved by boosterism; they must first be identified, acknowledged and engaged through sustained and collaborative effort. Black Studies programs have undertaken an important work of filling a gap of knowledge regarding structural inequalities but have struggled—like many other disciplines—to translate these core competencies into forms of gainful employment that can be easily conveyed to non-academic audiences.

Particularly, the gap between competencies and livelihood is a key point of divergence between Black Studies educators and the Millennial cohort. The changes that had brought about a revolution in social values twenty years prior, present a series of new attitudes, questions, and concerns that the traditional curricular and pedagogy of Black Studies is ill-equipped to address. The courses that are offered tend to be content to explore the philosophy and the intellectual content

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alone without engaging question of praxis, prescription, and policy. So for example, course on hip-hop are very popular throughout the Black Studies curriculum but there are far less programs or courses on how to develop a hip-hop business despite the high demand by students. There are also a lack of courses that work across colleges and departments to introduce innovation to our student experiences and engage emerging fields of study in science, technology, engineering and math in creative endeavors.

Students are often advised to major in something "practical" and that they will be able to secure a job with upon graduation. Long gone are the days when the creative exploration of ideas and knowledge itself became a means of employment. A generational divide exists between Generation X Black Studies educators and Millennial students and several generations of Black Studies educators like Carter G. Woodson and Lerone Bennet, Na'im Akbar, Jawanza Kunjufu and many others, all of which used their training in nascent Black Studies to create opportunities for themselves and their communities. Advocates of Black Studies have responded to critics that the degree "plays well with others" and is relevant to a variety of professions but Black Studies programs have not done an effective job of working collaboratively to illustrate this message beyond simply listing what past graduates have accomplished.⁴⁵

Towards a "Post-Racial" Pedagogy of Black Studies

Students and Black Studies educators can address the "gap" in leadership and learning outcomes by reinventing the pedagogy to align with the experiences of a diverse constituency. Many programs are already doing this but sustained innovation and an evolving strategy to address the changing racial climates must be the underpinnings of future

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pedagogical and curricular reform. As Arum and Roksa have suggested in *Academically Adrift*, there is extremely limited learning taking place on college campuses.⁴⁶ The emphasis of campus life is mostly social and not academic. Some faculties have low expectations for students especially amidst rising pressures for publication. An overemphasis on credentials instead of intellectual rigor and moral character are all major learning gaps on college campuses complicated by racial and generational overtones.

Students and educators can address these “gaps” in leadership and learning outcomes by critically reassessing the purpose of the discipline in a post-racial era. In era of so-called “post-racialism,” Black Studies programs must come to terms with training leadership to engage the high-stakes battles of the public square and private sector in a more nuanced manner through a variety of pragmatic methodologies. Ironically, Black Studies programs are being critiqued as an anachronism for employing racially-conscious approaches while ideological antagonists are using race-neutral language to dismantle ethnic studies, and Chicano and Latino/a Studies programs. The most recent of these evidenced by Arizona’s House Bill 2281 in 2010.⁴⁷ If the current trend of post-racialism in academic and political discourse is an indicator of the future, Black Studies programs should be the bellwether of a new strategy of minority leadership and engagement. In the words of Sundiata Cha-Jua, it requires that Black Studies scholars “move beyond merely critiquing and deconstructing systems of oppression and begin to confront and transform them.”⁴⁸

The Black Studies educator faces a dubious challenge of critically engaging the multiple meanings of “whiteness” in the current racial, political, and academic context. The “invisibility of whiteness,” a theme well-developed in the

literature, was largely responsible for the “yuppie racism” of the 1980s and is behind the post-racial ethos of the present. However, few Blacks Studies programs have engaged this concept as a major curricular emphasis (for obvious reasons) and this has obfuscated the role of Black Studies and its relevance to a growing segment of our students and a shrinking proportion of the population. Black Studies educators must engage new ideas about race while facing the challenges of engaging a host of other already neglected areas in history, art, literature, and the social sciences. It is not enough simply to criticize the role of whiteness, white people, and white ideas in race scholarship but a post-racial approach should mean envisioning new roles, new allies, and new opportunities for creating a new era. In the words of Manning Marable, “[F]or the oppressed, the act of reconstructing history is inextricably linked to the political practices, or *praxis*, of the transforming the present and future.”⁴⁹

The difficulty of addressing this challenge and others stems from the lack of uniformity across a variety of Black Studies programs. In 1980, the National Council for Black Studies developed a model curriculum that emphasized social responsibility and community engagement in foundation, thematic, and capstone courses. When adopted by the Executive board, they emphasized the “mission to produce and transmit knowledge and for the empowerment of individuals and institutions in relation to the conditions, experiences, and needs and imperatives of black communities.”⁵⁰ The core outline presented a flexible model for curriculum development in the spirit of the Black Studies Movement but a random sampling of Black Studies programs today that actually regard the community imperative of that core curriculum as key role of their programming efforts is less than notable. This is a particularly troubling “gap” of

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learning and outcomes in an era when universities are seeking to more closely collaborate with local communities in a variety of initiatives that Black Studies programs were once ridiculed for pioneering.⁵¹

Students and educators can also address the “gap” in leadership and learning outcomes by requiring more rigorous standards. Black Studies curriculum reform must be at the core of addressing these problems and leading our students and colleges into the 21st century. Courses in Black Studies should be some of the most challenging but also the most socially and politically, if not economically rewarding. Black Studies educators must reinvent opportunities for students to engage in leadership and to tap into a broad network of experiences in collaborative, active experiences that characterize the ideals of the founders. New research is suggesting that providing opportunities for our students to work on campus may help increase their study hours and performance, why not design these experiences around the curriculum?⁵²

One of Kilson’s criticisms of Black Studies in 1969 presents a similar dilemma today. How can students develop the competencies necessary for socially-conscious leadership in the black community while also developing the academically demanding technical skills of proficiency needed in high-demand areas such as science, technology, engineering and math?⁵³ There is no easy remedy to this dilemma, especially considering the achievement gap between white and black students when they begin college. However, it is incumbent on Black Studies educators to play a much more central role in closing the gap of learning that occurs during the time students are enrolled in college.

One simple step in addressing this gap is that students in Black Studies courses should be required to read more than 40

pages a week and to write more than 20 pages during the semester. Just doing this and nothing else will give Black Studies students a college experience more rigorous than the current average across a variety of fields.⁵⁴ Addressing educational deficiencies will not be resolved through this process alone but developed in tandem with the conferencing style of teaching, mentoring, and project-centered curriculum that students of color and increasingly millennials of all backgrounds are most receptive to.

In "Kunfundishi," Hellen Neville and Sundiata Cha-Jua's article discussing the need for clear pedagogical paradigm in Black Studies, the authors outline the central role of writing and present a model for course assignments that revolve around a series of short assignments and a 12-page paper. The paper should identify a major problem and discuss it from one of the theoretical frameworks of the course and propose a concrete solution.⁵⁵ With assignments like these, students and educators can address the "gap" in leadership and learning outcomes by making praxis the central goal of a Black Studies degree.

If the testing regime and educational environment is unfair and biased, then it is the responsibility of Black Studies educators to collectively and collaboratively devise alternative methods to counter these effects and to showcase the abilities of our students to outperform in competing areas. This type of work has been done in the past and is still being undertaken in the present but not with the coordinated action necessary to bring about structural changes. The pathway to the abolition of standardized assessments may not be realistic in the short-term; however, the brief history of resentment of these assessments has been highly ineffective despite the growing body of literature addressing their inadequacies. Rather than continue in opposing these measurements with no alternatives,

it is incumbent on Black Studies educators and students to work together to develop assessments that "objectively" measure the abilities and aptitudes of students in a statistically meaningful and relevant way.⁵⁶ The millennial No Child Left Behind cohort is well-acquainted with the shortcomings of the largest testing regime in the history of modern education. Educators and students alike can collaborate to creatively and critically put forward race-neutral alternatives.

To address the larger numbers of students who are enrolling at colleges and universities without adequate preparation, Black Studies programs need to focus on engaging students at the secondary and primary level.⁵⁷ Black Studies programs need to engage students at the high school and junior high level, providing AP classes and other options that will help them excel in college.

These remedies will be difficult to enact without increased economic support. Facing funding crises and the waning public support for Black Studies, programs should return to community-based models of scholarship where community stakeholders are central in the process of program development but also evaluation. When Black Studies programs came under fire in 1970s, LeRoi Ray Jr., director of Black Studies at Western Michigan University, suggested the creation of Advisory Councils to Black Studies. These councils, he advised, should be comprised of "interested and knowledgeable groups of seriously committed persons who represent complementary factions of the community" and remarked that many of the programs that had been dismantled would not have been if these units were in place.⁵⁸

Conclusion

"Leading from behind" it turns out may be less of a leadership style and more of a racial perception that white

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Americans have about the tactics black folk and their allies must use to pursue racial fairness in a racially-hostile environment. Black leaders have long addressed the failed will of the American public to seriously engage the possibilities of transformational educational and political policies. During the 1960s and in the present, leaders have devised creative and unconventional approaches to social change that have often disturbed diverse constituencies of their supporters and outraged their opponents.

Obama's election in 2008 positioned him against a plethora of constituencies, both liberal and conservative whose individual demands pitted them against the collective good. In supporting the laboratory of democracy, the ironic result was an emphasis on criticisms of his ability to lead effectively and to bring about the change the electorate demanded. Similarly Black Studies programs find their leadership and legitimacy called into question in an academic setting that has historically benefited from their presence but has not regarded them as important and relevant leaders in the educational experience on campus.

Millenials played a key role in the election and re-election of president Obama despite their widespread characterization as apathetic in education and politics. Black Studies has a role to play in engaging the creative, open-minded, and sometimes self-contradictory ethos of the post-civil rights generation to equip leaders for a new era in American political and social life. The post-racial Black Studies curriculum should not abandon the engagement of race but rather engage it in ways empower an optimistic generation of youth to address persistent inequalities and injustices.

Scholars and educators also face a serious dilemma in bridging the gap between political leadership and the experiences of minorities. In the volatile environs of academic

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and politics, change comes and is reversed much more quickly than expected. Consider that James Meredith was escorted with U.S. Marshals into Ole Miss in 1962 and just six years later San Francisco State became the first four year college to offer a major in Black Studies. In 2008, media pundits were proclaiming the death of race in American politics and just four years later higher numbers of Americans report higher incidents of racial prejudice than before. Progress, it appears, does not proceed in a direct line but can regress and even move behind the lines of previously established gains before going forward. The Obama phenomenon is certainly not the first time Americans have witnessed this behavior as it relates to race relations and it certainly will not be the last.

Few educational leaders exert complete control over the students who enroll in our programs, their work and study habits, their ambition and intention for engaging with us but educators do share, for better or for worse, a disproportionate responsibility for the outcome of their experience with us. If the experience of Obama has any relevance for Black Studies educators, it urges educators to understand the stakes of educational leadership, where there are multiple masters. Regardless of whether or not one supports Obama's policies, his experience parallels with the challenge of collaborating in a racially hostile workplace. How can Black Studies programs effectively work with other constituents, programs, students, and administrators when they are actively seeking to dismantle it?

This is not only an administrative issue but a pedagogical one. African-American students face a dual burden upon graduation. Educators know from the historical record that they will be the first to be fired in the last be hired, and that they will be placed under greater scrutiny by the decision to major in a field that places their identity front and center as

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one of their qualifications. How can Black Studies educators train their students to be the best in the world knowing that they have been and will continue to be offered the least promising opportunities?

Educators need to teach leadership skills from the front but also from behind, making it an explicit component of coursework to engage students in the inglorious task of crafting a destiny for themselves in which they will not receive credit and they will not be seen. This includes a whole new generation of social entrepreneurs, writers, artists, entertainers, technologists, health care professionals, and others.

A post-racial leadership pedagogy in Black Studies does not mean abandoning race as frame of an analysis or downplaying its significance, rather it mean abandoning an older approach of race-work that hoped to eliminate racial attitudes through education alone. The promise and paradox of the post-racial era is that race will continue to exist in American society for some time but the solutions posed to ameliorate and eradicate its effects through institutions have a greater appeal today than in recent decades.

While critics may point to the declining relevance of Black Studies, we continue to live in a society obsessed with race. Aside from the traditional historical arguments predicated on the role of Black Studies to address injustices in society, we must also reconsider a full engagement of the market forces in which race in general and blackness in particular, have become such a prevailing commodity. People continue to buy books about black people, watch movies starring black actors, enjoy therapy by black talk show hosts, attend sporting events powered by black athletes, bob their heads to music laced with laced with the addictive staccato of black rhythm and soul. So despite all factors inherent in the

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overtones of post-racialism, today, perhaps more than ever, is a great time to be training people "how to be black."

Concomitantly, Black Studies programs need now more than ever to be agile and responsive to provide training for millennial students to meet these demands in ways that are socially responsible and intellectually sound. The ability of Black Studies programs to graduate black and non-black leaders who can not only find but create meaningful opportunities for themselves and disadvantaged communities around them will be the best example of leading from behind.

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² "AP Poll: Majority Harbor Prejudice Against Blacks," *U.S. News*, accessed November 19, 2012, http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/10/27/14740413-ap-poll-majority-harbor-prejudice-against-blacks.

³ Michael I. Norton and Samuel R. Sommers, "Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6, no. 3 (May 1, 2011): 215–218, doi:10.1177/1745691611406922.

⁴ Richard Cohen, "The Price of Obama's Leading from Behind," *The Washington Post*, September 18, 2012, sec. Opinions, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/richard-cohen-the-price-of-obamas-leading-from-behind/2012/09/17/b9314986-00f2-11e2-b257-e1c2b3548a4a_story.html. Ironically, both presidents Lincoln and Harding faced staunch conservative constituents openly and reservedly opposed to legislation targeting African Americans.

⁵ For discussion of Lincoln's reputation and leadership, see Thomas L. Krannawitter, *Vindicating Lincoln: Defending the Politics of Our Greatest President*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 317–319. On Harding's reassessment see Phillip G. Payne, *Dead Last: The Public Memory of Warren G. Harding's Scandalous Legacy*, (Columbus, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009), 7–10.

⁶ Anjali Menon, "Online and Off, African American Studies

Professors Criticize President,” *The Daily Princetonian*, September 13, 2012, <http://www.dailyprincetonian.com/2012/09/13/31086/>.

⁷ James L. Gibson, “Being Free in Obama’s America: Racial Differences in Perceptions of Constraints on Political Action,” *Daedalus* 141, no. 4 (2012): 114–129.

⁸ In this paper, the designation “Black Studies” will be used to refer to African American Studies, Pan-African Studies, Africana Studies, Latino/a and Afro-Caribbean Studies, African and African Diaspora Studies and African Studies programs where race is incorporated a major critical lens of inquiry.

⁹ Martin Kilson, “Anatomy of the Black Studies Movement,” *The Massachusetts Review* 10, no. 4 (October 1, 1969): 718–725, doi:10.2307/25087920.

¹⁰ Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (New York Review of Books, 2005).

¹¹ For an extended discussion of the impact of assassinations on the Black Power Movement, see Peniel E Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006), 123, 152, 205–209.

¹² Allen, Robert L. Allen, “Politics of the Attack on Black Studies,” in *The African American Studies Reader* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 2001), 492–493.

¹³ Nathan Hare, “A Conceptual Proposal for a Department of Black Studies,” in *Shut It Down!: A College in Crisis*, by William Orrick (San Francisco: San Francisco State College, 1969), 160–167, <http://ia700504.us.archive.org/10/items/shutitdown1969collegorrich/shutitdown1969collegorrich.pdf>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁶ Noliwe M Rooks, *White Money/Black Power the Surprising History of African American Studies and the Crisis of Race in Higher Education* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 64, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10175309>.

¹⁷ Norment quoted in *Ibid.*, 68; Allen, "Politics of the Attack on Black Studies," 493.

¹⁸ Rooks, 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 58 and 62.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

²¹ Kilson, "Anatomy of the Black Studies Movement," 724.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Morris Freedman, "Black Studies and the Standard Curriculum," *The Journal of Higher Education* 42, no. 1 (January 1, 1971): 35–36, doi:10.2307/1977712.

²⁴ Roger Hewitt, *White Backlash and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6–7.

²⁵ Rooks, 11.

²⁶ Illinois Northern Illinois University, De Kalb Center for Minority Studies and Philip T. K. Daniel, *A Report on the Status of Black Studies Programs in Midwestern Colleges and Universities* (The Center, 1977). Quoted in Carlos A. Brossard, "Classifying Black Studies Programs," *The Journal of Negro Education* 53, no. 3 (July 1, 1984): 278–295, doi:10.2307/2294864.

²⁷ Richard Lowy, "Yuppie Racism: Race Relations in the 1980s," *Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 4 (June 1, 1991): 445, doi:10.2307/2784688.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 456.

²⁹ Dawn Turner Trice, "New Faces Among Black Studies Scholars," *Los Angeles Times*, March 5, 2009, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/mar/05/nation/na-black-studies5>.

³⁰ See Clyde C. Clements, "Black Studies for White Students," *Negro American Literature Forum* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 1970): 9–11, doi:10.2307/3041072; Ronald E. Hall, "White Women as Postmodern Vehicle of Black Oppression: The Pedagogy of Discrimination in Western Academe," *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 1 (September 1, 2006): 69–82, doi:10.2307/40034373.

³¹ Rooks, 11–12, 129.

³² Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 30 and 39.

³³ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁵ James L. Conyers Jr, *African Studies: A Disciplinary Quest for Both Theory and Method* (VNR AG, 1997), 10-11.

³⁶ Darrell Cleveland, *When "Minorities Are Strongly Encouraged to Apply": Diversity and Affirmative Action in Higher Education*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 78-80.

³⁷ Rooks, 77.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Allen, Robert L. Allen, "Politics of the Attack on Black Studies," in *The African American Studies Reader* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 2001), 494.

⁴⁰ Alyssa Figueroa, "Consolidating College Diversity Departments? CA Austerity Measures Attempt to Silence Those Who Critique Them," *AlterNet*, November 17, 2012,

<http://www.alternet.org/education/consolidating-college-diversity-departments-ca-austerity-measures-attempt-silence-those>;

Gary Y. Okihiro, "The Future of Ethnic Studies," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 4, 2010, sec. The Chronicle Review,

<http://chronicle.com/article/The-Future-of-Ethnic-Studies/66092/>.

⁴¹ Brossard, "Classifying Black Studies Programs."

⁴² "Larry Summers v Cornel West: Seeing Crimson," *The Economist*, January 3, 2002,

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⁴³ Naomi Schaefer Riley, "The Most Persuasive Case for Eliminating Black Studies? Just Read the Dissertations." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Brainstorm*, April 30, 2012, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/the-most-persuasive-case-for-eliminating-black-studies-just-read-the-dissertations/46346>.

⁴⁴ Rooks, 132.

⁴⁵ See Victor Oguejiofor Okafor, "Shortcomings in Wilson's 'Chronicle of Higher Education' Article on the State of Black

Studies Programs," *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 3 (January 1, 2007): 336; Robert Fikes, Jr., "What Can I Do with a Black Studies Major? 222 Answers," 2011,

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⁴⁶ Arum and Roksa, 129.

⁴⁷ Luis J. Rodriguez, "Arizona's Attack on Chicano History and Culture Is Against Everyone," *Huffington Post*, January 18, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/luis-j-rodriguez/arizonas-attack-on-chican_b_1210974.html.

⁴⁸ Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, "Black Studies in the New Millennium: Resurrecting Ghosts of the Past," *Souls* 44, no. Summer (2000): 49.

⁴⁹ Manning Marable, *Living Black History: How Reimagining the African-American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future*, (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 37.

⁵⁰ "NCBS Online - Black/Africana Studies Model Core

Curriculum," accessed November 24, 2012,

http://www.ncbsonline.org/black_africana_studies_model_core_curriculum.

⁵¹ Kelly Ward, *Faculty Service Roles and the Scholarship of Engagement. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report. Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003),

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/detail?accno=ED476222>.

⁵² Arum and Roksa, 102.

⁵³ Kilson, "Anatomy of the Black Studies Movement," 724.

⁵⁴ Arum and Roksa, *Academically Adrift*, 93.

⁵⁵ Helen A. Neville and Sundiata K. Cha-Jua, "Kufundishà: Toward a Pedagogy for Black Studies," *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 4 (March 1, 1998): 164, doi:10.2307/2784832.

⁵⁶ J. Owens Smith, "The Role of Black Studies Scholars in Helping Black Students Cope with Standardized Tests," *The Journal of Negro Education* 53, no. 3 (July 1, 1984): 334-340, doi:10.2307/2294868.

⁵⁷ Cha-Jua, "Black Studies in the New Millennium: Resurrecting Ghosts of the Past," 49.

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⁵⁸ LeRoi R. Ray, "Black Studies: A Discussion of Evaluation," *The Journal of Negro Education* 45, no. 4 (October 1, 1976): 387, doi:10.2307/2966852.