

BLACK STUDIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY Longevity Has Its Place

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This article is concerned with the fact that Black studies (or African American studies, Africana studies, Pan-African studies, African Centered studies, Afrocentric studies, Africalogical studies, African and African Diaspora studies—they all basically mean the same thing) continues to have a contested existence in the U.S. academy. However, regardless of the ever-present need to validate itself, this field defies all attempts to silence its voice. The works of Black studies scholars are “here, there, and everywhere” if one cares to take the time to search and sift through the many scholarly contributions. Admittedly, the field is very diverse with numerous schools of thought. Yet rather than viewing this diversity as a problem, it should endorse the fact that Black studies continues to make strides in the academy. This is not to suggest that there are not problems facing its growth and development in the university systems; this article shall highlight a number, but it does make a worthwhile claim against any notion of a decline in the scholarly interest in peoples of African descent, in terms of history, culture, socioeconomics, and politics.

Keywords: *Black studies; U.S. academy; African-centered analysis and contribution; anti-Black studies perspectives*

When black students first demanded the establishment of black studies [late 1960s-early 1970s] departments, programs, and centers, few of the beleaguered white administrators would have predicted a long life for these enterprises. Many undoubtedly wished that black studies would go away; others tried to thwart growth and development. Most of those who opposed the creation of black studies units claimed that these units would lower academic standards because they believed such endeavors lacked intellectual substance.

—Hine (2001, p. 51)

Professor Darlene Clark Hine, a pioneer in African American and Women's studies, alluded to the origin of Black studies and struggle for its acceptance by White administrators. This scenario has largely continued from the early 1970s to the present, which begs the question: Who has the power to define what is intellectual substance? It is suggestive that to grapple with any idea and practice of Black empowerment in the mainstream U.S. university system is also to comprehend the struggle to establish Black studies as a viable, dynamic, and worthwhile body of knowledge—for all students (Painter, 2000).

Yet, paradoxically, there should be no case to answer when it comes to defending Black studies in the United States. The recent swell in scholarly activity concerned with the subject matter, including theory and method, of African-descended peoples ought to be more than sufficient evidence of growth and discussion in the field from the 1960s era up to the present (e.g., Asante & Karenga, 2006; Asante & Mazama, 2005; Bankole, 2004; Bobo, Hudley, & Michel, 2004; Christian, 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006; Conyers, 1997, 2003; Karenga, 1982, 1993, 2002; Marable, 2000; Norment, 2001; Stewart, 2004, 2006).

Unfortunately, a concomitant feature with the growth in scholarly output has been the need to constantly validate its existence (Painter, 2000). In this sense it is important to note the perspective of Donald Henderson (2001), who is correct when he states, "Black studies is as worthy and legitimate an intellectual and academic undertaking as any endeavor presently being carried out in the university" (p. 93). Regardless of this fact, the stereotypes tend to continue to have a negative impact on how the Black studies field is broadly perceived. Indeed, as the sociologist W. I. Thomas famously revealed, if people define a situation as real, it is real in its social consequences. Hence, if administrators unfamiliar with the philosophy and practice of Black studies believe that the field is unworthy of support and consideration, this will probably unfavorably affect the field in terms of decisions made to empower its presence on campus.

One must necessarily be careful about suggesting that all administrators have been in cahoots to bring down Black studies programs and departments. This is not the case, and some universities have

given great support to their Black studies programs. Professor Hine (2001) has contended that since the late 1980s there is now a greater pool of qualified Black studies scholars, women and men, educated in the field who are

willing, indeed anxious, to head and/or work in black studies. No longer do administrators have to rely on the local minister or community activist to oversee and teach black studies. If they are willing to put up the money, administrators can recruit productive black scholars. (pp. 51-52)

The problem for many universities in the 2000s, however, is that there is now an increasing lack of funds, and the willingness to support Black studies is less evident than it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In short, Black studies as a discipline is at the caprice of administrators who may or may not support it in their universities. This scenario creates an unnecessary burden on those Black scholars who are determined to establish and stabilize it in the university system. In the age of "diversity," one would think that Black studies would be a central component for all universities; it certainly should be.

This article will focus on five key areas regarding the state of Black studies as it moves ever closer to its 40th anniversary as an institutionalized body of knowledge, based in departments and programs across the United States. The areas that will be covered are (a) longevity of the field, (b) growth and scope of scholarship, (c) who should teach in Black studies programs and departments, (d) opportunists in the field of Black studies, and finally, (e) administrative obstacles facing its future.

THE LONGEVITY OF BLACK STUDIES

Considering the fact that there has been no easy ride for the institutionalization of Black studies, it is a feat per se that departments and programs have survived for so long. Indeed, it cannot be denied that the field of Black studies has the mark of longevity, yet anyone who cares to follow its path can comprehend its position in the U.S. academy as most often being akin to the unwanted

stepchild. Nevertheless, the child has grown up and can now hold its own among the BA, MA, and PhD liberal arts offerings, although the skeptics will no doubt point to there only being a few institutions that can offer the MA and PhD degrees. In response, one could argue that the precedent has been set and there now needs to be widespread support that will extend offerings, yet this will only come with greater resource allocation (Painter, 2000).

Regardless of the problems with a lack of resources given to Black studies departments and programs, there has continued to be a steady growth in the field (Painter, 2000, p. B7). The advance in the field can be attested via perusing three editions of the *Introduction to Black Studies*, written by the preeminent Black studies scholar Maulana Karenga (1982, 1993, 2002). Indeed, each edition has grown in depth, breadth, and quality in a 20-year span. Very few commentators speak about this aspect of longevity in Black studies. Instead, there is a rather negative outlook, always looking at the glass as if it is half empty as opposed to it being positively half full. Black studies as a field has experienced much growth, and this can be viewed by a plethora of scholarship.

GROWTH AND SCOPE OF SCHOLARSHIP IN BLACK STUDIES

One should always keep in mind that Black studies emerged in the U.S. university system at a time of major social upheaval. The struggle for civil and human rights in the broader society was depicted in the fight for Black studies (Karenga, 2002). Myers (2001) puts the student protest for Black studies in perspective:

In many ways the ultimate aim of the demands of students in the 60's was for a means to correct the wrong doing, and gain freedom from the conceptual incarceration imposed by the hegemonous Eurocentric world view which had for so long dominated and oppressed the minds of people acknowledging African descent through an insidious intellectual imperialism and scientific colonialism. (p. 296)

Myers (2001) alludes to the outset of conceptual struggle for definition in Black studies scholarship. Scholars in the field would need to develop concepts independent of those that had "incarcerated" the minds of many students previously. In a real sense, there required a body of work that could speak to peoples of African descent without the ghost of Eurocentric knowledge impeding ways of thinking. Myers (2001) goes on to explain the intellectual dilemma facing Black studies scholars:

Black Studies in contemporary times has been forced to develop its competing paradigm within the context and confines of the world view dominant in the Western academy. The segmented or fragmented nature of that world view . . . predisposed the structure of academic disciplines to synchronic approach. A major issue which Black Studies has had to address is that of trying to fit round pegs in square holes, or facing the challenge of attempting to create new room for itself in a closed system. (p. 296)

The outcome of Myers's analysis is to suggest that Black studies may not be congruent to the Western framework for acquiring and disseminating knowledge. Circular and often holistic, Black studies scholarship has had to fit itself into a "square peg" or linear framework. This conflict is at the heart of the contemporary struggle to find definition and purpose in the field (Asante & Karenga, 2006). Grappling with definitions, purpose, terminology, and practice will no doubt be at the heart of Black studies scholarship for the foreseeable future. It is actually positive and worthy to have reflection regarding matters of "disciplinary position" and originality of thought in Black studies (Asante, 2006).

How Black studies scholars contend with this paradox of trying to fit into a square peg will be an important aspect in the future development of the field. In terms of originality and consistency of purpose, there is arguably no contemporary African scholar who can surpass the work of Professor Molefi K. Asante. In terms of his theoretical underpinnings regarding the concept of Afrocentricity, he has been at the forefront in developing the field of Black studies for as long as it has been in existence. In regard to the notion of what one could deem "intellectual independence," Asante (2006) maintains:

The Afrocentric idea is about location. Because Africans have been moved off of our own cultural and historical terms, decentered by the conditions of oppression, it is important that any assessment of the African condition or analysis of African phenomena be made Afrocentrically. We begin with the view that *Afrocentricity is a quality of thought, perspective, and practice that perceives Africans as subjects and agents of phenomena in the context of human experience*. All definitions of Afrocentricity carry with them the idea of centrality of the African experience and the idea of agency. (p. 152)

Black studies scholarship has grown tremendously with the development of the Afrocentric- or African-centered perspective. Although critics often decry its relevance to knowledge (Howe, 1998), very few would deny that African-centered thought has been at the forefront of debates and discussions in Black studies for more than a decade. The need for African agency is as important now as it was almost 40 years ago when the discipline originated. Today, there are few scholars who do not know something about Afrocentric thinking, whether it is superficial or in depth. This fact is often overlooked, but to comprehend it is to acknowledge growth in the field.

Arguably, the most significant development in Black studies has been the proliferation of Africana womanist perspectives. The works of Delores P. Aldridge, Darlene Clark Hine, Clenora Hudson-Weems, and others have been crucial to the development of Black women's studies, especially through the 1980s to 2000s (Karenga, 2002). Aldridge (2006) is correct when she states that women perspectives in Black studies (in her case Africana studies) should have a central role in the development of the field. She maintains,

It is important that women be placed at the center of the discipline of Africana Studies as in every aspect of life. They constitute more than half of the population of this country [United States], and this representation should be reflective in all aspects of the academy. . . . Although women know this and now demand their rightful place everywhere, some men also recognize the relevance of women to the full development of any enterprise and encourage their centralization. (p. 51)

Aldridge continues,

Black women's contributions to and voices in education have challenged old perspectives and added bold new ones in the academy. This thrust is particularly relevant to the development of Black/Africana Studies With this growing number of Africana women scholars and an apparent increasing interest in them, publishing appears somewhat less difficult than a decade ago. Thus, in spite of obstacles pertaining to the relevance and seriousness of Africana women issues, there has been considerable scholarship over the last two or three decades. (p. 55)

There has indeed been a distinct productivity in Africana womanist perspectives. I have considered the work of Hudson-Weems elsewhere (see Christian, 2006), but suffice it to state that the future of Black studies scholarship is inextricably tied to the breadth and depth of women's approaches. There can be no future in Black studies without the centrality of women at the intellectual forefront. The days of Black patriarchy are thankfully numbered. It is a bygone era, and this can only mean good for the Black studies field. This is not to suggest that the struggle against sexism and racism toward Black women is over—not at all. The academy has been informed of both the promises and perils faced by Black women in higher education (Benjamin, 1997; Etter-Lewis, 1997). However, as Black women relate to Black studies scholarship, their contribution during the past 20 years has been a powerful testimony to the growth and potential in the field (Aldridge, 2006).

Overall, there has been a consistent development in Black studies scholarship since the inception of departments and programs in the U.S. academy. However, much of this scholarship still has to be fully recognized, appreciated, and interacted with by those who occupy themselves within the mainstream or traditional disciplines. Black studies scholarship, just as people of African heritage, continues to be affronted by a delusion of Eurocentric intellectual supremacy, even though we see signs of its demise (Asante, 1999). What is required for the next two decades is for this denial by the so-called mainstream to abate; it needs to openly embrace Black studies for the good of academic pursuit and criticism. But it should always be constructive critique and not the shallow or skewed variety that

emanates from some Eurocentric-minded scholars (Howe, 1998; Lefkowitz, 1996).

WHO SHOULD TEACH BLACK STUDIES?

Who should teach Black studies? This is a complex question that needs careful consideration. It is certainly not a simple, pardon the pun, "Black and White" issue. The best way to explain the complexity is to consider the question: Who should teach women's studies? It is an odds-on certainty that the majority of professors in women's studies are women, as the majority will be of African descent in Black studies. This is not to suggest that men could not teach in women's studies and that White professors could not teach in Black studies. Indeed, it is with academic confidence to state, for example, that the works of Basil Davidson, Andrew Hacker, Tim Wise, or Joe Feagin (all White men) would be far more appreciated in Black studies than those of, for instance, Thomas Sowell, Stanley Crouch, or Shelby Steele (all of Black or *Negro* descent, to use Crouch's preferred term, origin).

The most important aspect of one's credentials to teach in Black studies ideally would be in regard to one's orientation to the data. In other words, how does she or he position herself or himself in terms of a Black perspective? Does the pedagogy empower Black history and culture? Who does the work ultimately benefit? These are more important than the color of the professor's skin. However, this is not to suggest that the racialized body has no significance in the classroom setting; it does. Each professor carries some form of baggage when entering a room to teach a group of students. The Black studies scholar ought to be aware that the phenotype is a marker that has to be explained to the students if one is to have a productive teaching environment in Black studies.

Back to women's studies. If I as a Black male were to teach a course on Black women's perspectives, it would be appropriate for me to explain my limitations as a male in terms of teaching or empathizing with the nuances of Africana womanhood. However, when teaching Africana womanism, I would refer to the works of

women scholars more readily and explain to students that my role is to merely pass on the concepts and perspectives, and I would not claim authority or authenticity in this subject matter. In this sense it would be fair to expect Davidson to also explain his White privilege before undertaking an examination of Africa via his works in a given Black studies classroom setting. In short, the Black studies scholar should have knowledge that no classroom setting is value free for the professor. It is about orientation to the data that makes the scholar acceptable to African people's empowerment in the learning process (Asante, 1994, p. 3). It is also about being honest about one's values and personal baggage.

OPPORTUNISTS IN THE FIELD OF BLACK STUDIES

Rather than the issue of who should teach Black studies, a more pressing problem relates to opportunists who do not have a stake in the field, only self-interest. This is a worrying trend in our contemporary times, and any discussion on the state of Black studies ought to consider this as an important issue. Indeed, many of the departments and programs have gatekeepers who are making the survival of Black studies an uphill struggle.

Very little contemporary research has been conducted into the problem of opportunists in the field of Black studies. However, it is a serious threat to its development, and there should be a concerted effort toward grappling with this particular negativity. What is opportunism in Black studies? The question relates fundamentally to those persons in the field who have no genuine connection to the philosophy and practice that brought about Black studies in the turbulent 1960s, which was led by student protest for Black history and culture to be taught in the universities of North America.

In the second edition of Karenga's (1993) *Introduction to Black Studies*, he alludes to this type of Black studies scholar in the field: "They entered Black Studies not because they believed in its principles or supported its academic or political objectives, but simply because of its personal benefit to them" (p. 480). He goes on to state that many of the opportunists made their way into Black studies because they could not get into the traditional or mainstream

fields because of institutional racism. It is ironic that many of these opportunists have actually earned a living from the struggle of Blacks committed to the development of the field yet have never had an attachment to its struggle for academic excellence and social responsibility. Rather, they have been either directly or indirectly instrumental in denying its growth and development.

It would be difficult to find this preponderance of opportunism in another field of study. For instance, would it be possible for a person with a degree in sociology to teach in an English department? Would it be possible for someone with a degree in psychology to teach in a department of history? No, most probably not. Yet regardless of the fact that one can attain BA, MA, or PhD degrees in African American or Black studies, we still have almost anyone in the social sciences and humanities allowed to teach or affiliate themselves with Black studies. All they need is to have a "Black topic" in their academic profile, and that usually secures them the right to teach a Black studies course. It is quite astonishing when you think about it in an intellectual sense that this can occur in contemporary times. I fully understand the argument that before the 1980s there were very few colleges and universities offering the MA or PhD degrees in Black studies, but this is no longer the case. Therefore, we have had at least a quarter of a century time span whereby one can get qualified in the field. There are few excuses not to get qualified, and those who are should have the opportunity to secure employment in the field over those who do not carry direct qualifications attained from either departments or programs.

This particular problem is deeper than what can be referred to here, and more research into this issue is necessary to estimate the extent of opportunism in the field. It should be more basic to know who has a right, qualifications wise, and a genuine commitment to the field. The National Council of Black Studies and the other major Black professional academic organizations ought to develop a strategy for eliminating opportunists from teaching Black studies. Right now it could be argued that they hold positions as chairs of Black studies departments, and search committees, across the breadth of the United States, policing the field. Moreover, if this continues, then it will probably mean the inevitable demise of

Black studies. There needs to be more discussion on this issue via conferences and seminars.

Black studies currently commands international status whereby the scope and range of studies and expertise in the field is burgeoning each decade (Painter, 2000, p. B7). However, like any other academic enterprise in the university system, there needs to be an organizational framework that discusses the intellectual foundations and development of the paradigm. Without being facetious, one could conservatively estimate that if a pop quiz were to be administered on the origins and philosophy of Black studies to a third, at least, of the current chairs or directors of programs, they would miserably fail. Moreover, even fewer would answer yes to having attended an annual National Council for Black Studies conference. This is a serious situation that demands attention and action.

THE BLACK STUDIES SCHOLAR: ANECDOTES TO PHENOMENA

Professor Nell Irvin Painter, a distinguished scholar of Black studies and history formerly based at Princeton, wrote an interesting article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* explaining her experience and views on the field. Among other things, she pointed out how difficult it is for Black studies scholars to survive in higher education. According to Painter (2000), there has been a constant struggle to both establish and gain intellectual credibility for the Black studies departments and programs. As she maintained,

Both black studies and black faculty members, often seen in countless academic minds as kindred phenomena, still face familiar frustrations. For the widespread American assumption that black people are not intellectual affects everyone in higher education who is black or who does black studies. (p. B8)

Regardless of the extraordinary intellectual growth in a generation of Black studies that has produced mountains of interdisciplinary work, Painter argues forcefully that its scholars have unduly suffered in the U.S. higher education system. For her, it has been a constant battle to gain every modicum of professional advancement,

and by and large this continues to be the scenario at most universities. Painter goes on to discuss how over the years her vast experience in the academy and association with Black studies has yielded many insights into the day-to-day experiences of her colleagues across the country: "One by one, they have offered their confidences." When she reflects on all of these interactions with colleagues over the years she states,

Taken together, a multitude of anecdotes reveals the existence of phenomena—phenomena, not just chance occurrences. The first belies the existence of color-coded allies and enemies. Evidence from across the nation shows that both support and problems for black faculty and black studies can come from people of all racial and ethnic identities. (p. B9)

The experience of Black studies scholars across the United States in departments and programs has to my knowledge not been fully or systematically grappled with in a formal study. This is why Painter's (2000) insight is both informative and timely. Although I only have just more than 13 years of teaching experience in the field of Black studies, in the United Kingdom and United States, what Painter alludes to is something relevant to my professional experience in higher education (I have argued elsewhere that Britain is far worse than the United States in terms of professional growth as a Black studies scholar; see Christian, 2001, 2005). However, our individual professional experiences of slights and discrimination in academia do not provide much evidence alone. But, as Painter maintains, when we put all the anecdotes together, there emerges a consistency of experience, or "phenomena," as she puts it. Indeed, "we can't be crazy" or "paranoid" or "over-sensitive" when we view our interaction in Black studies and the U.S. academy as a collective experience.

Painter (2000) goes on to refer to the negative labels many of us face in our day-to-day lives in predominately White higher educational settings. Whereby there is heightened scrutiny in career advancement, one encounters White colleagues with lesser qualifications and less productivity gaining promotion, whereas each step up the ladder for Black studies faculty is arduous, time consuming, and mentally draining. An underlying interaction

with administrators exists that endures constantly having to prove our competence at every turn and often to mediocre counterparts. Painter eloquently but probably too "objectively" suggests that the hiring process is rigged with nuances of unfairness:

Vague demurrals may discourage the hiring of faculty members, black or non-black, in black studies, even when the publication record of the person in question obviously merits respect. Black faculty members who have survived long enough—to have become tenured, to have waged battles in professional associations and home institutions, and have published work that others may disagree with—gain reputations by virtue of their longevity. They become targets of vague accusations of being "too political," "hard to get along with," or "difficult," as though each individual faculty member had his or her own peculiar problem, unrelated to the environment. While listing scholars in their field, colleagues may simply forget the existence of even senior black faculty members or assume—without reading it—that their scholarship is "not good enough." (p. B9.)

Reflecting on my time as a Black studies professor, the above citation could be something I would write in my autobiography. Indeed, it is akin to what I and probably many other Black scholars in the field have experienced as academics. What should be done? How can we tackle such phenomena? Not being respected is arguably the one thing that most Black studies scholars have endured in their careers. Another is of being rejected, and the better the Black studies scholar one is, the more rejection one faces. It really is something that is experienced. Painter (2000) is correct in her analysis, and this is unfortunate in many respects.

The issue of being invisible is common among colleagues in Black studies, especially those who have published many works and have an accomplished record in the field. It is an irony, as the scholar is usually invisible in her or his home institution yet prominent to the external world. Painter (2000) has described the phenomena "as variant on the prophet ignored in his own country. The black scholar at a distance gets held up as an intellectual paragon" (p. B9). However, at one's home institution, the experience of invisibility takes its toll, and the Black studies scholar who is externally successful has to comprehend the deeply ingrained racist foibles of

this paradox or go insane. Without recognizing the existence of one's invisibility, it could have a devastating effect on one's professional ego. Indeed, Painter's perspective is more than insightful; it is actually therapeutic to the Black studies scholar.

Black studies scholars witness and become perceptive to the unintentional consequences of White privilege. However, the idea of most non-Black faculty and administrators being racist does not stand up in liberal arts colleges and universities. It is not useful to call everything "racist" that goes against Black studies scholars. Instead, it may be more logical to call it "acts of White Privilege that may have unintentional or intentional racist outcomes" that can often lead to the marginalization of Black studies scholars. The majority of my Black studies colleagues, external to my home institution, have revealed their anecdotal evidence of being overlooked for promotion or having been denied tenure or having been scapegoated for a decline in Black studies minors or seniors. The list goes on.

One example from a colleague doing very well at a predominately White university on the east coast related to her being harassed by the hierarchy for supposedly being connected to the Afrocentric school of thought. Because her teaching evaluations, research publications, and service to the university were impeccable, they could not deny her promotion and tenure. However, the administration still made her professional life miserable by relocating her from a spacious and roomy office to one half its size and in a less favorable building in terms of quality and atmosphere. This kind of pettiness forms the insidious way in which discrimination often operates now. One cannot easily find it to be outward, institutionalized racism. Moreover, although this is mere anecdotal evidence, it could have come right out of Painter's (2000) assessment of her 30-year feedback from Black studies colleagues around the country. More concrete examples of professional harassment toward Black studies scholars could be revealed here, but space does not permit.

Instead, it is appropriate to share a statement-poem entitled "21st Century Insidious Racists" (Christian, 2004a). This was dedicated to the renowned civil and human rights activist Julian Bond on his visit to give a keynote address on "Civil Rights, Then and Now" at Miami University in Ohio (February 25, 2004). The statement-poem drew

from the anecdotal utterances and experience of people of color in the academy, along with various speeches Julian Bond had given over the years stating that racism had become far more subtle and insidious, somewhat less obvious, in contemporary times:

They say it is hard to detect the racists of the 21st Century
Some even say racism is dead when it serves a "white" purpose
Others more in tune with the reality of everyday racism state that one can detect the insidious racists as they have certain traits, for instance:

The insidious racists smile like "Cheshire Cats" but bite like Tigers

They are most often supreme manipulators in maintaining power and dominance

Whereas Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his followers advocated "racial justice, economic equality, and world peace," the insidious racists advocate "racial just-us, economic exclusivity, and world domination"

The insidious racists can be subtle in their collective schemes

They befriend people of color in victim-hood, but deny them self-empowerment

They abound in all circles of society: education, law, politics, media, sport, and health

They may march on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

They may even buy the occasional Black Heritage stamp

In the workplace they will encourage "diversity" as long as it remains within a hierarchical framework that maintains the dominant status quo

They will hire people of color, but undermine their every potential advancement

If the person of color assimilates she may find success among the insidious racists, but always at a cost to her cultural expression and creativity

The insidious racists look for human weaknesses in the person of color

Will constantly conspire behind the back of the person of color

Smiling like the Cheshire Cat, but biting like the Tiger

In the 21st century, insidious racists are among us:

HERE, THERE and EVERYWHERE

In line with Painter (2000), it is important to state that probably many faculty-based readers of this article, and those from varied social backgrounds or “minority” identity groups, may well have faced similar experiences of isolation and/or discrimination in their academic endeavors. However, in agreement with Painter (2000, p. B9), the academy differs for people of color, and Black studies scholars particularly, compared to those persons racialized as being of a White ethnic background. Even progressive Whites fall prey to the delusions of White supremacy, even though they would no doubt consider themselves nonracist in attitude and practice (Feagin & Vera, 2002).

White privilege is conferred, and it has a life of its own; indeed, a White faculty member could not divest her or his self of it whether she or he wanted to or not (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Rothenberg, 2002). It is an advantage that is bound up in historical and contemporary racialized hierarchy, as Whiteness is privileged over any other labeled human entity. The reality of White privilege is becoming more evident with the increasing attention paid to it by White progressive scholars. Beverly Tatum (2002) is correct when she argues for the need to “break the silence” over speaking about White racism and its concomitant ally: White privilege. Indeed, it is a phenomenon that abounds in every nook and cranny of academia. Therefore, it is a logical assumption that White privilege affects the everyday experiences of Black studies scholars, especially those working in predominately White universities.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPEDIMENTS TO BLACK STUDIES

Looking at racism in colleges and universities in a broad sense, Feagin (2002) makes a strong plea for a greater and more systematic assault on dismantling racialized barriers in higher education. He writes,

Today, we need progressive and proactive leadership at all levels inside and outside academia to deal aggressively with racial barriers that continue to exist at many historically white colleges and universities. Some college presidents and other senior educators

have taken up the leadership mantle on these matters. But more bold and innovative leaders are required to ensure that college settings are truly hospitable for and supportive of students, faculty and staff from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. These leaders need to hear and take very seriously the voices of the students and faculty of color on our campuses. All college and university campuses have such students and faculty, and they can serve as major resources for administrators and faculty seeking to learn the realities of, and solutions to, campus racial barriers. (pp. 3-4)

Feagin (2002) speaks to the macro experience of persons of color in higher education in regard to the continued significance of racism. One must consider this question: If it is bad for the average person of color who may not readily be associated with Black studies, what is racism like for those faculty and students connected to the field? Indeed, administrators at all levels at colleges and universities for the most part tend to be of White ethnic background.

In terms of the hiring of Black studies faculty, often this involves having White male administrators heading up the search committees and having the final say on who is hired or fired for a Black studies department or program. Ultimately, most of the decision making comes from the dean of the college of arts and science. Those Black faculty involved in shaping the outcome of searches have little or no power because of numerical disadvantage in terms of complex power relations. This is crucial in comprehending the powerlessness faced by the majority of Black studies departments and programs. They are not only, according to Feagin (2002), functioning in a racist environment *per se* but have the added problem of being harassed as Black studies scholars, whether it be by outward racism or unsupportive administrators (Painter, 2000).

Apart from dealing with the everyday realities of institutionalized racism and White privilege, Black studies programs by and large lack resources. The combination of this two-pronged assault is that there is always a threat to the stability of the departments and programs. Administrators play a crucial role in supporting Black studies, and if a particular program lacks dynamism, then it is likely because of a distinct lack of support emanating from the university administration. In the 21st century, it is time to make

administrators accountable also for any of the deficiencies to be found in Black studies programs and departments.

Support ought to be defined in a number of ways: (a) by allowing intellectual autonomy and diversity to develop; (b) by adequately funding the program or department; (c) by hiring faculty who have a record of achievement in the field of Black studies and not allowing “outsiders” to proliferate and dilute the intellectual output from an African or Black perspective; (d) by only putting forward those with knowledge of the field to head-up search committees for hiring and/or promoting Black studies scholars; (e) by a greater effort by the university administration to not allow stereotypes about Black studies to be disseminated by faculty external to the departments and programs; and (f) by creating ample opportunities for collaboration and a healthy intellectual exchange of ideas between the traditional disciplines and Black studies.

This list for administrative support for Black studies faculty is not exhaustive; it is just a beginning that could greatly improve the status and professional development of Black studies in colleges and universities. In reading the literature and adding to my personal experience in the field, to date there is much that university administrators could do to improve the lot of Black studies departments and programs.

CONCLUSION

What is most exciting about Black studies is that regardless of the many problems faced by its advocates, it simply, in Black parlance, “keeps on keepin’ on.” To put it another way, as a body of knowledge, it has grown during almost four decades of being established in the college and university system to become a very dynamic field that encompasses a Pan-African perspective (Asante & Karenga, 2006, p. x). This in and of itself is a clear sign that Black studies remains an important and expanding field of study.

There are, of course, the problems that persist in undermining the field. Most of these can be summed up as having a relationship

with the agents of the dominant European intellectual and cultural hegemony that continues to thwart its productive existence in the academy. Nevertheless, there have been great advances in the output of scholarship in the field that denies any notion of a crisis in Black studies. Rather, there is now going to be a need for many more conferences that will consider the old and emerging perspectives in the field. This can only be positive for the future of Black studies.

Again and again there have been insidious attempts by those who have little interest in Black studies to emasculate its development. Ultimately, it is the administrators in colleges and universities who are responsible, in the main, for the growth or demise of Black studies. If there is not a concerted effort to root out those who have no genuine attachment to Black studies, then the future will remain to be one of struggle for its advocates.

In regard to first-hand experience of Black studies scholars, there needs to be more research into what is actually happening around the country for individuals in terms of their interaction and professional well-being within specific universities. As Painter (2000) has implied, there is a plethora of anecdotal evidence that points to the phenomena of insidious discrimination being waged against Black studies and its supporters. What is needed is more systemic evidence of this via a nationwide research project. However, any study that is carried out ought to be administered and led by the National Council of Black Studies, the field's main professional organization.

In echoing the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the eve of his assassination, April 3, 1968, and at the outset of the birth of Black studies, it is important to foster the value that "longevity has its place." In this sense, there should be open dialogue between scholars in the field and the specific schools of thought. This exchange among Black studies scholars ought to be mutually rewarding and free from negativity and personalized backbiting. Unfortunately, too often the important task in developing the field is lost to the conflict between supposedly competing schools of thought. Instead, there ought to be more emphasis on what has been achieved collectively by all, and much has been achieved in the struggle to have Black perspectives heard, studied, and discussed in

the academy. To disagree is normal in the academic world, but let us disagree without being too disagreeable in the process of intellectual exchange.

Overall, it has been contended that Black studies is a body of knowledge that should be acknowledged for the many contributions to the life of the university. Regardless of the lack of support and recognition in some universities, it is still likely to persist in providing both unique, innovative teaching and scholarship in higher education. In point of fact, this successful journal alone vindicates the field as a bona fide academic enterprise. Indeed, the scholarship being produced presently, under rather harsh circumstances, endorses the fact that with greater backing from administrators Black studies would make an even greater contribution for many decades to come. Crucially, Black studies provides a body of knowledge that is open to all students who have an interest in gaining an epistemological insight into a variety of intellectual schools of thought. In this sense, with the emphasis on African agency in all endeavors, there is focus on comprehending the unfolding historical and contemporary experiences regarding peoples of African heritage, on the continent of Africa and its diaspora.

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