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Epilogue

We are approaching the end of the founding generation of Black Studies in the 1960s, as people go into retirement and make their life transitions. We need a comprehensive history to hand off to the coming generations, with as many lessons as possible that we can get from our historical experience. This study contributes to the filling of this need. It is a start.

The most basic question is still asked: what is Black Studies? Many studies assume that what something is called is the key to what it is. But there is that old saying about a rose being what it is, no matter what one calls it. I suppose that I feel the same way about Black Studies—it is what it is, no matter what one calls it. Black Studies is the study of the Black experience tied to the intellectual refutation of racism and the advocacy for improvement in the lives of Black people. It is study, pedagogy, and knowledge for change. We captured this position in the main mission of Black Studies adopted by the National Council for Black Studies: Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility.

In two volumes, we have tried to be as comprehensive as possible in discussing Black Studies in six main ways: as intellectual history, social movement, academic profession, studies about the future of Black people, Diaspora Studies, and as knowledge networks. These manifestations reflect study to gain new knowledge, the organization of teaching materials, cultural performance, and protest advocacy. Each manifestation has a record and has been researched, but has never before been brought together as part of a Black Studies history. We want to be respectful of all these manifestations and not succumb to the notion that knowledge production belongs only to institutions of higher education.

There are two main concerns for this history: knowledge production and supporting Black people's struggle for a better life. This has required the people whom the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci calls:

the "organic" intellectuals, the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental social class. These organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong.

(Gramsci 1999, 131)

My intention in connecting these two concerns is to return to the basic experience of the 1960s, linking Black Studies back to its origin as part of the Black liberation movement. When we examine the Black intellectual history of the HBCUs and the insurgent institutions in the Black community and its movements, we find this connection as well. Reason has always required resistance by the oppressed. It makes sense.

As a member of the founding generation, I have concerns about the state of Black Studies today, but I am keenly aware that these concerns have to be contextualized in the current economic, social, and political situation we face.

Marx and Engels point to our fundamental economic situation in *Preface to a Critique of Political Economy*:

The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.

At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters.

Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.

(Marx and Engels 1969, 503)

The technological revolution has disrupted the economic foundation of class relations, and raised even more profoundly than ever the question: "Who needs the Negro?" Willhelm (1971) and Yette (1972) raised this question in the 1970s, but it is now more urgent than ever. What was then a choice, whether to continue to employ the masses of workers both Black and white, is now a question being answered by labor-replacing technology. The capitalists are planning an economy without workers. Robots and other smart machines, for example, driverless cars, have become a permanent part of economic development all over the world.

Given this decline in the demand for Black labor, mass education has been declining as well. Now there is a great polarity developing. Higher

education, especially in engineering and computer science, is now being transformed toward the new economy. Public schools do not work like they used to, when they were training workers for the old industrial economy. Cities that were once the prosperous communities of industrial works are pockmarked with vacant lots, Single Room Occupancy hotels, and food deserts. Police killings of unemployed youth are at record levels, with few if any prosecutions or convictions of any wrongdoing.

On the other hand, a new professional class of Black Studies academics has been developed, based on the struggles against institutional racism and the battle of ideas to legitimate Black intellectual history. The crisis is the contradiction between careerism and commitment to academic excellence and social responsibility. As the class polarity increases, this contradiction will expose a fault line in Black Studies. Will there continue to be a betrayal, about which Houston Baker (2010) has written so eloquently? He uses Martin Luther King as a standard to judge the current public intellectuals:

My hypothesis is that post-Civil Rights era black public intellectuals have been far more interested in serving as self-promoters than as thinkers committed to black majority interests. Much of what they have proclaimed, postulated, and published of their personal deliberations on the great problem of race, particularly race in the contemporary United States, has been profitably tailored to the tastes of conservative black and white audiences.

(Baker 2010, 15)

Baker deals with nationally popular neoconservatives, but his point applies to a much wider portion of Black academics, including those who are foul-weather friends of the community and the movement. The critical issue is about using the money and resources of the campus, often the most resource-rich institution to which Black people have any access in any given community.

On the other hand, there is much to celebrate and support. Black Studies is a permanent part of higher education, including doctoral-degree granting programs. Rational reflection on the Black experience and the corresponding cultural celebration impact the vast majority of students and faculty at all levels, from kindergarten to twelfth grade and on into undergraduate- and graduate-level programs. We present to the reader this reflection on the future to help them stay on the path covered

by those who have come before us. We study this history so we can repeat it, not as it was, but as it can be in the new times in which we live.

We have been presenting an analysis of the future of Black Studies. There is an old saying: if you don't know where you are going any road can take you there. So while it is critical to have historical understanding, it is our responsibility to develop a collective agreement on a path into the future toward a goal. The main goal that has had a central position guiding the motion of Black history has been freedom. In the most abstract sense, freedom has been on the one hand the end of oppression and exploitation, and on the other the social, political, and economic conditions facilitating the full development of one's human potential via education and culture. So Black Studies has a purpose—it is not neutral and without a value orientation.

We have discussed the future of Black Studies in three main ways, and out of these analyzes we can draw three main lessons.

1. The future we need must be fought for, can only come about through struggle. This means that Black Studies is part of the battle of ideas, against racism, about the freedom struggle, and for the reorganization of society to facilitate the realization of freedom. We need the fullness of our imagination grounded in the motion of the masses of Black people to do what must be done.
2. The world has now become one arena for politics, so while Black Studies must maintain its foundation in the African-American experience, it is essential that our research and teaching embrace Africa and the African Diaspora in a global historical context. This includes monitoring how Black Studies is being researched and taught in countries all over the world.
- 3 These two goals on the march to freedom can be achieved with the tools of digital technology. Black Studies can become eBlack Studies by continuing the process of utilizing the tools of digital technology.

This is the most progressive future for Black Studies, but of course this will by itself not be enough to change society. On an academic level, this will have to also be embraced by other academic disciplines, all the diverse ethnic studies programs as well as labor and working-class studies. But in the end this is only an intervention at the level of consciousness, theory, and moral beliefs. The connection has to be with social motion.

We must remember the profound insight from Karl Marx: “Material force can only be overthrown by material force, but theory itself becomes a material force when it has seized the masses” (Marx 1843). This truth requires that Black Studies return to its origin as a tool of the Black liberation movement. So, my final comment on the future of Black Studies is summed up in the slogan I created for NCBS, “Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility.” Our future is on campus with academic excellence, and in the movements for justice, social responsibility. I call on the rising generation of Black Studies scholar-activists to take up the baton and carry on to create the future we need.

