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# Conclusion

## Next Steps in Africana Studies: Beyond the Twenty-First Century

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### *Returning to the Question of Graduate Training and the Comprehensive Exam*

In fall 2005, during my early years as a faculty member at the University of Florida, one of my students expressed interest in pursuing a PhD in African American Studies. Though I knew all of the programs, I did not have enough information on the major differences to offer her data substantial enough to weigh her decision towards a particular program. I surveyed the six stand-alone PhD programs in existence at the time and, by publishing the findings in the *Griot* (Evans 2006a), began a dialogue explicitly about graduate training between programs — one that sought to include department administrators, faculty, and graduate students alike. This effort, simultaneous with Mark Christian's look forward at the development of the field in his *Journal of Black Studies* (*JBS*) article (Christian 2006b), resulted in two conference panels and this special issue of the *Western Journal of Black Studies* (*WJBS*). As this discussion moves forward, it is imperative to consult these two original documents, which together contrast the graduate training in the field/discipline and represent a bridge in communication between disparate approaches to our work.

Without a solid understanding of the curriculum—and, more significantly, the content and method of testing—graduate programs will not clearly understand their individual contributions and their responsibility to train students within a collective context. The comprehensive examination uniquely exposes where the agenda of a program lies. The singular concern, “What is on the test?” reveals what faculty and department administrators value. Institutions that seek to develop doctoral programs in Africana Studies would do well to revisit my *Griot* article to understand the differing approaches to testing students and should revisit Christian's *JBS* article to ask hard questions about motive, intent, means, and implementation: The question of opportunism is an important one and applies to faculty and graduate students alike. Scholars who create new

directions in the field can learn more about the origins of graduate studies and current practices to determine best practices and meaningful patterns.

In addition to the two original articles in the *JBS* and *Griot* journals, administrators, faculty, staff, and graduate students can now use this *WJBS* issue as an entry point into the discussion of how older programs must grow and how new programs should be formed. The contributors to this work have provided concrete talking points around which students, advisors, faculty, and department chairs can gather to move our collective Africana effort forward with a reverent eye toward the long history of Black struggle for freedom, equality, equity, and justice. In the current political climate, our collective critique is uniquely relevant to the development of democracy in this country. It would be a pity if we should squander this valuable and unprecedented time arguing with each other. This volume provides an alternative paradigm of collaboration, and although marred in its own shortcomings of process, it is an important start of holding all doctorate programs—specially those in elite institutions—accountable for joining this discussion.

### *Value of this Special Issue*

This collection, taken together, represents a significant first step at true disciplinary collaboration. Though there is clearly vast disagreement of language and definition, programmatic focus, graduate student experience, and varying approaches of theory, method, and application, this work *is* Africana Studies. To be sure, some folks, for various reasons, have chosen not to participate in this published discussion; however, those who do not join the discussion will be left behind as Africana Studies graduates determine for themselves whose ideas they will follow, implement, build upon, and institutionalize. As a solid step toward dialogue between faculty and graduate students, this volume offers much for established and new doctoral programs to consider. Asante's

beginning article is fitting because of his tireless effort to advance knowledge production in Africana Studies. That he seeks to put scholars like himself (those trained in mainstream disciplines) out of business is not to be taken lightly. His call for disciplinary clarity, faculty recruitment only from doctoral programs, and organic theory building are essential. The idea that Africana Studies represents a fall-back plan for those who could not cut it in mainstream disciplines is false and must be proven so by rejecting those who do not seek to learn about the origins of the discipline and support its original tenants of community activism and reciprocity. Mazama's continued focus on naming highlights that different program and epistemological approaches are not merely semantics; African American, Black, Africana, Diaspora, and more are deliberate choices and must be appreciated as such, despite disagreement. By embracing discipline or field discourse, scholars advocate for particular positions. However, as demonstrated in Kershaw's conclusion, the reality of limited resources may force Afrocentric scholars to engage interdisciplinary partnerships. The material resources, like the regional histories and institution types, often determine the direction of program growth. Kershaw's spotlight on various publishing outlets also reflects the need to engage Mazama's questions of nomenclature, approach, and application.

The contrast of development between Taylor's detailed description of the University of California-Berkeley's department and Troutman's outlining of Michigan State University's program structure offer rich discussion. On one hand, Taylor demonstrates why it is imperative that department administrators use primary sources to reconstruct their individual histories. In addition, this article raises the issue of regionalism in the context of how Black Studies relates to Ethnic Studies program development on the West Coast. On the other hand, Troutman's article offers a critical structural question about the *applied* aspects of graduate training: A mandatory local and international internship/field work component, in addition to community service-learning courses and community-based research models, raises the question of how experiential education in Africana Studies returns scholars to the origins of protest, activism, "rank and file" knowledge exchanges, and community building collaboration. These issues of training, naming, departmental history, and applied learning are essential for future development. The graduate student perspectives offer additional richness.

Akoma and Johnson call for Black Studies to revisit the roots of service, justice, development, and activ-

ism in institutional development—which ties directly to Christian's critique of those who are "in" Africana Studies but not "of" it. The question of building bridges with disciplines and with local communities enhances our discussion of how we can also build bridges between Africana Studies doctoral programs. In this sense, perhaps faculty and administrators can follow the lead of the Black Graduate Student Collective, highlighted by Phillips. Graduate students have begun a difficult conversation about how the discipline/field should develop; regardless of whether the program administrators or faculty facilitate the process, graduate students will continue to ask questions about identity politics in the corporate academy and the separation of labor in academe; Black Women's Studies; and comparative strengths/challenges of existing doctoral programs that Phillips addresses. Graduate students are comparing notes; it would be wonderful if the existing programs supported these efforts by providing arenas for this rich exchange to continue and to grow. It is clear that graduate students, faculty, and department heads must increase their comparative conversation in order for the discipline of Africana Studies to prosper. Toward that end, I offer a few suggestions to build on the work that Mark Christian and I have started.

### *Community Building in Africana Studies and the Significance of Collaboration*

Through good fortune, I met Mark Christian when he visited the University of Florida for a talk in 2006. After only a few short conversations, it was obvious that we both were invested in the development of Africana Studies. We had publications released at the same time and decided to carry that conversation into conference panels. As he stated in his introduction to this *WJBS* issue, I arranged a panel of Black Studies PhD program chairs and faculty for the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) in fall 2006 and he coordinated a panel of exemplary graduate students from various programs in spring 2007 at National Council of Black Studies (NCBS). For the past two years, Mark and I have been working on this dialogue and though we have been trained in different ways and hold slightly different ideological positions in the discipline, our commitment to open communication and tireless collaboration has been rewarding beyond measure. Together, we have witnessed examples of how communication can make or break professional development relationships and, regardless of the level

of difficulty required, how talks must resume for the advancement of this important work. On a personal note, I have witnessed how ego and hurt feelings carries us away from each other. Despite deep divides that have taken place over the past two years, I hope this volume reminds all, regardless of institution, of the need to move beyond our silos and engage each other in respect, solidarity, and open-mindedness. In 2007, I visited Temple University as the keynote speaker for the 19th Annual African American Graduate Student AYA Spring Conference. I spoke about my experience connecting Africana Studies to community engagement, particularly through the practice of community service-learning. After my talk, Dr. Nathaniel Norment, who I had met at the ASALH conference, firmly but affectionately reminded me that though “community service” was essential to linking universities to local interests, Africana Studies was more about *community building*. This point was well taken and I have added that to my academic advocacy work by recognizing the numerous ways there are to collaborate and connect around an idea, issue, or mission. In addition to community building between academic and local agencies, Africana Studies scholars must actively begin to community build between departments. The programs at Temple University and the University of Massachusetts-Amherst are fundamentally different; however, the collective embrace that greeted me when I spoke at Temple was very familiar to me and must serve as an example to other programs. Though we disagree on language, definition, and approach, we must not let that get in the way of our frank but respectful exchange of ideas and strategies. Though I am not an Afrocentrist, I can appreciate and respect the rigor with which the Temple graduate students (not all of whom embraced Afrocentricity) approached their work.

Without everyone participating in this conversation, we will continue to be defined from the outside. The recent work by Fabio Rojas provides an excellent example. In *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline*, Rojas has produced a work for which all Africana Studies scholars should be grateful—especially because it demonstrates the chasm in philosophical framework, theoretical grounding, and methodological approaches separating traditional disciplines from the academic approach of Africana Studies. Rojas provides a useful description of Black Studies as an “interdiscipline” (pp. 21, 167–69), and he simultaneously demonstrates why a singular disciplinary approach fails to adequately capture Africana Studies endeavors.

From my perspective as an Africana Studies professor, this research has limitations. Significantly, the recent report by Abdul Alkalimat (2007) lists 311 Black Studies programs nationwide that award a B.A., whereas Rojas considers only 120. The difference can be accounted for by the scholars’ sources. Rojas relied on tertiary references, like the College Board record (pp. 169, 266 no. 2), whereas Alkalimat accessed the respective University Board of Regents or institutions directly—state by state (Alkalimat 2007, pp. 4, 7, 9). Therefore, Rojas’s estimate of 855 professors in the field (pp. 182, 235) may bear closer scrutiny, and comparisons with studies such as Alkalimat and Evans’s (2006a) may prove useful.

Rojas’s work also displays a top-down, hierarchical focus on research institutions and a special deference to the “Ivy League.” Rojas buys into “the Harvard effect” (p. 178) at the expense of detailing the vast differences, strategies, shortcomings, and innovations at lesser-recognized programs. Here again, we see the significance of regional analysis (especially the dearth of graduate training in the South) and the need to interrogate current research in terms of institution type. Though Rojas convincingly demonstrates that the majority of Ford Foundation funding benefited elite research institutions, his own study missed the opportunity to provide a broader scope in tracing the development of Black Studies nationwide. Regional analysis does shine through when the author discusses the political climate in California that surrounded the San Francisco State developments (pp. 211–12). Yet, this nuanced analysis is not sustained, and there is no mention of the unique role that San Francisco State plays today in housing a college of Ethnic Studies. Finally, as a historian, I experienced one additional difficulty with this book: gender reification. The centrality of male voices—Hare, Huggins, Karenga, Asante, Gates (pp. xiv, 232)—to the development and documentation of the movement makes this error almost unavoidable. Nevertheless, women’s demands for recognition within the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Studies movements continue with the professionalization of the field. Historical and organizational accounts that do not include the central roles of Katherine Dunham, Angela Davis, Kathleen Cleaver, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Delores Aldridge, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Clenora Hudson-Weems, Nelly McKay, Evelyn Higginbotham, Sharon Harley, Bettye Collier-Thomas, Darlene Clark Hine, Nell Irvin Painter, Esther Terry, and others are simply incomplete reifications of the academic male hierarchy. Surely social movement

theory should grapple with the impact of significant struggles from within.

*From Black Power to Black Studies* represents the limitation of a traditional disciplinary approach to adequately measure the significance and meaning of Black Studies as an interdiscipline. Ultimately, although Africana Studies programs did emerge out of the demand for Black Power, it is too simplistic to assess the contributions of this academic endeavor in such narrow terms. As Rojas admirably demonstrates, however, Africana Studies can help sociologists better understand the relationship of social movements to institutions of higher education with which they clash and merge, and which they thereby irrevocably alter and improve. In the “co-evolution” process (Rojas 2007, p. 210), Black Power as a social movement and Black Studies as a field/discipline have helped institutionalize human knowledge and understand political strategizing in and outside of the academy. What Rojas cannot do, however, is speak to the central issues that Africana Studies scholars must address (and have been addressing since the inception of development in the late 1960s). This *WJBS* issue is one important step, but without structured and respectful exchange, graduate programs will continue to be underdeveloped and thrown asunder in the U.S. and global Ivory Tower.

### ***Suggestions for Future Development of Graduate Training in Africana Studies***

In conclusion, below are some suggestions that I have to further this discussion between and within programs and communities. In addition to the suggestions offered in the *Griot*, I propose the following:

1. *Create opportunities for graduate students to speak with one another.* Hosted conferences at individual institutions are essential locations for graduate student exchanges. However, ASALH, NCBS, Southern Conference of African American Studies (SCAAS), and National Black Graduate Student Association (NBGSA) conferences are essential meeting places as well. Regardless of where graduate students meet, they should remain independent of any particular body, much like Ella Baker advocated for the independence of SNCC. Black Graduate Student Council has “something special” and it should be supported by institutions without any attempt to co-opt the movement.

2. *Find practical ways to engage graduate students in local and international experiences that enable them to learn within Black communities.* As I wrote in the *Griot* article, studying *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in mid-winter Massachusetts was an entirely different experience than teaching the text in hurricane season Florida. Floating cows, race antagonisms, and scenes of the Civil Rights Movement struggle hold a special significance in the South in a way that studying at a Northern institution can never reveal. As such, graduate students of the Black experience should be given an opportunity to conduct “fieldwork”—beyond visiting archives—and those who have no interest in working within Black community justice movements should be forced out of their jobs and into “traditional” academic disciplines where they belong. In an edited volume entitled *African Americans and Community Engagement in Higher Education*, I revisit Septima Clark as an exemplar of community building that is desperately needed in advanced Africana Studies training. Clark, and generations of scholar-activists before her, demonstrate three things that are essential for those engaging in experiential education: a) community-defined needs should propel research and action; b) collaborative learning and asset-based evaluations that recognize Black communities as more than a “problem” (as DuBois correctly refuted) are just as important as “problem-solving” by university researchers; and c) critical understandings of race are complex and vary by region, nation, and ethnicity so well established and informed partnerships are essential to effective justice movements. Graduate training that does not engage praxis of experiential education and build on historic Black activist knowledge of community action is missing the mark.
3. *Create opportunities for faculty exchange internationally and between U.S. programs.* In spring 2006, I team taught a course with Dr. Rosemarie Mwaipopo, a sociologist from the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) in Tanzania. In the summer of that year I conducted research at UDSM and found the exchange to be fruitful, challenging, and enriching. I learned about the dynamics of African culture—from an African who lived on the continent—and my

learning bore fruit in revealing my ignorance and arrogance in certain areas of my Black feminist research. I was challenged to move beyond my received knowledge of American interpretations of African life, and I was enriched by the exchange with African women scholars like Lettice Rutashobya, Amandina Lihamba, Lillian Osaki, Fanella Mukangara, Ruth Meena, and Rose Mwaipopo. Their writing and their hospitality demonstrated the value of exchange in the Diaspora beyond agendas that we may articulate here in the United States. Though many faculty in Africana Studies departments travel and research widely, making this an explicit value and area of training would be helpful in preparing graduate students for understanding Black issues within international contexts. In addition, creating faculty exchange programs between existing and developing PhD programs would be an outstanding way to share ideas as departments continue to emerge.

4. *Incorporate contemporary African scholarship, especially women's scholarship, into graduate student research interests in Africana issues.* There is significant disagreement about what "African-centered" means; accessing current scholarship from the Continent allows for fruitful geographic and temporal contexts in which Africana Studies scholars write and work. Black Studies scholarship must utilize contemporary research by and about African women on the continent in order to repair connections between increasingly parochial academic fields, as well as addressing pressing global problems. There is a rich tradition within Africana Studies of women placing African women's perspectives front and center. From Clenora Hudson-Weems (1989) and Michelle Howard-Vital (1989) to work by British-Ghanaian Nah Dove (1998, 2002), some have made inroads into male dominated scholarly traditions, yet a greater integration of contemporary African women's intellectual contributions must take place.
5. *Use edited volumes to present a wide range of voices and main themes in Africana Studies.* There are now at least 30 anthologies of Black Studies beginning with a 1969 Black Studies collection introduced by Bayard Rustin and in

1971 with the John Blasingame's *New Perspectives on Black Studies* to the 2007 *Contemporary Africana Thought and Action: A Guide to Africana Studies* edited by Clenora Hudson-Weems. Scholars at all levels can use these texts as a basis for future discussion and though there will surely be no unified approach to graduate curriculum and comprehensive exam preparation, this list of anthologies provides a vital foundation to identifying the scope of an Africana Studies canon. Though new critical publications abound, reading early publications of the 1970s–1990s is essential; this list of edited volumes allows students to identify a long list of central contributors over time rather than five or six contemporary popular scholars. Studying *edited* volumes of Africana Studies provides a rich mosaic of dialogue, discussion, and debate about the formation of theories, methodologies and applications not found by reading one or two major scholars in isolation. Undoubtedly, there are now extensive bibliographies of crucial Africana Studies publications; one example from Ernie Allen includes over 500 entries. Yet reading a short list of edited volumes allows an in-depth comparative analysis where graduate students can make their own judgments about areas of convergence and divergence, validity, and utility from various essential authors. The graduates in all doctoral programs can use these collections as a common lexicon to construct and contextualize their individual contributions. I have provided the table of contents for over 30 volumes—including a subject guide—online at <http://www.professorevans.com/Evans-BSTGradStudentResources.pdf>. This bibliography should offer a rich foundation for future discussion in the basic graduate training curricular and examination processes regardless of an overarching theoretical position of varied graduate departments.

In *Women, War, and Peace* (2002), Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf provided findings from qualitative research done in fourteen countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Columbia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, East Timor, Macedonia, Kosovo, Guinea, Israel, Liberia, Palestine, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Somalia. They placed women's voices at the center of their study. We must do the same. As scholars of Africana Studies we must give more credence to

those who are marginalized in the academy. For those who are not already doing so, engaging—and citing—African, Caribbean, and African American women’s scholarship is a great place to start. Only by considering African women scholars’ social standpoint, engaging their scholarly production (without deletion, interpretive oversight, or heavy-handed revision), and encouraging fruitful exchange programs can we begin to offer holistic, comprehensive “African-centered” research worthy of the name.

In addition, Mark Christian calls for discussion on the following points:

1. *More research on the complexities of graduates in Africana Studies gaining employment.* In the introduction to this Special Issue, Christian touches on this with the “joint appointment” problematic. Along with graduate student experiences, hiring appointments and tenure homes deserve more scrutiny.
2. *Forays into research on what “administrators/administrations” think about Africana Studies in the twenty-first century.* Those with the power have been silent in our discussions; and with new generations of faculty being educated, the administrative perspective and weight will be increasingly central to the discussion.
3. *How to blend the undergraduate and graduate experiences also deserves greater attention in research and practice.* The pipeline of undergraduates is an essential aspect of graduate student, faculty, and administrative existence and should be integrated.

4. *What constitutes a philosophy of Africana Studies in the twenty-first century—one that incorporates various schools of thought but is still “unique” to that of so-called “traditional” disciplines?* This will be an ongoing discussion for the foreseeable future.

### ***The End — A Beginning***

Please feel free to email Mark Christian at christm3@muohio.edu or Stephanie Evans at contact@professorevans.com in addition to contacting the individual authors of these chapters. Engage one another at professional conferences and support individually sponsored events. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “we may have come over here on different ships, but we are all in the same boat now.” The editors and authors of *Africana Studies at the Graduate Level: A Twenty-First Century Perspective* seek to advance Africana Studies doctoral training and strengthen institutional commitment and community engagement at the undergraduate levels.

The future will be what we make it and, as Christian (2006b) stated in “Black Studies in the 21st Century: Longevity Has Its Place,” Black Studies will “keep on keepin’ on.” This begs the question: Will doctoral training keep up or fall behind in this movement? The answer may well lie in our ability to engage one another around the issues these authors have raised and move beyond our differences to embrace critical diversity in Africana Studies while reinforcing fundamental principles of social movement upon which this field/discipline was founded and grounded in academe.

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