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*What Black Studies is Not: Moving from Crisis to Liberation in Africana Intellectual Work*¹

Greg Carr

Introduction: What is Africana Studies?

Africana Studies is an academic extension of what Cedric Robinson has called “The Black Radical Tradition.”² This tradition is notable for emerging out of a pre-existing constellation of African intellectual work, shaped by millennia of migration, adaptation, and improvisation. Through the central acts of translation and recovery,³ Africana Studies seeks to theorize on the basis of long-view genealogies of African intellectual work.

This process has been captured by only a handful of thinkers over the arc of existence of the field, largely because of the difficulty of acquiring the requisite linguistic skills. There have been, however, a handful of scholars who have taken up this challenge, including Cheikh Anta Diop, Theophile J. Obenga, Aboubacry Moussa Lam, Babocar Sall, and the writer and translator Ayi Kwei Armah (both in his fictional texts – *Two Thousand Seasons*, *KMT: In the House of Life*, *Osiris Rising* – and in his memoir/historiography *The Eloquence of the Scribes*).⁴ Armah and the others have set themselves the task of

1. This essay is adapted from my remarks as the 15th Annual Donald K. Smith Distinguished Lecturer, Baruch College, New York, December 6, 2010.
2. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
3. See Ngugi wa Thiongo, *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (New York: Basic, 2008).
4. The importance of this type of work has been most recently described by Africanist/Linguist Christopher Ehret: “Word histories directly register the cultural events of human history. From each word’s history we can infer different individual elements of the human history that lies behind the changes the word has undergone. From the histories of many words together we can build up a complex understanding of the

intentionally linking that series of migrations, adaptations and improvisations from the origins of humanity to the present, integrating wave after wave of challenges and solutions to the problems of African human existence as a series of interlinked episodes, of which the period of enslavement and colonialism is a very recent and very temporary set of moments.

The key factor in assuming both this task and the intellectual posture that grounds it, is the deliberate embrace of “long-view” memory: the same type of broad envisioning of the human experience that has long informed the intellectual posture of other societies (including the West) as an ideational construct. In fact, the truncation of the time/space coordinates of memory – the amputation of memory as a consequence of the failure of educational institutions whose task it was to re-inscribe those memories as a critical element of equipping Africans to negotiate their futures – precedes the crisis that informs the great confusion over the nature and intellectual thrust of Africana Studies.⁵

The crisis and a question

Shorn of the idea that contemporary Black life is but the most immediate iteration of a long-view historical genealogy and tethered to the idea of linking Black life with the experience of enslavement, we have, predictably, reached a stage in our intellectual life where our resistance has been dissolved. We have arrived. Thinkers identifying with “African American,” “African Diaspora” or “Africana” Studies are pundits, commentators, teachers and researchers helping to address the challenges facing the American and global body politic.

Increasingly, the field and idea of Africana Studies is reduced – and expanded – to a subject-matter field (“the study of Black stuff”)

history of the society as a whole. And from applying this kind of research to regional collections of societies and their languages, we can construct intricate regional histories of the *longue durée*.” *History and the Testimony of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 3–4.

5. This subject has been addressed in book-length form very rarely. Representative examples include Kwesi Otabil, *The Agonistic Imperative: The Rational Burden of Africa-Centeredness* (Bristol, IN: Wyndham Hall Press), 1994, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises* (Dakar, Senegal: CODESIRA), 1997, and Molefi Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (Trenton: Africa World Press), 1990. See also Greg E. Carr, “Toward an Intellectual History of Africana Studies,” in Nathaniel Norment, Jr. (ed.), *The African-American Studies Reader*, 2nd ed. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press), 2006. That chapter is part of a book-length work in progress.

rather than a field of disciplinary contestation and the generation of normative theoretical space (the African study of phenomena and experience). This raises the unavoidable question: is our intellectual work in the field being put to the best uses? Are we asking the right questions, or even the same questions our ancestors and those not oriented to our privileged elite class status asked? Are our contemporary questions still deeply relevant, and, as the environmental and experiential conditions that caused us to ask our initial human questions continue to exist, has the circumstance that interrupted and tethered that arc of human inquiry to the problematic of survival so altered it that liberation as a collective practice is no longer conceivable?

The challenge for African intellectual work and workers remains the same as that for all knowledge work and workers: to ask and answer the fundamental questions of human existence and to leverage answers by drawing first on the most familiar, richest and most accessible deep well of human experience, namely the one native to the cultural arc out of which one emerges as a human being and as a custodian to the received inscriptions of the group, as a “representative thinker.”

On the question of intellectual genealogy: linking Africans to African ideas and the deep well of African thought

Many texts have purported to outline the trajectory and genealogy of African intellectual work. While the full range of thinkers and historical eras is increasingly incorporated in these narratives, the placement and attention they receive and the links established between them are inescapably informed by the vantage points of the authors. Several types of intellectual approach are being applied to the study of African life and experience:

The Black Radical Tradition Approach links ideas of “African cultural unity” to the material contexts and circumstances of Western racialization and racial hierarchy. These various contexts are seen as informing the meaning-making and social movements of African people as they emerge from a relatively common, long-view (meaning pre-European encounter) set and range of epistemological and axiological assumptions. Key thinkers adopting variations of this approach include the aforementioned Robinson, Armah, Diop and Zeleza as well as Michael A. Gomez, Marimba Ani, and Gerald Horne.

The Emic/Etic Approach takes the examination of language, cultural contact, and localized meaning-making as the basis for understanding historical and contemporary African life. This approach does not privilege – and in many instances, overtly rejects – the idea of long-view

genealogies of Africana historical and cultural meaning-making. Thinkers adopting variations of this approach include Lorand Matory, Farah Griffin, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and Yvonne Daniel.

The Alternative Epistemology Approach shares the attitude of the Black Radical Tradition approach toward long-view genealogies of meaning-making among African people, but seeks to generate the theories, methods, and reliability-standards necessary to establish academic legitimacy for their study of African people. Key thinkers who can be grouped in this effort include Molefi Asante, Maulana Karenga, Abdul Alkalimat, and Lucius T. Outlaw.

The Unbroken Genealogy Approach, taking elements from all of the afore-mentioned approaches, emphasizes the idea that modalities of African meaning-making are central to the study of contemporary African social, political and cultural life. Unlike the Black Radical Tradition approach, this approach de-centers the impact of Western racialization as a formative factor for contemporary African-descended communities. Like the Emic/Etic Approach, this approach emphasizes the centrality of linguistic and cultural exchange, but traces those changes along an unbroken arc linking classical African practices to subsequent forms of African cultural and social organization, in all the variety reflecting the migrations and adaptations of African people. Several of the thinkers included in the Black Radical Tradition category could be grouped here (e.g. Armah and Obenga), along with scholars such as Jacob H. Carruthers, Mario Beatty, and Anderson Thompson.

The Sui Generis Approach takes the "modern era" (that of the construction of "The West" as an organizing set of cultural logics) as the point of departure for theorizing large-scale African identity and organizes itself around the principle of perpetual improvisation, poly-centered contestation and the idea of Blackness as a social construct drawing upon an indefinable range of characteristics, identities and/or experiences. Prominent among those who could be grouped in this category are Stuart Hall, Eddie Glaude, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Hortense Spillers, Paul Gilroy, Adolph Reed, Orlando Patterson, Paul Gilroy, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Kenneth Warren.

The contemporary struggle to define the discipline of Africana Studies is essentially a contestation over methodologies emanating from these various approaches to knowledge production. The intellectual genealogy of Africana Studies must be established as a first order of business before going on to articulate what it is not.⁶

6. A full discussion of the intellectual genealogy of Africana Studies would go beyond the scope of this paper. It is important to note, however, that the field's origins in the

Categories of contemporary African intellectual work: the black intellectual as social commentator

As a matter of the political thrust that attended its birth as an academic field in the late 1960s, Africana Studies did not function as what Chris Hedges has called “a safety valve for the traditional form of American democracy.”⁷ Certainly, Africana Studies scholars have played such a role in the past, but it has been, for those most deeply committed to the work, a secondary and peripheral, though important, aspect. Perhaps the best-known of these thinkers was W.E.B. Du Bois, who posited in his 1960 commencement address to Johnson C. Smith College, *Whither Now and Why*, a vision of African contributions to an American, even post-American state. This vision characterizes the US as a contested site of cultural authority and social reality, one that must be experienced and engaged by African people as group-oriented actors seeking to contribute to a poly-centered society with basic, legally-guaranteed rights. This is the Du Bois evoked by Nikhil Pal Singh in *Black is a Country* and by Eric Porter in *The Problem of the Future World: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Race Concept at Midcentury*. Du Bois and Robeson had arrived at the place finally recognized as missing by Edward Franklin Frazier in his “Failure of the Negro Intellectual” and later called for by Harold Cruse in both *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* and *Plural But Equal*.⁸

The problem is that the Du Boises (W.E.B. and Shirley Graham), the Robesons (Paul and Essie) and others similarly situated as political actors for the advance of African people in the US have given way – in the face of what Derrick Bell called “the permanence of Racism” and what Ron Walters termed “White Nationalism” – to what

US academy must be traced to insurgent activity among African-descended academics at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The efforts of, among others, Du Bois at Atlanta University, Oliver Cox at Langston University, Charles Johnson at Fisk University, and the coterie of scholars at Howard University during the first half of the twentieth century are the proper roots of what we now call Africana Studies.

7. Hedges writes: “In a traditional democracy, the liberal class functions as a safety valve. It makes piecemeal and incremental reform possible. It offers hope for change and proposes gradual steps toward greater equality. It endows the state and the mechanisms of power with virtue. It also serves as an attack dog that discredits radical social movements, making the liberal class a useful component within the power elite.” *Death of the Liberal Class* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 9.
8. Cruse wrote late in life that Afrocentricity might serve as “a philosophical basis for cultural equity battles.” Harold Cruse, “Afrocentricity: A Philosophical Basis for Cultural Equity Battles,” in Maria Morena Vega and Cheryll Y. Greene (eds), *Voices from the Battlefield: Achieving Cultural Equity* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1993), 11–21.

Hedges characterizes as a “courtier or mandarin” impulse among the African-US intellectual elite. The American state had from its inception set itself against the full measure of African life on its own terms. This racist posture, characterized by Michael A. Gomez as “the rejection of Africa as equal,”⁹ set the stage for what Cedric Robinson describes as “two alternative Black political cultures”: The first, a set of elite cultural practices, orients Blacks’ aspirations for liberation toward the pursuit of the rights and privileges jealously guarded by whites. The second, emerging from the lives of plantation laborers, reflects a Maroon sensibility, and forms what Robinson calls a creative rather than imitative, democratic rather than republican, Afro-Christian rather than secular and materialist political culture.¹⁰ The two strains converge at moments of mutual interest, but those moments increasingly are increasingly defined by elite interests.

Black Studies is born out of a moment when what Mark Chiang has labeled “cultural capital” of the masses of African people¹¹ was leveraged for access to the institutional spaces for training and replicating the managerial class of intellectual workers. As this oppositional perspective is slowly incorporated into the German/Anglo-Saxon model for intellectual training,¹² Black Studies scholars are produced whose interests and perspectives are increasingly similar to and aligned with the corporate power elites who use the academy for their purposes.

These circumstances encouraged and promoted institutionalized Black Studies programs, departments and centers that could enable the production of entrepreneurial-minded vulgar careerists and academic individualists of the type bemoaned by Houston A. Baker in his 2008 text *Betrayal: How Black Intellectuals Have Abandoned the Ideals of the Civil Rights Movement*.¹³ This transition from resistance to

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9. Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).
 10. Cedric Robinson, *Black Movements in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 96–98.
 11. Mark Chiang, *The Cultural Capital of Asian American Studies: Autonomy and Representation in the University* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
 12. The convergence of German and English cultural contexts in the creation and reification of the contemporary academy is chronicled compellingly in two recent texts: William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Rise of the Modern Research University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), and Peter Watson, *The German Genius: Europe’s Third Renaissance, the Second Scientific Revolution and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2010).
 13. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). See also Nowile Rooks, *White Money/Black Power: The Surprising History of African American Studies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

incorporation is a common trait in the relationship of insurgent traditions to hegemonic power structures. The movement of Black elite intellectual workers toward an accommodating stance is not entirely a "betrayal," considering the contradictory make-up of the bundle of interests that marked the first of Robinson's two political cultures. Hedges' remarks are suggestive of what then follows:

...the assault by the corporate class on the democratic state has claimed the liberal class as one of its victims. ... [But] reducing the liberal class to courtiers or mandarins, who have nothing to offer but empty rhetoric, shuts off this safety valve and forces discontent to find other outlets that often end in violence. The inability of the liberal class to acknowledge that corporations have wrested power from the hands of citizens, that the Constitution and its guarantees of personal liberty have become irrelevant, and that the phrase consent of the governed is meaningless, has left it speaking and acting in ways that no longer correspond to reality.¹⁴

Thus, while Black/African/African American/Africana Studies is highly susceptible to producing Hedges' "courtiers or mandarins," the field also presents the best possible safe space for replicating the liberatory potential implicit in its founding – which demands a self-determining intellectual space and methodology.

This requires, in turn, an attempt to categorize the political impulses of thinkers doing work in the name of "Black Studies." The following are broad categories – subject to reworking, debate and clarification – describing the political allegiances of scholars who purport to do Black Studies. Individuals are included as "representative thinkers" in each category, not because their work belongs exclusively in that category but because the category fits the overall arc of their work. The work of most of these thinkers, in fact, often spills across categories, underlining the preliminary nature of this attempt at classification.

Defenders of the African Way: Unapologetic intellectual advocates for African people, across the ideological and methodological range, emphasizing the maintenance of self-determining political spaces, e.g. Marimba Ani, Edward W. Blyden, Jacob Carruthers, Alexander Crummell, Cheikh Anta Diop, Marcus Garvey, Vivian Gordon, William Leo Hansberry, Hubert Henry Harrison, Aboubacry

University Press, 2007); and Phillip M. Richards, *Black Heart: The Moral Life of Recent African American Letters* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), which compares Henry Louis Gates (and other thinkers not discussed by Baker) to representative African American thinkers of previous eras such as Du Bois and Sterling Brown. Richards argues that there has been an "erosion of moral reflection" compared to the earlier period.

14. Hedges, *Death of the Liberal Class*, 9.

Moussa Lam, Theophile Obenga, Babacar Sall, Anderson Thompson, David Walker, Malcolm X.

Grand Theorists: Theorists who advance an overall explanation of phenomena and/or experience as part of a political act of Pan-African struggle and liberation, e.g. Molefi Asante, Oliver C. Cox, Martin Delany, Cheikh Anta Diop, W.E.B. Du Bois, Hosea Easton, E. Franklin Frazier, Paul Gilroy, Asa Hilliard, Gerald Horne, Maulana Karenga, Alain Locke, Ama Mazama, Oyeronke Oyewumi, Kwesi Otabil, Paul Robeson, William Santiago-Valles, James Stewart, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Kwame Ture, James Turner, Ron Walters, Paul Zeleza.

Progressives: Thinkers who see the principal and first emphasis of Black Studies to be for the securing of a more equal, humane and just American society, including an American state radically transformed as a consequence of extra-national political and social movements, e.g. Algernon Austin, Houston A. Baker, Derrick Bell, Rod Bush, Kimberle Crenshaw, Harold Cruse, Michael A. Gomez, Lewis R. Gordon, Nathan Hare, Jesse Jackson, C.L.R. James, Robin D.G. Kelley, Terry Kershaw, Martin Luther King, Jr., Julianne Malveaux, Lorand Matory, Toni Morrison, Lucius T. Outlaw, Adolph Reed, Jr., William C. Rhoden, Robert Smith, Cornel West, Armond White, Carter G. Woodson

Liberals: Scholars who emphasize the position and responsibility of the individual - as distinct from government - as social actor for change or status quo relations, e.g. Kwame Anthony Appiah, Ralph J. Bunche, Michael Eric Dyson, Gerald Early, John Hope Franklin, Eddie S. Glaude, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Bob Herbert, bell hooks, Peniel Joseph, Albert Murray, Mark Anthony Neal, Alvin Poussaint, Benjamin Quarles, Charles H. Wesley.

Neo-Liberals: Proponents of a market-driven approach to African intellectual work and its contribution to the state polity, stressing the efficiency of markets, free and open trade, and maximization of the corporate sector in orienting both citizenry and the mechanisms of governance; "academic entrepreneurs," e.g. Todd Boyd, Stanley Crouch, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Clarence Page, Ali Mazrui, Booker T. Washington.

Conservatives: Proponents of traditional and/or cautious intellectual approaches to social change, oriented in an individualistic relationship to pre-existing traditional institutions, habits, and/or conditions, e.g. T.D. Jakes, Tyler Perry, Juan Williams.

Neo-Conservatives: Displaying moderate to deep political and/or intellectual conservatism, often as formerly liberal thinkers, e.g. Tunde Adeleke, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Jacobus Capetein, Michael

Steele, Clarence Thomas, Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, Clarence Walker.

What Africana Studies is *not*: points of discursive departure

The following theses are designed to be provocative. Each was formed in response to the declaration of an "Africana Studies" space, either internally or externally, and reflects my own intellectual posture, which spans the "Black Radical Tradition" and "Defender of the African Way" approaches described above.

1. Africana Studies is not a de-linking of intellectual work from Pan-African political movements and social policy informed by the objectives of these movements. The analysis of the US state in *White Nationalism/Black Interests* and the Pan-African Method introduced by Ron Walters in his 1995 work *Pan Africanism and the African Diaspora* marks the political thrust that intentionally informs the intellectual contours of the field and discipline of Africana Studies. Similarly, Gerald Horne's important essay published in *Socialism and Democracy* (no. 33, 2003) entitled "The Crisis of White Supremacy" outlines how to engage in this transnational work, emphasizing the permanent race-based orientation of what Charles Mills has called "The Racial State." Africana Studies work must place the analysis of African life and experience in larger global geopolitical, economic and cultural contexts, with scholarship seeking to excavate, interrogate and extend political organization and movement oriented toward the liberation of African people.

2. Africana Studies is not (only) mediation of the meaning of "Black" identity in the social and cultural context of and responses to "whiteness." A recent edition of National Public Radio's "Studio 360" turned its attention to the anniversary of the publication of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. This program used "Black Studies" scholars such as Eddie Glaude and Gerald Early to orient the discussion on the meaning of the text to non-whites, evoking conciliatory language that saw the resolution of Africana into the mainstream of American cultural thought and history. This arc is similar to that of the powerful narratives created by documentarian Ken Burns (e.g. *Jazz, Baseball, The Civil War, Jack Johnson*), who relies on a set of African American "translators" to re-inscribe his own liberal-to-progressive narration of American exceptionalism and triumphalism. The intellectual energy of Africana is far too expansive to shoehorn into this tired, failed paradigm, or to resolve into mediations about the triumphalism of American democracy, etc.

3. Africana Studies is not an attempt to suppress, ignore or otherwise manage the narration of long-view genealogies of African deep thought in order to avoid the responsibility of engaging the world on Africa's own complicated but nevertheless real and vibrant, self-determining and collective terms. The artificial truncations that attend histories and genealogies of African thought (e.g. the politics of selecting pieces for anthologies or conferences ostensibly on "Black Studies") reveals the seeming arbitrariness of those charged with training scholars in Africana Studies; however, the clear evasion of long-view genealogy is apparent in the choices made by this managerial class. Scholarship that links the study of African diasporic subjects to long arcs of history that extend as far back as classical Africa (e.g. Kemet, Kush, Axum, Meroe) are summarily dismissed, in spite of the undeniably rigorous scholarship published during the last two generations by African Egyptologists and linguists demonstrating the relevance of such normative interventions to the study of global African life and culture.

4. Africana Studies is not the reinforcement of Black (Negro) American exceptionalism. Instead, Africana Studies is a reminder of the obligation to contribute to human society and, through it, to human meaning from the vast deep well of African experience and reflection. Without this dimension, what could the contours of Africana Studies be save the imaginings of the thoughts and deeds of that group categorized as African from without – a practice of othering and spectacle and erasure?

5. Africana Studies is not a surrender of the idea that scholarly research methodologies should use unbroken, long-view (e.g. pre-modern) narratives of the African experience. In fact, it is the opposite. It is an embrace of the fundamental principle that African ideas and experiences, beginning with the origins of humanity, can and, for this particular field and discipline, must by definition produce an intellectual framework that orients research inquiry. While these experiences include the very recent ones of enslavement and colonialism, Africana Studies scholarship must also (and firstly) include the search for more enduring, elemental experiences that mark African intellectual work ordering human learning, awareness, knowledge and sharing information about the nature, purpose and meaning of reality. These experiences were encoded in many of the first inscription systems created by and known to humans and continued, through migration and adaptation, to inform African ideas about science, human social organization and creative expression in an unbroken fashion extending through the contemporary era. The scholarly act of

recovering these acts of “inscribing meaning” lie almost completely unexplored, prohibited by the enduring illness of a viral amnesia, a virulent, pervasive and seemingly impenetrable malaise marked by the orientation of the body of African memory and knowledge to the trauma of enslavement. Unerringly – and falsely – acts of recovery of Africana epistemologies are truncated by time/space coordinates that defend a first-order premise: that creating bodies of knowledge and methods of inquiry that represent unbroken improvisational extensions of African corpuses of knowledge that connect over thousands of years is at best, an unnecessary or impractical alternate form of academic inquiry or, at worst, a useless, near-useless or counterproductive waste of time.

6. Africana Studies is not writing that re-inscribes existing knowledge orders. Africana Studies pedagogy and scholarship is teaching, learning, researching and writing that consistently states the intellectual ground on which it stands as a matter of road mapping and blueprinting. While this work follows the methodology that befits the academic site in which it is carried out, it nonetheless demonstrates the necessity of creating and testing the assumptions of normative theories and methods derived from African-derived linguistic, cultural and/or historical sources. Several major attempts in this regard remain virtually uncommented upon (and certainly not used as orienting texts for methodological training), such as Robinson’s *Black Marxism*, Clyde R. Taylor’s *The Mask of Art*, Obenga’s *African Philosophy: The Pharaonic Period*, Kimbwandende Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau’s *African Cosmology of the Bantu-Kongo*.

7. Africana Studies is not a surrender of the difficult work of recovering and connecting African historical memories to the idea that such work amounts to “romanticizing” or “mythologizing” the past. Walters writes in *Pan Africanism in the African Diaspora* that it is often this perceived difficulty of recovery that drives thinkers to recede to the false alternative of focusing exclusively on contemporary problem-solving (as if contemporary problems can even be apprehended – let alone solved – without a command of the relevant historical experiences, circumstances and structures). Constructivists and radical postmodernists reject anything foundationalist and normative as essentialist. Africana Studies rejects this discounting of foundational moments by stating the essential first-order requirement of translation and recovery. This requirement has been modeled by the handful of scholars currently equipped with the requisite skills to undertake comparative analysis of African life, language and culture over the arc of long-view genealogies. Among these scholars

are the aforementioned Obenga, Lam and Sall as well as Mario Beatty and Andreas Woods. Scholars of contemporary African language systems such as John Baugh, John Rickford and Lisa Green in African American English have provided invaluable scholarship to link African languages across time and space as the grounding element of Africana Studies.

8. Africana Studies is not a sieve or drain on the resources of the university in service to an "anti-academic" intellectual enterprise (except where practiced as research scholarship by a small contingent of research faculty). To the contrary, and especially at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the attraction of the field – and the discipline – must be to the general student body, and must lie in teaching and learning committed to the mastery of language and research methodology and the recovery of intellectual genealogies and representative techniques. This requires both the practice and recovery of Africana perspectives toward intellectual mastery across modal forms. The written form of inscription, reconciled with the associated movement, sound, visual and conceptual forms, provides an organic representation of literacy that makes possible the integral recovery of historical and contemporary African attitudes toward intellectual work,¹⁵ forever displacing the idea of "black culture as pathological," especially with regard to teaching, learning and the *sebayt* (education). This is not only a reasonable route to intellectual rehabilitation in African communities; it is historically accurate, pedagogically sound, and practically achievable. Africana Studies is not, in other words, an attempt to fit the unbroken, organic and vibrantly improvisational exercise of Africana modes of inscription, coding and decoding to race-anchored validation systems that neither recognize nor honor those earlier practices. Africana Studies distinguishes its scholarship from that of other disciplines precisely by its elevation of this range of practices to a self-conscious corpus of historically connected techniques and content.

9. Africana Studies is not an evasion of the essential questions raised by previous generations of scholars determined to address first-order questions of documentation, translation, recovery and improvisation. The discipline embraces Du Bois's 1897 call to "conserve races" and his penultimate charge in 1960 to take up the special

15. A critical and instructive text in this regard is the exhibition catalogue edited by Christine Mullen Kreamer, Mary Nooter Roberts, Elizabeth Harney and Allyson Purpura entitled *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in Art History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2007).

history and thought of Africans as the conduit for contributing time-honored and unique solutions to problems facing humanity. It is the chastened extension of the efforts of Institute of the Black World, of Bernice Johnson Reagon, of the African Heritage Studies Association and the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization and other organizations established to ask the right questions regarding the sources, normative assumptions, translation and recovery priorities and policy implications of Africana Studies. It is, because of the self-conscious exclusion of the other disciplines as distorting conceptual spaces, the only self-constructed space in which to ask and attempt to continue to provide answers to these questions, unencumbered.

Conclusion

Having clear ideas of what Africana Studies is, and what it is not, we can now address the challenge of planning future directions – a challenge to be taken up by the students present today and their colleagues around the world. W.E.B. Du Bois, in “Whither Now and Why,” observed that “what I have been fighting for and am still fighting for is the possibility of black folk and their cultural patterns existing in America without discrimination; and on terms of equality. . . . What we must do is accomplish two things: the utter destruction of color discrimination in American life, and the preservation of African history and culture as a valuable contribution to modern civilization as it was to medieval and ancient civilization.”¹⁶

In order to achieve this objective, Africana Studies, as the first academic field and discipline created out of the masses-oriented protest and struggle tradition, must reject the easy call to produce academics trained in inferior approaches and aspiring to courtesanship and mandarin status. Rather, it must leverage the social, political and cultural capital that commanded its birth into the level of intellectual engagement necessary to widen the tributaries flowing from the African experience to human knowledge and advancement.

In his seminal essay entitled “The Field and Function of the Negro College,” Du Bois suggests that this may be the most salient and relevant purpose of what are now referred to as “Historically Black

16. W.E.B. Du Bois, “Whither Now and Why,” in Herbert Aptheker (ed), *The Education of Black People, Ten Critiques, 1906–1960* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 195.

Colleges and Universities.”¹⁷ When tethered to approaches to inquiry based on translation and recovery, that is certainly the most useful and essential work that can be performed by Departments of Africana Studies at such institutions, an intriguing possibility that would mark an intellectual *Weheme Mesu* (Ancient Egyptian for “repetition of the birth” or “renaissance”) in the field and discipline, helping the academy finally mark what Black Studies is – and is not.

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17. Du Bois in Aptheker, 111–133. For an extended discussion of the possibilities of Africana Studies at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, see Greg Carr, “Can We Talk [For a Minute]?: Social Sciences, Humanities and the Question of Africana Studies,” Center for African and African American Research, Duke University, March 26th 2010. In January, 2011, Howard University completed a process of academic program review that contained a recommendation that it pursue the development of a graduate program in Africana Studies. This development presents the American academy with a heretofore unrealized opportunity to institutionalize graduate training in Africana Studies-specific content area mastery and research methodologies that will extend, adjust and refine the efforts of the initial Temple University graduate program a generation before.