

Introduction

THE ORIGINS OF BLACK STUDIES

Nearly 40 years ago, African American students at San Francisco State College engaged in protests that led to the creation of the first bachelor's degree-granting departments of Black Studies in the United States. Nathan Hare was made the first chairperson of the department. This was 1967. A year later, Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, leading to the most widespread demonstrations and urban disturbances in the history of the United States. However, with the death of King came a renewed commitment on the part of the American nation to bring about educational reform, and Black Studies was one of the beneficiaries of this new mood.

Since that time, scholars have undertaken the task of fleshing out Black Studies with theoretical works, research studies, methodological discourses, social responsibilities, and institution building. The success of these efforts, against the enduring intransigence of the academy toward Black Studies, has been phenomenal and sustaining. The fact that the *Encyclopedia of Black Studies* can now be written attests to the maturity of the field.

THE FIELD AND THE ENCYCLOPEDIA

This is not merely an encyclopedia of black culture or an encyclopedia of black people—it is a specific, precise encyclopedia dealing with the emergence and maturity of an intellectual field that was begun as a corrective to generations of hegemonic curricula meant to support the theories and practices of white racial domination. Increasingly there are encyclopedias dealing with many topics and themes, including distinguished African scholars, the African world, African nations, and African culture.

Few disciplines or areas of study have needed an encyclopedia as much as Black Studies does. This is

not because the field should be codified or concretized but because scholars and students should have some clear conception of the evolutionary processes that created and maintain the discipline. Black Studies has limited the wanton spread of imperialistic curricula to the degree that it has presented an exceptionally brilliant collection of articles and books demonstrating the validity of a multiplicity of perspectives on facts. Education is no longer, as it was, lily-white. One only has to consider the linguistic and symbolic transformations that have occurred in the academy to see the impact of the discipline of Black Studies on sociology, history, social work, psychology, and political science. Those fields that have not been influenced by the innovations in Black Studies remain intractable but also remain outside of the new thinking about race, culture, gender, and ethnicity.

No longer are most academicians comfortable using terms and phrases such as *African slaves*, *Columbus's discovery of America*, *African primitives*, *Universal Man*, and *Black Africa*, without appending some explanation to them. The ideas these words represent call for studied reflection on the nature of historical and cultural reality. Clearly, Europe is no longer the standard nor the model by which Africa, Africans, and those of African descent must be judged. Numerous arguments for white exclusivity have been shown to be myths maintained by a racist educational system. Thus, the names of ancient African philosophers such as Ptahhotep, Imhotep, Akhenaten, Amenemhat, Amenemope, Duauf, and Amenhotep, son of Hapu, have been heard in the classrooms of America's most prestigious universities because of the transformation brought about by Black Studies. Indeed, it is not simply that the names have been heard but that the philosophies have been translated, read, and discussed in many venues. Maulana Karenga's monumental work *Maat: The Ethics of Social Justice* (2004, Routledge) is just the latest in a long line of outstanding publications in Black Studies

scholarship on ancient Africa. It has taken Black Studies scholars to rescue the study of ancient African ethics and culture from the static archaeological works of many Egyptologists.

Our aim in this encyclopedia is to extend the discourse on intellectual ideas, not merely to enumerate the cultural artifacts that exist in the black world. Indeed, culture is important and we see our work as adding to the serious treatment of the concepts and ideas that are employed in Black Studies. In effect, in order to approach the study of Africans in the Americas and Caribbean, it was necessary for the African and African American scholars who practiced Black Studies to see it as more than politics, and more than the enumeration of artifacts; they had to understand the field in its own right as disciplinary arena. This was the first task of achieving an academic fullness in the field. Without this type of framework, all else dangled in the air and often appeared irrational, bizarre, or strange. For example, it was impossible to properly study the funeral behaviors of African Americans in the South, Jamaicans, or Haitians without some appreciation of the context in which these behaviors developed. Catherine Godboldt (2002) addressed this issue in a telling way when she noted that although it is well known that black people in the South have always enjoyed the porch as an extension of the family dwelling, it is necessary to have a broad view of village life in Africa to see the connection between enslaved Africans building porches on Southern homes and the public spaces for socializing in Africa. European houses did not have porches, and it was not until Africans introduced porches that this new idea was born. What has happened too often in education is that the white, Western European perspective has been taken as universal, and therefore people have no idea of what constitutes continuities or correspondences from one culture to the next. This perspective collapses almost everything into its sphere and what is actually an African achievement is seen as European. Thus one of the central tendencies of Black Studies is to consciously cultivate a discourse on identity that speaks to the diversity and commonalities found in the pan-African world.

What we have discovered in the course of editing this encyclopedia is the extent to which Black Studies has revolutionized the information pool. Just the fact that the field has brought many new professors into the arena for thinking and acting has affected information in both quantity and quality. We now have

much more capability and much more enlightenment about African American and African realities than we had in the past. The reason for this is researchers' intense search for as much information as possible to be able to write the whole black story. This search led scholars to Ahmad Baba, the last chancellor of the University at Sankore in Mali, who may have been the most published African writer of his generation. During the 15th century, he wrote more than 42 books on various subjects, including law, ethics, mathematics, and religion. Another writer, Amadou Bamba, the early 19th-century cleric of Senegal, authored more than 1500 treatises on many subjects during his time as spiritual and cultural leader of the Mourrides of Touba. Without the aggressive research of African American Studies scholars, however, information such as this probably would not have been brought to the attention of students and the lay audience.

The fact that we know so much about the condition of the African diaspora in Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, Belize, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and many other countries is directly related to the scholarly interest in comparative African societies, religions, and acts of resistance to oppression. Much of this information was available before Black Studies, without registering as serious points of interest in the academy until Black Studies scholars began to refer to new categories of information.

Black Studies as a discipline also has a political aspect because it was born of the desire to see a more equitable world. It is a subject that introduces the student and scholar to the fact of Africa's betrayal. The question is not "Has Africa been betrayed?" but "By whom and for what reasons has Africa been betrayed?" Set in motion by enslavement, colonialism, and globalization, the betrayal of Africa sought to disinherit Africans in the Americas as well as throughout the world. The ultimate function of this is to dislocate Africans in the context of human history.

Dislocation is at the root of many of the theoretical problems in studying African phenomena. It is the quality of being outside of one's own psychological or cultural reality, which has been the experience of Africans worldwide. The fact that Africans have often taken as their reality the experiences of Europeans and have participated in the general Eurocentric understanding of history has further distanced many people from their own historical realities. Thus, the intent of the Afrocentric revolution, including its cultural and

political forms, is to relocate Africans everywhere within their own centered context for analysis and interpretation, enabling them to produce more authentic and genuine responses to phenomena.

The Afrocentric Point of Departure

Afrocentricity, therefore, was posited not as an anti-European view but as a way for Africans the world over to proactively seek to explain phenomena from their own points of view. This perspective created, *inter alia*, difficulties with the many scholars who hold imperializing and hegemonizing attitudes and have insisted on a dominating ideological perspective where only Europe is correct, only European ideas are valid, and Europe becomes the universal model for all thought and behavior.

The transformation brought about by Afrocentricity had been presaged in the writings and actions of numerous scholars. Perhaps, as both Daryl Zizwe Poe (2004) and Kwame Botwe-Asamoah (2004) have claimed, Kwame Nkrumah was the first African to call for an Afrocentric response to the political, economic, and cultural realities of Africa. As Ghana's first president and the spiritual leader of the modern pan-African movement, Nkrumah propounded the view that Africa had to examine the world with an eye to its interests as determined by its culture rather than Europe's culture. Ghana was to be the prime model of African *conscientism*, which is what Nkrumah named his philosophical perspective.

Various seeds of an Afrocentric orientation can be found in the works of Willie Abraham, Frantz Fanon, and others, but their works are often compromised by their training in the West (Abraham, 1966; Fanon, 1968). While this is not the time for a discourse on the misorientations that exist in their works, let it suffice to say that the incipient ideas in their intellectual contributions were useful to the maturity of the concept of Afrocentricity.

A Call to Change Scholars' Views of Africans

It was the dramatic walkout of the 1969 African Studies Association Convention in Montreal by African American scholars that led directly to a call for renewal in the way Africans were approached by scholars from the West. This may have been the event that made John Henrik Clarke, leader of the walkout, a household name in the pan-African community and

assured him a place in history. Clarke articulated the views of many African American scholars that Africanists, who were usually white, were disinterested in the quality of African development and were in many ways merely arms of the colonizing impulse in the Western world. Although Clarke would later criticize the Afrocentric theory, in 1974 he published an article in the *The Afrocentric World Review* in which he strongly affirmed the need to reshape the study of history.

The experience in Montreal had been a watershed. When the African American scholars walked out of the conference, they were joined by a group of revolutionary African scholars who vowed to work for the creation of an African Heritage Studies Association. This movement and the association it created predated the National Council of Black Studies, which was founded in 1974. Since that time, the two organizations have worked in tandem to examine, investigate, interpret, and promote African culture transcontinentally and transgenerationally.

The publication of *Afrocentricity* in 1980 by Molefi Kete Asante, 8 years before the creation of the first Ph.D. program in African American Studies, and 6 years after the founding of the National Council of Black Studies, had an energizing effect on African American Studies scholarship. Among the first dissertations to be written using Afrocentric ideas was that of Francis Dorsey, who received a doctorate from Kent State University's Department of Communication in 1983. Dorsey had received a master's degree in communication from the State University of New York in Buffalo under the direction of Molefi Asante in 1979. He had been among the first students to be exposed to the new thinking regarding African agency. Thus, his dissertation on Marcus Garvey at Kent State was a revolutionary turn in the communication field and it anticipated many dissertations that were to be written in African American Studies.

A Disciplinary or Multidisciplinary Field?

Various scholars, such as Linda James Myers, Marimba Ani, and Wade Nobles, emerged in the 1980s and 1990s to add to the discourse on the nature of Black Studies. One of the earliest to undertake a discussion of the scope of the field was James Stewart (1997), who pioneered work on the philosophical side of the discipline. He was committed to a multidimensional, multidisciplinary view of the field and in several

highly useful essays laid out an intellectual idea that generated debate and discussion. Maulana Karenga (1993) at first reinforced Stewart's multidisciplinary view of the field. Later, however, he stated that the Afrocentrists had made an important distinction between discipline and interests: There is only one discipline, and there are many interests, not many disciplines (Karenga, 1993). Nevertheless, this issue has continued to be debated in the National Council for Black Studies conferences, as befits any serious discourse around concepts grounded in the search for theoretical and professional advancement.

On the other hand, the Temple Circle, a group of Temple University professors and graduate students led by Ama Mazama and Molefi Asante, took a radically different perspective by arguing that Black Studies was a discipline that could be applied to several different thematic and subject interests. Thus, one could have an interest in social institutions, music, human experiences in chronological time, or the psychic states of humans, and study these interests from an Afrocentric perspective. This became the most dominant perspective among students seeking the highest degree since it freed them from being locked into defending a multidisciplinary field that could not be put back in the box. Black Studies had come of age because now there were not just competing paradigms but different ways to view reality.

Faculty at other departments joined the fray on one side or the other. At Harvard, Yale, Brown, and Cornell, four key Ivy League institutions, Black Studies was seen literally as the study of black people from many different disciplines. There was only one boundary—you had to be studying black people. This meant that there was almost no boundary, because African people had been studied for hundreds of years; yet it would have been too much of a stretch to claim that this activity was Black Studies. What the Temple Circle understood was that the mere study of black people was not Black Studies.

The Theoretical Evolution and Development of Black Studies

Cecil Gray (2001) wrote an interesting and controversial book on the evolution of Afrocentricity. In his book, he points out the inadequacy of a system that must rely on definitions from outside the group. Therefore, to discuss Afrocentricity one must always return to the intellectual source, that is, the books and

research articles that constitute foundational work in the discipline.

One cannot simply write the history of Black Studies as a history of Temple University's department of African American Studies, although many of the intellectual battles for the discipline have been fought at Temple. A plethora of issues have confronted the field at other universities and have been met by equally committed scholars. One of the first issues that scholars had to deal with was the relationship of African American Studies to African Studies. A second issue was the role of Marxist analyses in the construction of responses to the continuing crisis in the lives of African Americans. A third issue was the cultural war debate that was generated by the strong Afrocentric thrust in the early 1980s. Finally, the idea of gender and its relationship to culture had to be configured in the evolving discourse around the collective African experience. Each issue had its corollaries, subthemes, and extenuations; each had its arguments, and some were accompanied by conclusions before arguments were made, but all the issues have been addressed in the general development of Black Studies.

Black Studies and African Studies

African Studies developed during the late 1950s and early 1960s in the United States as a response to the rising tide of independent nations on the continent of Africa. Most of the early support came from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. Their interests and those of the United States government coincided inasmuch as they both sought ways to influence the newly independent nations. Furthermore, the American government wanted to have a highly trained cadre of civil servants who had knowledge of the languages and cultures of Africa. This was particularly useful to the information agencies.

Consequently, many of the early Africanists were also government employees and consultants. There has always been a close association between the Africanist tradition and the information services. American officials interested in diplomacy and commerce in Africa frequently turned to the new Africanists for advice and assistance. Many of them were scholars who had limited appreciation of America's own role in the enslavement of Africans and therefore disconnected their research and work from the ongoing problems of the Africans in the diaspora.

Thus, when the Black Studies movement began in the late 1960s, nearly 10 years after the Africanist movement, there was little contact between the two interests. Indeed, Africanists tended to be largely white, and Black Studies scholars were largely African Americans. However, the fact that African Americans cast their research interests in pan-African terms meant that they would have a different perspective than that of the Africanists. Bridging the gulf between the continents became a new desire in the academy.

Black Studies and Marxist Sociologists

Most of the leading sociologists in Black Studies departments viewed themselves as political sociologists and always framed their discussions in terms of what it was that they had to offer to the vision of autonomy. It was clear that the African American condition was one that demonstrated the class question in its strictest sense. It was not clear whether there was a Marxist solution to the condition of Africans in the United States. Many of the leading scholars in this tradition—Gerald McWorter (aka Abdul Alkalimat), Ronald Bailey, and William Sales, for example—believed strongly in the necessity of a general analysis of African American history based on the conflict model (Alkalimat, 1986). The fact of the matter is that when one looks at the Southern experience of African Americans, Africans were workers and whites were capitalists in the classic caste sense. One could argue, as some have, that this was only an aberration because white workers were also being crushed by the capitalist state. With radical democratic and socialist thinkers, such as William Sales, Manning Marable, and Cornel West, one often sees the duality of class and race in their Black Studies writings. Manning Marable, who teaches political sociology at Columbia University, is the author of many books, including *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (1983) and *Black Liberation in a Conservative America* (1997). Cornel West, who teaches religion at Princeton University, is best known for the popular work *Race Matters* (1992). William Sales, who teaches Black Studies at Seton Hall University, is the author of *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation: Malcolm X and the Organization of Afro-American Unity* (1994).

The question of which factor is most responsible for the economic and cultural condition of people of

African descent in the industrial, heterogeneous societies of the West has not been adequately answered by the Marxists; it remains one of the continuing issues in Black Studies. Nevertheless, a socialist ethic seems to underlie much of the literature in the field, although it could be argued that it is not a consciously socialist attitude that governs the writings of African American Studies professors. It is as though the humanist element in the analysis and synthesis of political energies is directed toward creating societies where domination is critiqued as a matter of course and where human oppression based on race, culture, class, or gender is obliterated.

Black Studies and the Cultural Wars

The cultural wars of the 1990s were initiated not by Black Studies scholars but by white Eurocentric scholars in response to some of their black protégées' Afrocentric contention that it was necessary to develop a paradigm that spoke to the specific and particular condition of African people in the world. This was a thrust for agency, a movement to reinterpret reality from the standpoint of African people and for the interest of African people. This was seen, inter alia, as an attack on white people, which it was not, and as an assault on Europe's hegemony, which it was. Black Studies, in using the Afrocentric paradigm (Mazama, 2003), was expressing its commitment to demonstrating that African phenomena can be studied from the perspective of African people. The goal was for Africans the world over to be centered, that is, to be placed in an active role as agents with the possibility of seeing, conceiving, and acting in their own best interest. Thus, scholars rushed to show that one can examine anything from an Afrocentric point of view and arrive at conclusions different from those of Eurocentrists. The difference was that Eurocentrists had identified their particularity as universal and could not see that others had different views and perspectives that were valid for them. The Eurocentrists were so used to universalizing their experiences that they believed that Black Studies scholars were, indeed, committing the highest academic crime—they were assaulting the taboo of Eurocentric hegemony itself. This is the origin of what white scholars describe as cultural wars and what Black Studies scholars, such as Perry Hall and Terry Kershaw, describe as the necessary reexamination of the protocols of researching African phenomena.

Afrocentrists claimed that it was not legitimate for white scholars to attack other cultures or peoples and then to claim that Europe was protected from criticism because it was a chosen, special, unique culture above the rest. Creating and researching from a centered perspective, Afrocentrists rejected the idea that Europe was a model for humanity, because everywhere Europe seemed to be separating itself from the rest of humanity (Chinweizu, 1975). Indeed, geographer J. M. Blaut (1999) argued from a position similar to that of the Afrocentrists by claiming that the major European historians were racists.

This new Afrocentric approach led scholars such as Innocent Onyewuenyi (1993), Miriam Monges (1997), Katherine Bankole (1996), and others to advance novel ideas about different eras of African history. Onyewuenyi claimed a legacy that had been left by Cheikh Anta Diop and continued researching the African origin of Greek philosophy in order to demonstrate the antiquity of Nile Valley philosophical concepts. Monges undertook a new look at the civilization of Kush and established the plinth that would later yield her work on the “shebanization” of knowledge, which is the critical recentering of ancient knowledge on the activities and achievements of women. Bankole demonstrated that the medical care of the enslaved Africans in Louisiana was not only brutally crude but also based on a Eurocentric notion of the inferiority of Africans and the superiority of Europeans.

Perhaps the most provocative element in the cultural wars was the Afrocentrists’ objective of carrying out the work of Cheikh Anta Diop, the late Senegalese historian, Egyptologist, and linguist. Diop had contended that the ancient Egyptians who built the pyramids and the Pharaonic civilization were black-skinned Africans. This had upset much of the common lore among whites that the ancient Egyptians were whites and had established the great civilization in North Africa without any African influence. Diop’s arguments in *The African Origin of Civilization* (1974) were intended to answer all of the questions raised by European scholars about the cultures and civilizations of Africa as well as to show emphatically that ancient Egypt was the creation of black people.

Thus, Diop took the lead in defending Africa’s own agency as a continent of cultural expression apart from European influence. Pharaonic Egypt, or Kemet, as it was called by the early Africans, was the most monumental civilization of antiquity. The creative

productions of the society are more impressive than Greece and Rome combined. This meant, in Diop’s conception, that Europe, in its racist attitude, would have to find ways to disinherit Africans of their classical civilization. He wrote many books, mainly in French, but some of them were published in English, including the majestic work, *Civilization or Barbarism*. In each work Diop sought to advance his idea that the African was the mother of human civilization. A devoted researcher, Diop studied linguistics, physics, architecture, history, art, mathematics, and did melanin experiments on mummies, in order to prove his point that the ancient Egyptians were black Africans. In response to Diop, numerous Black Studies scholars took up the call to link the study of African people to the classical African structures of the past to advance a more meaningful interpretation of philosophy, ethics, religion, and culture.

Detractors sought to minimize the achievements of science, whether biological, archaeological, linguistic, or physical, when such achievements turned up as evidence against the position of a white Egypt or the position that Greece learned nothing from Africa. Of course, this could not be supported in the end, because the overwhelming evidence to the contrary silenced everyone except the most foolhardy. Mary Lefkowitz, a classicist, wrote a book called *Not Out of Africa* (1996) to answer what she deemed the most significant arguments of the Afrocentrists. She singled out Martin Bernal, author of *Black Athena* (1987), who had created quite a stir with his thesis that ancient Athens owed a lot to the African and Asian civilizations that predated it, and attacked him with a vengeance, believing that he had somehow undermined the dominant position of Greece in the ancient world. But Bernal’s position was supported by enormous evidence as well as plausible theories of African contributions to Greece. Indeed, in the 1950s George G. M. James had written in *Stolen Legacy* (1956/2002) that there was no Greek philosophy, only stolen African philosophy. Bernal outdistanced both James and Diop in his massive *Black Athena* project. What was clear in the cultural war discussions was that the hegemonists were outclassed by scholarship. Afrocentric scholars, many of them with knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and the ancient Pharaonic language Mdw Ntr, delved into the works of Plutarch, Herodotus, and Aristotle, among others, to ferret out the distinction between the ancient record and the modern Aryan record. It was necessary for Black

Studies scholars, particularly the Afrocentrists, to reformulate historical periods based on a new reading of the texts. This was done, and it was published in and disseminated through articles in the *Journal of Black Studies*, the *Journal of Negro History*, *Western Journal of Black Studies*, and *Black Scholar*.

Black Studies and Gender

The issue of gender in the context of Black Studies has always been a complicated one. There had been an early movement to separate female-centered interests from Afrocentric ideas, thus creating two perspectives, one female and the other African. This separatist idea was rejected by the major leaders of the field because it overlooked the idea that Afrocentricity was a theoretical perspective, indeed, a paradigm, that was initiated without regard to gender. The idea of a separate female-centered paradigm would essentially leave Afrocentricity as a male-centered paradigm. It was neither conceived as a male-centered idea nor sustained in any active way as a one-gender concept. The Afrocentric idea was to view both females and males of African heritage as benefiting from a general orientation to phenomena, reality, concepts, and events that were African centered.

One cannot divest oneself of one's cultural perspective. When a person is making an analysis, it must be from one cultural perspective or another. This was the fundamental issue facing those who wanted to construct a gender-based analysis of African phenomena. It was in this light that Clenora Hudson-Weems (1998) established the idea of "Africana womanism." Hudson-Weems meant to disengage the study of African womanism from feminism. The discourse around feminism was, to her, a discourse originated by white women who had limited understanding of the place African women had played in American or African life. Indeed, she contended that white women could get their liberation and still remain essentially racist against black women.

Thus, race always trumped gender in the discussion of transformation. Furthermore, Hudson-Weems led the charge to disengage the struggle for women's rights from the antimale discourse of many feminists. This became a leading ideological position for many women in Black Studies. It was by no measure the only position taken by women and men in the field, but there were few who could assert successfully a position in opposition to the one held by Hudson-Weems (1998),

Patricia Dixon (2001), Nah Dove (1997), and others. Gender is necessarily a factor to be raised in any critical, political, economic, behavioral, or cultural discussion, but it is not the core of Black Studies. Definitionally, Black Studies must deal with black people, with no regard to gender.

Yet it is understood that in the context of Black Studies as elsewhere men and women cannot be seen as being the same. Indeed, Patricia Dixon (2001) has boldly argued that it might be necessary for black women in the United States, given the large numbers of single women, to reconsider the Western opposition to polygamy. Of course such a proposal is provocative, but it is one idea found in an analysis of the economic and social plight of African American families. Gendered understandings of different phenomena are definitely possible within the purview of Black Studies.

Black Studies cannot be isolated from the world and therefore it cannot be isolated within the academy. The modern college or university, to be taken seriously as a place of major intellectual discourse, must have Black Studies. Africans and those of African descent are preeminently modern people in thinking and attitude, and whether one is at Harvard or Arizona State, it is almost impossible to understand the modern world apart from understanding the role of African people in this era. Furthermore, African American people are so much a part of the political culture, the religious context, and the economic life of America that it would be impossible to be considered well educated without knowing something of the myriad ways blacks have created space in America. Given the issues that have been articulated over the past 40 years, and anticipating what is likely to occur in the future, we believe that the *Encyclopedia of Black Studies* will serve as a much-needed guide for those who are seeking clarity in the ever more complex world we live in. While our encyclopedia does not purport to provide all that is known about African people the world over, we are confident that you will find in this work a full measure of the state of Black Studies.

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Editors' Note: The majority of our contributors provide brief descriptions of the resources they recommend in the Further Reading sections that appear at the end of the individual entries. We invite you to learn more about the subjects presented in the *Encyclopedia of Black Studies* by following up on these suggested resources.