

## Chapter 13

**The Origins of Africana Studies: A Brief History of a Scholar Activist Tradition**

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**Introduction**

Born out of students' demand for a relevant education during the transitional period between the modern Civil Rights era (1954-1965) and the Black Power era (1966-1975), Africana Studies is a discipline that emerged during one of the most radical moments in Africana history.<sup>1</sup> Impatient with the pace with which European-Americans accepted that Africana women, men, and children were deserving of full integration in all areas of American society, students and faculty at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) and predominantly white institutions (PWI) began to critique the integrationist ideals espoused by Civil Rights era activists and reclaim Africana history, culture, and values. These scholar-activists sought to use this perspective to transform university education in preparation to address the social, political, and economic conditions within their immediate neighborhoods and communities. This desire for a

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<sup>1</sup> Within this chapter the term "Africana" refers to the collective histories, experiences, and destinies of continental Africans and their descendants located in the Americas, the Caribbean, and elsewhere due to enslavement and later voluntary and involuntary migrations.

relevant and solution-driven education on college campuses during this period led to the creation of the discipline of Africana Studies.

Africana Studies and the student-activist tradition that brought the discipline into being in the late 1960s has a much longer evolutionary development, however. This history begins with the purpose of education and the role of the student within ancient and traditional African societies and can be traced throughout Africana people's struggle for freedom and inclusion since their enslavement in America. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce students to the origins of the discipline, the early objectives and motivations of some of its early architects, and the particular ideological framework which students, faculty, and community members used as motivation to disrupt and, in some instances, to completely shut down, college and university campuses. In doing so, however, this chapter examines this activism as an outgrowth of Africana women, men, and youth who have historically used the acquisition of knowledge, literacy, and the creation of scholarship as methods to resist oppressive conditions in America.

Before exploring the origins of Africana Studies, it is important to explain the significance of nomenclature (naming) used for the discipline and the scope of the discipline. The students and scholars who brought about the field through activism often espoused the political philosophy of Black Power. Therefore, Black Studies was the initial name of academic units and reflected the philosophical orientation of those who agitated for the transformation of not only racist America but its racist higher education curricula. Within this chapter, the term Africana is used interchangeably with Black, African American, and Diasporan African. Africana Studies is used interchangeably with African

Studies, Black Studies, Pan-African Studies, African American Studies, African Diaspora Studies, and, less frequently, Africology. Since the institutionalization of the discipline in the American academy, many students, faculty, and administrators use these names interchangeably as well. But not without some debate.

Nomenclature has often reflected how many scholars have envisioned the discipline. A discipline, in simple terms, is "a specialized branch of study and knowledge."<sup>2</sup> For Africologist Ama Mazama, the various names for the discipline reflect the unresolved issue of the scope of discipline.<sup>3</sup> The normative perspective is that terms used in relationship to the discipline identify varying Africana cultures, communities, and regions that are of interest to scholars. For instance, as will be discussed later in the chapter, African Studies scholars or Africanists study varying aspects of continental African history, psychology, politics, sociology, and religion. For scholars in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, aligning themselves with the terms African American Studies or who refer to themselves as African Americanist scholars, their scholarship is frequently (not always) centered in the history, life, and culture of Africana people in North America. For James Stewart and Talmadge Anderson, these thinkers use theories, approaches, and perspectives borrowed from traditional Western disciplines of history, psychology, and

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<sup>2</sup> Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ama Mazama, "Naming and Defining: A Critical Link," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 20 (2009), 68.

political science, to examine African American life, defining the field to be an inherently interdisciplinary examination of the African American experience.<sup>4</sup>

This interdisciplinary perspective also exists among some folks laboring within both African Diasporan and Pan-African Studies units. But many of these scholars see the discipline as an intellectual space in which there is room for engagement with continental African subject matter, both past and present, as well as the study of the linguistic, social, historical, political, economic, and behavioral realities of African descendants throughout the world (diaspora) and across time and space (pan). Practitioners who more so identify as Africana Studies scholars seem to view the discipline similarly to Pan-African and African Diasporan scholars. However, like Africologists, they attempt to dispense with Western traditional disciplinary theories, approaches, and perspectives and consider their approach to reflect the intentions of the early architects of the discipline who called for the use of “ideological and pedagogical blackness” as the approach to researching and teaching in the discipline and transforming communities.<sup>5</sup> This current brand of Africana Studies scholarship often defines the discipline as a transdisciplinary enterprise in which ancient and traditional African perspectives on reality, found throughout African history and culture, are in fact “the ideological and pedagogical blackness” that early laborers in the discipline called for. Africana Studies scholars, then, use this ideological framework

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<sup>4</sup> Talmadge Anderson and James Stewart, *Introduction to African American Studies: Transdisciplinary Approaches and Implications* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2007), 4

<sup>5</sup> Nathan Hare, “What Should Be the Role of Afro-American Education in the Undergraduate Curriculum?” *Liberal Education*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (March 1969), 42-50.

as a lens through which to examine the whole of the African world experience in an attempt to bring about their psychological, spiritual, political, and economic liberation.<sup>6</sup> Yet, African American, Pan-African, and Diasporan studies scholars often unquestionably align with this academic approach as well. The next section of the chapter presents the ideas of scholars who utilize this latter approach to rethink and define the African ancestral goal of education and knowledge.

### **African Indigenous Education: A Purpose-Driven Intellectual Tradition**

Maulana Karenga, Daudi Azibo, Linda James Myers, and several other Africana Studies scholars support the idea that an African intellectual tradition predates what would become eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth-century scholar-activist objectives in the Diaspora.<sup>7</sup> Attempting to demonstrate the existence of a liberatory higher education model among Africans thousands of years before Europe enslaved and colonized the African world, these scholars look to the ancient African Nile Valley (Kemet/Egypt) educational systems that began during the Old Kingdom period, circa 2600 BCE. These educational institutions (universities) were grounded in a time-honored study of the movement of the natural world and how nature reflected the human potential to

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<sup>6</sup> Karanja Keita Carroll, "Africana Studies and Research Methodology: Revisiting the Centrality of the Afrikan Worldview Methodology," *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (March 2008), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Linda James Myers, "Optimal Theory and the Academic and Philosophical Origins of Black Studies," in Nathaniel Norment, ed., *The African American Studies Reader* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007).

live a balanced life. In a word, the major purpose of education in the Nile Valley was to learn how to bring about balance in one's community through knowing one's self, that is, one's true self, one's higher self.<sup>8</sup> Referencing the mission of one of the oldest centers for higher learning in the Nile Valley in Waset (Thebes), Asa Hilliard details the educational mission: "The highest aim of Egyptian education was for one to become godlike through the revision of one's own 'Neter,' of how God is revealed in the person."<sup>9</sup> It was through this training that graduates were prepared to serve in spiritual, scribal, political, and other occupations that were in service to their dynastic government and/or local communities. For Myers, the students and educators comprising the movement for Africana Studies and the academic objectives of contemporary Africana Studies practitioners are heirs to this tradition.<sup>10</sup>

The mission of precolonial and contemporary West African education systems reflect ancient intentions. Within most African cultural or language groupings, formal education was—and in some communities continues to be—an initiation process, where all youth on the verge of adulthood are introduced to cultural knowledge that supports their spiritual development and life purpose.<sup>11</sup> Malidoma Patrice Somé describes this process within his contemporary Dagara culture of Burkina Faso, West Africa: "Initiation

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<sup>8</sup> Asa G. Hilliard, *The Maroon Within Us* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1995), 92.

<sup>9</sup> Hilliard, 93, 99.

<sup>10</sup> Myers, 297.

<sup>11</sup> Vincent B. Khapoya, *The African Experience: An Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1994), 47.

focuses on and is a response to some basic existential questions faced by humans beings....Everyone wonders, Who am I? Where do I come from? What am I here for? and Where am I going?"<sup>12</sup> Additionally, depending on the particular social order of the African cultural grouping, youths may acquire further training to prepare them to perform specialized occupations, including but not limited to musicians, metallurgists, fisherpersons, healers, shaman, and other specialized professions through which they could use their individual talents and life purpose in service of their community.<sup>13</sup> Kwame Gyekye, writing about the Akan of Ghana, West Africa, sums up service to the community in this way: "one must have two responsibilities: to oneself as an individual and to the group. Maintaining the balance is not easy, but most people in African societies try to do what they can to fulfill those responsibilities."<sup>14</sup> Mastering one's purpose for community survival has therefore been the goal of formal education within many African societies.

### **The Making of an Africana Scholar-Activist Tradition**

By the early eighteenth century, intellectuals in Europe and in North America began to fabricate the inferiority of continental and Diasporan African peoples. Although fifth-century BCE Greek historian Herodotus documented the ingenuity of Nile Valley inhabitants, eighteenth-century philosophers concluded that African people were

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<sup>12</sup> Malidoma Patrice Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1998), 276.

<sup>13</sup> Somé, 40.

<sup>14</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Sankofa Press, 1996), 50.

uncivilized and backwards. French philosopher Montesquieu, Scottish philosopher David Hume, and German philosophers Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Hegel, for instance, wrote extensively about the ignorance and innately primitive nature of continental and Diasporan Africans. Their main assertion was that African people had never developed any form of science, mathematics, art, spirituality, political, and economic structures that were comparable to ancient Greek and Roman foundations and contemporary European advancements because they were incapable of doing so. These ideas echoed social science theories emerging during the eighteenth century, including the conclusion of Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, who classified Africans as an intellectually inferior species in comparison with all other races, especially the intellectually astute “white race.” Although the enslavement of Africans by Europeans began in 1444 when Portuguese raiders kidnapped human beings off the western coast of the African continent, these Western intellectual and social science ideas provided *further* rationalization for the enslavement and colonization of African people.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries enslaved and free Africans in what would become North America used literacy to challenge these white supremacist ideas and the system of enslavement. Between 1619—the infamous year when the first stolen Angolans were brought to Jamestown, Virginia—and the close of the Civil War in 1865, owners provided necessary skills, crafts, and management training for Africans to labor on plantations, and some provided biblical education in an attempt to encourage obedience to God’s divine plan for their enslavement. While educating Africans was illegal, a few owners taught just enough literacy for a select few to read biblical scripture and to



teach Christianity to other enslaved Africans. However, in 1831 in Southampton County, Virginia, for instance, enslaved preacher Nat Turner used his interpretation of biblical scripture and his spiritual insight to organize and launch one of the largest documented, deadly acts of revolution against Europeans in African history. While by no means the first, it is an excellent example of enslaved folks using their education in the service of community survival. These acts were in tandem with eighteenth-century lectures and publications composed by free Africans.

Indeed, some enslaved and free Africans in both the North and South before the Civil War taught themselves to read and write, while other free Africans, especially in the North, received education from Quakers and other religious organizations or established small institutions for themselves and their children with private support. David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829), Maria W. Stewart's *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality* (1831), Edward Blyden's *A Voice from Bleeding Africa on Behalf of Her Exiled Children* (1856), and several others exemplify the purpose-filled scholarship meant to incite African peoples' critical thinking about collective methods to bring about their own emancipation. These scholar-activists unquestionably laid down the foundation for what would evolve into the discipline of African Studies. Despite the fact the discipline had not been formed, it was their orientation to the work, their connection to the community, and their undying commitment to liberation through education that makes them scholar-activists and early African Studies scholars.

## **Word to Our Mothers: Foremothers of African Studies**

Gender has affected how the development of Africana Studies has been understood and historicized, especially when considering the differing degrees of access to education of Africana women scholar-activists living under patriarchal white supremacy, even compared with their Africana male peers. Because of these inequities, histories of Africana Studies have highlighted an almost exclusively male foundation. Our foremothers are central to the historical development of the discipline of Africana Studies, as is evident in the rich legacy of the scholar-activist tradition of Africana women orators, educators, and researchers, many of whom are also recognized as early developers of what has become womanism, Black Women's Studies, and Black Feminist Studies.

Professionally trained and self-taught Africana woman scholars have faced numerous obstacles, even more so than their male counterparts. A social system that placed women exclusively in domestic roles made it quite difficult for Africana women to be viewed as worthy contributors to the growing body of scholarship focused on African people and the Diaspora. This same social system excluded Black women from higher education, making it doubly difficult for them to secure positions using their expertise and seemingly impossible to publish in their respective fields. Finally, they faced outright sexism from their male counterparts, many of whom saw Africana women's arrival as an affront to their authority. Anna Julia Cooper, Maria W. Stewart, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Drusilla Dunjee Houston are four early Africana Studies scholars who overcame these obstacles, becoming major contributors to the body of scholarship on Africana people and are recognized as founders of Africana Studies.

Anna Julia Cooper has been recognized as an early founder of Africana Studies and Black Women's Studies not only because of her dedication to Africana people and education but also due to her significant influence on Black feminist intellectual thought during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Credited as the first African American woman to earn a doctorate in history, she remains an important Black feminist theorist because she was one of the first to consider the interconnectedness between the political, social, and economic liberation of Africana women and African people as a whole.

Cooper was born into enslavement in Raleigh, North Carolina. Still a child at the end of the Civil War, she had numerous opportunities to pursue an education and eventually obtained degrees from St. Augustine Normal and Collegiate Institute and Oberlin College. At that time, St. Augustine was a newly established institution for the education of Africana teachers, and while Cooper started as a student, in time she went on to serve as a tutor and later as a teacher.<sup>15</sup> After earning a master's degree from Oberlin, she taught at the M-Street school, a prestigious Black high school in Washington, D.C., where she would eventually be appointed as principal. She later became president of the Frelinghuysen University, a school that provided vocational and academic courses for working-class Black people.<sup>16</sup> Regardless of the location or institution, Cooper made the education of Africana people her life's work. Cooper was motivated to begin her doctoral studies at sixty years old, one of her most notable accomplishments. She

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<sup>15</sup> Cathryn Bailey, "Anna Julia Cooper: 'Dedicated in the Name of My Slave Mother to the Education of Colored Working People,'" *Hypatia*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Spring 2004), 57.

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, 58.

completed her doctorate at the University of Paris, Sorbonne, and defended her thesis, entitled "L'Attitude de la France dans la question de l'Esclavage entre 1789 et 1848" ("The Attitude of France on the Question of Slavery between 1789 and 1848").<sup>17</sup> Challenging the moral implications of enslavement, her thesis considered the impact of enslavement on African people in nuanced ways. Her thesis grappled with the contradictions of the country's slaveholding past, and the work proved to be another important and practical step in her journey as a scholar-activist.

Cooper's work has become a foundational example of early Black feminist intellectual thought. Her collection of essays *A Voice from the South* discusses the intersectionality of Africana women's identities and positions them as a unique and necessary force in reform efforts. In 1892, she astutely described the challenges faced by Africana women:

She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both. While the women of the white race can with calm assurance enter upon the work they feel by nature appointed to do, while their men give loyal support and appreciative countenance to their efforts...the colored woman too often finds herself hampered and shamed by a less liberal sentiment and a more conservative attitude on the part of those for whose opinion she cares the most.<sup>18</sup>

Cooper's focus on Africana women's agency despite their invisibility was a strong call to action and made an intentional break from the gender norms of the time.

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<sup>17</sup> Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, "Black Women Historians from the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the Dawning of the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of African American History*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (July 2004), 251.

<sup>18</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (Xenia, Ohio: The Aldine Printing House, 1892), 134-135.

An Africana educator, orator, abolitionist, and theologian, Maria Miller Stewart was born a free woman in 1803 in Hartford, Connecticut. Much of Stewart's life remains a mystery, but her important, albeit short career as an abolitionist writer and lecturer places her at the forefront of the scholar-activist tradition that would eventually usher in Africana Studies. Mentored by free Black abolitionist David Walker, Stewart shared his belief that God was on the side of African American people and would avenge their enslavement and discriminatory treatment; however, unlike Walker, she avoided endorsing violence.<sup>19</sup> Instead, Stewart focused her energies on promoting education and moral discipline as the most viable roads to racial uplift. Further, she broke with traditional gender norms of the period and fiercely advocated for the education of Africana women and girls, going as far as to encourage them to promote, fundraise, and build their own educational institutions. Her deep commitment to the "daughters of Africa" was demonstrated both through the content of her speeches and her published works.

Between 1831 and 1833, Stewart launched a powerful career as a passionate orator and went on to become the first American-born woman to speak before an audience mixed with Africana and European-American women and men in 1832. In her provocative speech "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation on Which we Must Build," Stewart highlighted the importance of women's education. She righteously asked, "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?" and advocated that they "let

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<sup>19</sup> Valerie C. Cooper, *Word, Like Fire: Maria Stewart, the Bible, and the Rights of African Americans* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 2-3.

every female heart become united and let us raise a fund ourselves; and at the end of one year and a half, we might be able to lay the corner-stone for the building of a high school, that the higher branches of knowledge might be enjoyed by us."<sup>20</sup> Despite her relatively short career, Stewart's published works and speeches left a lasting impact by demonstrating African women's early investment in education as a means of liberation and by showing the promise and potential of African girls as viable leaders in the long, protracted struggle against white supremacy.

Perhaps the most popularly known of the four scholars highlighted in this section is Ida B. Wells-Barnett, anti-lynching crusader, journalist, orator, and advocate for woman suffrage. Born to enslaved parents in 1862 in Holly Springs, Mississippi, she attended Rust College, an industrial school for freed people. After the death of both parents, the 14-year-old Wells-Barnett became primary caregiver for her siblings and took a teaching job to support them. In 1884, she moved her family to Memphis in hopes of securing a better-paying position, and, that same year, she successfully sued the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad Company after refusing to ride in the smoking car that was designated for African passengers.<sup>21</sup> Wells-Barnett's demand to ride in the Ladies' Car instead of the smoking car was more than a demand for individual respect; her refusal symbolized a

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<sup>20</sup> Maria Miller Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build," in Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 26.

<sup>21</sup> Sharon Harley, "Wells-Barnett, Ida B. (1862-1931) Journalist and Social Activist," in Charles Reagan Wilson, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture Volume 3: History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 350.

much broader call for the protection of African women and girls, a campaign that remained central to her activist agenda.

While teaching in Memphis, Wells-Barnett began to pursue a career in journalism and became co-owner and editor of the *Memphis Free Speech*. Using the resources most readily at her disposal, in 1891 Wells-Barnett wrote and published an article criticizing the school system for its inadequate allocations to African schools and was subsequently fired from her teaching job.<sup>22</sup> The following year, Wells-Barnett wrote another fiery column in response to the lynching of three of her friends; public response included the destruction of Wells-Barnett's *Free Speech* building and numerous threats on her life. Undeterred by threats, Wells-Barnett further researched the numerous lynchings of Black people and criticized local officials for their inaction. Her research was published in the pamphlet *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* in 1892, and a more formal analysis, *A Red Record*, was published in 1895. Her work garnered support from prominent African Americans, like Frederick Douglass, who helped her gain a larger national and international audience. Wells-Barnett's fastidious desire to document the terror of lynching also served as an important corrective that dispelled myths of African barbarity.<sup>23</sup>

After marrying the editor of the *Chicago Conservator*, the city's first Black newspaper, Wells-Barnett became an active contributor while also founding and serving

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<sup>22</sup> Harley, 350.

<sup>23</sup> Linda McMurry Edwards, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 166 -167.

in a number of civic clubs and organizations. During the opening decades of the twentieth century, Wells-Barnett served the National Afro-American Council and the Negro Fellowship League. Further, she helped to found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).<sup>24</sup> Wells-Barnett's legacy of outspoken activism, striking prose and tireless fight for African people generally, and Black women specifically, positions her as an undeniable example of the stalwart African Studies scholar before the formal installation of the discipline.

Drusilla Dunjee Houston, historian, author, and poet, is best known for her meticulously researched *Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire*, a study hailed as the first exploration of ancient African civilizations by an African American woman. But long before she began working toward *Wonderful Ethiopians*, Houston demonstrated unwavering interest in strong education for African Americans people, especially African girls and women. After serving as an elementary school teacher in McAlester, Oklahoma, she opened the McAlester Seminary for Girls at the close of the nineteenth century. Following twelve years of service and numerous commendations, Houston served as principal of the Oklahoma Baptist College for Girls from 1917 until 1923, after which she opened the Oklahoma Vocational Institute of Fine Arts and Crafts.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Edwards, 282.

<sup>25</sup> Peggy Ann Brooks-Bertram, *Drusilla Dunjee Houston: Uncrowned Queen in the African American Women's Literary Tradition* (Buffalo: State University of New York at Buffalo, 2002), 6.



Her career in education was matched by her career as a journalist. Born into a “newspaper family,” Houston was a regular contributor to the *Black Bookertee*, a periodical published in the all-African town of Bookertee, Oklahoma.<sup>26</sup> She was also a regular contributor in the *Black Dispatch*, which was owned by her brother, Roscoe Dunjee. Between 1914 and 1939, Houston wrote more than 2,000 editorials. Houston’s experience as a researcher and journalist may have prepared her for *Wonderful Ethiopians*, a major undertaking that would become her life’s work.

Self-published in 1926 amid rising racial tensions in the United States, *Wonderful Ethiopians* was an important project that connected the ancient majesty of the Cushites to their African-descended ancestors living in America. It was not only timely but necessary to achieve the historical recovery and progress that Houston envisioned. In the preface, Houston writes to Africans, “Lift up your heads, discouraged and downtrodden Ethiopians. Listen to this marvelous story told of your ancestors, who wrought mightily for mankind and built the foundations of civilization true and square in the days of old.”<sup>27</sup> Much like the Africana Studies scholars that would follow her, Houston placed unmatched importance on knowing the truth and fullness of Africana history and using that knowledge in service of liberation. Clearly an act of reclamation, Houston challenged misrepresentations of African people within Eurocentric scholarship. *Wonderful Ethiopians* was just as much a project of recovery as it was a practical means of helping African

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<sup>26</sup> Brooks-Bertram, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Drusilla Dunjee Houston, *Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire Book I* (Oklahoma City: Universal Publishing Company, 1926), 10-11.

Diasporans to reclaim and reconnect to their histories. As demonstrated through the extraordinary life and works of Cooper, Stewart, Wells-Barnett, and Houston, Africana women were active in conducting and sharing research about Africana people that was both practical and accessible to the community.

## **African American Research, Pan-Africanism, and African Studies at HBCUs**

Historically Black colleges and university (HBCUs) had been the intellectual hub for Africana students interested in seeking a college education before 1965. Although initially established by religious missions and European-American philanthropists to educate free Africans in the North directly before the Civil War, the majority of these institutions were established in the Southern states from Reconstruction through the first quarter of the twentieth century. While many HBCUs initially began as primary and secondary schools, they became premier institutions of higher education for Africana people because of legislation that mandated segregation of races in most institutions and facilities in the South. It is within these segregated institutions where highly educated Africana professors—often having received advanced education and degrees from predominately white institutions in the North—trained, challenged, and supported many of the students and graduates who were on the cutting edge of civil rights activism during the first half of the twentieth century. In this way, HBCUs, in some instances, provided students with a critical education that engendered the possibilities for radical social transformation.

Some of the earliest research on the African American experience was conducted by HBCU faculty setting the backdrop for what would evolve into Africana Studies. Seeking solutions to disenfranchisement, poverty, and other conditions impacting the wellbeing of African communities at the turn of the twentieth century, Howard University professor and priest Alexander Crummell formed the American Negro Academy in 1897 in Washington, D.C. Featuring a series of yearly lectures and scholarly presentations, the Academy attracted the foremost radical scholar-activists of the day who used their scholarship as means to dismantle white supremacy. Some of the presentations included the writings of Arturo Schomburg, Archibald H. Grimké, and John W. Cromwell, among others.

Sociologist and historian William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois is unquestionably positioned as a forerunner to the discipline of Africana Studies.<sup>28</sup> Often described as one of the most prolific thinkers, researchers, and activists in Africana and American history, Du Bois completed his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1895. He was a founding member and later president of the American Negro Academy, and one of Du Bois's earliest appointments was to lead the sociology program at Atlanta University. While there, Du Bois led a series of social science research studies on the social, economic, familial, and mental wellbeing of Africana communities under the umbrella of the Atlanta Sociological

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<sup>28</sup> Nagueyalti Warren, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Grandfather of Black Studies* (Africa World Press: Trenton, 2011); James B. Stewart, "The Legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois for Contemporary Black Studies," *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (1984): 296-311.

Laboratory.<sup>29</sup> Between 1897 and 1910 Atlanta sociology students often assisted Du Bois with this early research also known as the Atlanta University Studies, the publication and research arm of the Laboratory.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, in one of Du Bois' earlier reflections "Strivings of the Negro People," published in an 1897 volume of *The Atlantic Monthly* and later as a chapter in *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), he provided the prognosis that Africana people walk through the world with a double-consciousness resulting from the intergenerational impact of racism in America:

[T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, a gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.<sup>31</sup>

For Du Bois, this double-consciousness renders Africana women, men, and children often unable to see themselves beyond the racist characterizations and demeaning stereotypes of Africana people created and upheld by European elites, academics, and laypersons. It is this dilemma that twentieth-century educators in African Studies and later in the discipline of Africana Studies would seek to heal through scholarship and classroom instruction. Overall, Du Bois's scholarship on Africana communities—including *The*

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<sup>29</sup> Earl Wright II, "The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, 1896-1924: A Historical Account of the First American School of Sociology," *Western Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2002), 165-174.

<sup>30</sup> "Studies of Black Families," *Finding a Way: The Black Family's Struggle for Education at the Atlanta University Center*, <https://digitalexhibits.auctr.edu/exhibits/show/finding-a-way/studies-of-black-families> (accessed November 2, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "Strivings of the Negro People," *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1897, 194.

*Philadelphia Negro* (1899), *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935) and innumerable other books, works of fiction, and articles—set the tone for solution-drive research and writing on the life chances of Africana people living under white supremacy.

Although Carter G. Woodson's tenure as faculty at Howard University was short lived, his intellectual contributions are enduring. With the goal of establishing scholarship about African and Diasporan history to Africana people who may not have had access to higher education, Woodson believed that self-knowledge could repair the damage that the social, economic, and physical conditions of enslavement and post-Reconstruction segregation has had on the psyche and self-esteem of Africana people.<sup>32</sup> To achieve this aim in 1915, he formed the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History) and its publishing arm, *The Journal of Negro History*, a year later. In 1926 Woodson established Negro History Week and published *The Mis-Education of the Negro* in 1933. It is clear that the contributions of these early male scholars, like their female counterparts, shaped the meaning of scholar-activism for Africana people.

The origins of African Studies at HBCUs must also be understood within this intellectual climate and as a precursor to the discipline. According to historian Mario Azevedo, African Studies is defined as "a broad field or area of study which combines several disciplines in the arts, the humanities, and the socio-behavioral sciences for the

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<sup>32</sup> Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, "Making Black History Practical and Popular: Carter G. Woodson, the Proto Black Studies Movement and the Struggle for Black Liberation," *Western Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (2003), 378-381.

sole purpose of studying and understanding Africa and its people from all facets.”<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, normative histories highlight the founding of African Studies at Northwestern University in Chicago in 1948 during the Cold War era. During this moment in history, the federal government, along with European-American philanthropists, sought to fund Western academics in Africa to investigate and curb the extent to which neo-colonial African leaders were adopting anti-capitalist economies. Anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits secured yearly funding, allowing him and a team of professors and researchers to create Northwestern’s program and to conduct research in all aspects of African social structures. The program became one of the foremost African Studies programs in the world that is still in existence today. However, prior to the creation of Northwestern’s program, several HBCU faculty formed political alliances with continental African leaders, conducted research in Africa, and included African history in their curricula for the purpose of challenging European colonialization of the continent and reclaiming the humanity of both continental and Diasporan Africans.

Du Bois’s intellectual and activist commitments to Africa are prime examples. During the period when racist theories about the inferiority of African people continued to prevail and segregation was the normative social order, Du Bois published *The Negro* in 1915 which reviewed the interconnected history of Africa and the Diaspora and was

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<sup>33</sup> Mario J. Azevedo, “African Studies and the State of the Art,” in Mario J. Azevedo, ed., *Africana Studies: A Survey of Africa and the Diaspora* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2019), 4.

one of the first books on this neglected history.<sup>34</sup> However, Du Bois's interest in Africa was evident in his 1895 dissertation, "Suppression of the African Slave Trade," and can be traced through his considerable involvement in and organization of Pan-African Congresses between 1900 and 1945, his teaching legacy at Atlanta University until 1910, and his role as a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In doing so, Du Bois organized, presented research, discussed position papers, and lobbied international political bodies alongside Trinidadian attorney Henry Sylvester Williams, theorist George Padmore, Senegalese parliamentarian Blaise Diagne, Emperor of Ethiopia Haile Selassie I, and numerous other continental and Diasporan thinkers and politicians during the first half of the twentieth century. Du Bois and these early twentieth century Pan-Africanists from the continent, the Caribbean, and North America gathered in London, Paris, Brussels, and elsewhere in the European empire to rally for the end of the economic and political occupation of the African continent by European colonialists who sought to extract raw material resources at the expense of the political, economic, and culture autonomy of African cultural groups. For Du Bois and other attendees of the congresses, Pan-Africanism became a political philosophy that considered the end of colonialism on the African continent as a part of the collective (pan) liberation struggles against European racism and domination in North America, the Caribbean, and other parts of the African Diaspora. Notably, the philosophy of Pan-

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<sup>34</sup> Jerry Gershenhorn, "'Not an Academic Affair': African American Scholars and the Development of African Studies Programs in the United States, 1942-1960," *Journal of African American History*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (2009), 49.

Africanism would later inform the political outlook and priorities of many of the students and faculty who fought for the development of Africana Studies in the American academy and shaped early curricular concerns.

In 1922 Leo William Hansberry offered courses about pre-colonial African social organizations, political economies, and cultural expressions at Howard University. In teaching these courses, Hansberry, like Woodson, wanted to provide an alternative history to the dominant representations of inferiority in Africa and its diasporic areas as a method to repair the damaged ego of his Africana students. During the 1930s, Howard political scientist Ralph Bunche researched colonial governments and African social and political systems of West, South, and East Africa. According to Pearl T. Robinson, the culmination of Bunche's research "emphasized the problems posed by colonial policies, imperialism, and the changing status of the contemporary African population."<sup>35</sup> Although faculty struggled for years to receive funding from the Ford Foundation to maintain its program, by 1953 Howard offered a graduate program, and by 1969 in the midst of the Black Power era, Howard became the first university in the country to offer a Ph.D. in African Studies, a program that continues today.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Pearl T. Robinson, "Ralph Bunche and African Studies: Reflections on the Politics of Knowledge," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (April 2008), 1-16.

<sup>36</sup> "About the Center," Howard University African Studies Center, <https://cfas.howard.edu/about#:~:text=In%201969%2C%20Howard%20University%20became,this%20glorious%20heritage%20and%20legacy> (accessed November 2, 2020).



Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and Lincoln University in Pennsylvania housed the first two programs in African Studies at HBCUs. Fisk's program began in 1942 due to the American government's increased interest in colonialization policies on the African continent. To be sure, the Fisk faculty were not interested in furthering colonial priorities in Africa; much of their interests in the study of Africa fell along the same lines as Du Bois, Woodson, Hansberry, and Bunche's objectives. However, attempting just to benefit from federal and philanthropic funding, sociologist Charles Johnson, linguist Lorenzo Turner, and other faculty were able to eventually offer an undergraduate and graduate degree in African Studies before the demise of the program in the late 1940s due to a myriad of faculty transitions.<sup>37</sup> Horace Mann Bond of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania created the Institute for the Study of African Affairs in 1950 without external funding. Creating an exchange program, Bond was not only interested in researching and teaching about Africa. Bond created a bridge for which over one hundred continental African students could exchange ideas with Diasporan African students in attendance at Lincoln; Kwame Nkrumah, who would be the first president of Ghana, was one of these students. As funding went to the African Studies programs at PWIs, like the program at Fisk, Lincoln's Institute was short-lived, leaving Howard University with the remaining program in African Studies at an HBCU. At both PWIs and HBCUs, contemporary Africana Studies scholars attempt to incorporate the investigation of Africa as part of the study of the larger diasporic African experience and use this historical cultural knowledge as

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<sup>37</sup> Gershenhorn," 50.

examples for how to sustain Africana life amidst white supremacy. Therefore, much of the scholarship produced by these early African Studies scholars comprise part of the Africana Studies curricula.

## **Civil Rights and Black Power: Student Activism at HBCUs**

The struggle for Africana Studies cannot be divorced from the activist tradition that influenced the modern Civil Rights era (1954-1965). Scholars have well documented the scholar-activist tradition of HBCU students, faculty, and alumni who were key architects in dismantling segregation policies in the South during the modern Civil Rights era. After the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, community-engaged students, faculty, alumni, and other sympathizers and concerned community members were further inspired to challenge all policies of discrimination.

For HBCU students, this resistance was especially the case. English professor JoAnne Robinson and her students at Albany State in Montgomery, Alabama, initiated and helped to bring about the 1956 court ruling that desegregated the city's buses. In the fall of 1956 Hampton University students boycotted segregated movie theaters in Hampton, Virginia.<sup>38</sup> The same year, Florida A&M students, like Albany State students, boycotted buses in Tallahassee, Florida.<sup>39</sup> With training from theologian James Lawson,

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<sup>38</sup> Jelani Favors, *Shelter in a Time of Storm: How Black Colleges Fostered Generations of Leadership and Activism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 2020), 186.

<sup>39</sup> Favors, 186.

Fisk University student Diane Nash, American Baptist Seminary student John Lewis, and many other members belonging to the Nashville, Tennessee, branch of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) began to stage non-violent sit-ins at segregated restaurants during this time as well. These Nashville HBCU student-activists were the first to successfully desegregate lunch counters on May 10, 1960, three months after the sit-ins began. However, it was the non-violent sit-in staged by four first-year students attending North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 1, 1960 that nationalized the sit-in revolution.<sup>40</sup> In April of the same year, SCLC activist Ella Baker organized students under the umbrella of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) at the HBCU Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. SNCC functioned as one of the major student activist organizations until the end of the 1960s.

For the remainder of the decade, even after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, HBCU students were often joined by students, both African and European, from colleges and universities throughout the nation. This united effort helped to overturn segregation policies and practices through voter registration drives, boycotts, and non-violent protests and marches throughout the South. These revolutionary activities resembled the traditions of thinkers, writers, and orators who used their talents in service of the liberation of their communities.

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<sup>40</sup> "Complete Coverage: The Civil Rights Movement in Nashville," *The Tennessean*, May 9, 2020, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2020/05/10/nashville-lunch-counters-desegregation-civil-rights/4807209002/> (accessed June 29, 2020).

The institutionalization of Africana Studies is situated within the specific political priorities of both the Civil Rights and the Black Power eras. Even with the passage of civil rights legislation, Africana communities across the nation remained frustrated with unchanging social, economic, and political realities impacting the life changes of Africana communities. During the sit-ins, boycotts, voter registration drives, and other revolutionary actions, SCLC and SNCC activists remained nonviolent in the immediate threat of violence, intimidation, and possible death at the hands of the state and local governments and European-American bystanders, in most instances. Indeed, after a white supremacist shot James Meredith in 1966 during his "March Against Fear," many activists and students were inspired to think more critically about the meaning of identity and freedom. Howard University alumni Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), who by 1966 had become the Chairperson of SNCC, initiated shouts of "Black Power!" while marching to Memphis after the shooting of Meredith. In doing so, he is documented as one of the first to articulate and develop the philosophy of Black Power.

Black Power was revolutionary at the time, but it was not new. When Ture and political scientist Charles Hamilton published *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* in 1967, their work resembled many ideas articulated by David Walker, Edward Blyden, Marcus Garvey, Drusilla Dunjee Houston, Ida B. Wells, Carter G. Woodson, and numerous other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thinkers, for instance. Timely, the text argued for self-determination; Africana people in America should not seek to assimilate themselves in the American cultural fabric, as American middle-class values were anti-

human and anti-Black at the core.<sup>41</sup> What Ture and Hamilton advocated for and what became the core philosophy of SNCC was revolutionary nationalist philosophy.

Black Power as revolutionary nationalism called for a two-step self-determination process. The first step in gaining self-determination was for Africana folks in America to no longer identify themselves as Negro. Like Malcolm X and his use of "Afro-American" in the vein of the Black Muslim Movement and his use of X to replace his slave name, Ture and Hamilton admonished readers to refrain from referring to themselves as Negro and instead to identify themselves as Black. This process of self-redefinition, self-renaming, was an attempt to dispense with names in which European-America has used to identify Africana peoples since their enslavement in America. Coupled with reading and learning about Africana history and culture, African people could begin to love themselves for who they were and no longer believe in the white supremacist ideology that Africana people were inferior to Europeans. In reclaiming the self, one could begin to address the social-psychological dissonance within Africana folks' psyche that Du Bois defined as double-consciousness almost a century earlier. The second step was political modernization. A revolutionary nationalist perspective on political modernization is that Black folks must gain full governance over their bodies and protect themselves from violence and their communities from economic and political exploitation. Ture and Hamilton urged readers that it was time for "black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to

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<sup>41</sup> Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), 41.

begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations. It is a call to reject the racist institutions and values of this society."<sup>42</sup>

Students heard this call, and many students attending universities and colleges across the nation began to identify with revolutionary nationalism/Black Power. From PWI state colleges to Ivy League universities, Africana students began to rethink what it meant to be in full governance of their education, and, more importantly, the purpose of higher education. At these institutions, regardless of the number of Africana students enrolled at their respective colleges and universities, students began to drop the name Negro from the name of their organizations and replace the term with Black or Afro-American. Or in some instances they created new campus-based organizations that were community focused.

Students also began to view their liberation as part of a larger international Pan-African struggle. Civil rights activists during the late 1950s and early 1960s, because of the decolonization efforts on the African continent, stayed abreast of these activities by reading newspapers and devouring scholarship produced by African leaders. Like Du Bois and attendees of the Pan-African Congresses that began in 1900, this new generation of radicals also began to see their struggle in relationship to the Pan-African struggle for liberation against colonialism on the continent and in other parts of the African Diaspora and that these political futures were aligned. As Africana historian Lerone Bennett Jr. estimated at the time, students were now considering the applicability of the theories and

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<sup>42</sup> Carmichael and Hamilton, 44.

ideas of Malcolm X, Martiniquais psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, and Pan-Africanists Amil Cabral and Kwame Nkrumah, among many others.<sup>43</sup> Some students even supplemented their study by joining local and national Black Power organizations such as the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, the Us Organization, and the Revolutionary Action Movement. On campuses across the nation, however, the main priority was the call for equitable funding and a radically transformative education that would prepare African students to gain social, economic, and political control of their oppressed communities. In this context students consciously demanded the creation of Black Studies courses, departments, and programs on university campuses.

Students attending historically Black colleges and universities were at the forefront of espousing revolutionary nationalism to transform their institutions. During this Black Power era, students took it upon themselves to use any means necessary—familiar boycotting, sit-ins, and even violent tactics—to gain more governing power on their campuses and in their communities. One main objective was to advocate to state legislatures and university administration for equitable funding to curb the sub-par campus conditions and resources; whether HBCUs were state funded or private, these institutions were always underfunded, and this condition continues today. Students at Bowie State in Maryland adhered to this line of thinking, responding to the dilapidated academic buildings and dorms that plagued most HBCUs. According to one account, the Bowie students “protested, boycotted, then took over the school for a day.”<sup>44</sup> Coupled

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<sup>43</sup> Lerone Bennett, “Confrontation on the Campus,” *Ebony*, May 1968, 27-28.

<sup>44</sup> Steven Morris, “Black Students Revolt,” *Jet*, May 9, 1968, 47.

with the concern of underfunding due to racist legislation, students wanted quality teachers and courses about the Africana experience.

For the most part, HBCUs, like PWIs, sought to offer an American liberal arts, social science, and science education that would prepare students to assimilate into American society. Outside of African Studies programs, with limited exceptions, the faculty were trained in Western traditional disciplines and the curricula at most HBCUs mimicked the course subjects, philosophies, and ways of thinking within these Western disciplines. For revolutionary nationalist students, this tradition was no longer acceptable. For instance, while students at Kentucky State University protested for courses in "Black history and culture," students at North Carolina A&T and 6,000 Howard University students and community members agitated for a "Black university."<sup>45</sup> Demanding that all departments at Howard should have Africana-oriented courses and that these courses prepare students to serve their communities, revolutionaries at Howard occupied the administration building, many academic buildings, and several dormitories between March 19, 1968, and March 23, 1968, effectively shutting down the university.<sup>46</sup> Unlike most HBCUs, however, what resulted at Howard was the 1968 series on Black Power, "Toward a Black University Conference," to discuss the changes in curricula that would best meet the needs of the faculty, students, and communities. Scholars and students throughout the country interested in these ideas came to this event. Following the

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<sup>45</sup> Morris, 50; Favors, 210.

<sup>46</sup> Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 142-173.



conference, in 1970 Howard established one of the first Africana Studies departments—the Department of Afro-American Studies—at an HBCU, just one year after the establishment of Africana Studies at San Francisco State College.

## **San Francisco State College: The Emergence of the Discipline of Africana Studies**

Students at many colleges and universities in California throughout the 1960s sought to transform their campuses. Like the students at HBCUs and their intellectual activist ancestors before them, Africana students in attendance at PWIs were seeking a new way to construct their educational experiences on college campuses in what for them was a climate of white supremacy model of education, even more so for them given the percentage of Africana students on campus. From California State-Chico to the University of California at Berkeley, students engaged with revolutionary nationalist philosophy and organizations, and like the rest of the students across the nation during the radical 1960s, organized to demand inclusion and autonomy. Nowhere else on the West coast was this more apparent than at San Francisco State College (SFSC).

The literature about the emergence of Africana Studies as a discipline consistently points to the protracted student activism at SFSC between 1967 and 1969 as the watershed moment in the history of student activism on American campuses.<sup>47</sup> Due to the unwavering commitments of Romona Tascoe, Sonia Sanchez, Danny Glover, Jimmy

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<sup>47</sup> Karenga, 12.

Garrett, Benny Stewart, and hundreds of other known and unknown students, faculty, staff, and community members who literally put their lives on the line in the face of violent police retaliation and jail time, SFSC is recorded as the first institution of higher education in America to establish a bachelor's degree-granting *department* of Black Studies. Although by 1971 there are more than five hundred units—departments, programs, centers—established on American campuses, the narrative of the establishment of Africana Studies at SFSC is significant because the institutionalization is the result of the longest strike on a university campus in American history.<sup>48</sup> The emergence of the discipline of Africana Studies is not only the outgrowth of a long and ancient Africana intellectual-activist tradition, but it is the first discipline in the American academy that is born out of revolutionary struggle.

The series of experiences that led to the emergence of Africana Studies at SFSC reflect concerns of students on many college and university campuses, especially at predominantly white institutions during the age of Black Power. For instance, during the middle of the decade, Africana students made up no more than ten percent of the student population.<sup>49</sup> Even so, the Board of Trustees for the California state campuses implemented new admissions requirements in 1965, which resulted in more than a fifty percent decrease in the enrollment of Africana students at SFSC.<sup>50</sup> Africana students not

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<sup>48</sup> Noliwe Rooks, "The Beginnings of Black Studies," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 6, 2006, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-beginnings-of-black-studies/> (accessed November 13, 2020).

<sup>49</sup> John H. Bunzel, "Black Studies at San Francisco State," in Norment, 257; Biondi, 39.

<sup>50</sup> Biondi, 39.

only began to feel isolated, but believed the decrease was by design and in response to the radicalization of students. Karenga explains that "Black Studies advocates were first concerned with the low number of Blacks on campus which they saw as a racist exclusion to maintain the white monopoly on critical knowledge and to thwart the rise of a Black intelligentsia capable of effectively leading and serving Blacks."<sup>51</sup> Given the shift in demographics, student organizing became an even more urgent method to advocate for control of their educational environment. Adhering to the power in the process in naming outlined in Ture's brand of revolutionary nationalist philosophy, the following year, students belonging to the Negro Student Association renamed their organization the Black Students Union (BSU). Jimmy Garrett, a SNCC member who adopted revolutionary nationalism, became its primary organizer.

Academic concerns were the most pressing. Not only were Africana students at SFSC in the minority on campus, but similar to HBCUs, the majority of professors teaching at the institutions were European-Americans trained in traditional Western disciplines. The majority of the courses, then, unquestionably reflected the training and perspectives of the faculty, and the subject matter reinforced Western values and ideas at the exclusion of other cultural experiences and perspectives. As students who were grappling with the two-step prescription for Black Power, many sought to reclaim an identity rooted within African American culture and in continental and diasporic African experiences. Questioning the extent to which their education at SFSC should support this process was

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<sup>51</sup> Karenga, 17.

of great concern. One student recounted the significance of shaping the BSU's demand for the discipline:

Black people are not western; they are "westernized," made to be western. So basically their psychology is not Freudian, Alderian, or Jungian, only so far as they have accepted westernization. Students find themselves enchanted by the schools of psychology, but as they probe deeper they find less and less in an association with their lives. Other Black students pretend they can relate to western psychology by "becoming" Freudian. They psyche themselves out as we say, by trying to describe manifestations of every desire by description directly from the psychology textbook.<sup>52</sup>

The point here for this student and other revolutionary nationalist-minded students was that the faculty at SFSC did not consider or care that all subjects reflected European social, political, and economic ideals and values; and Africana students accept, without question, the authority, validity, and supremacy of this education. A relevant education was therefore a necessity on campus *and* within local communities where the youth, especially Africana and other students of color, attended underfunded public schools. Through the Community Involvement Program and the Tutorial Program, BSU students sought to remedy this concern in neighborhoods in San Francisco.

To immediately address the issue of relevance on campus, BSU members and other students moved beyond the traditional education process. One resolution was to offer courses in the SFSC's already existing Experimental College (EC). Founded in 1960 and funded by the student government, the College was an extra-curricular program in which all students, graduate students, and faculty could volunteer to teach courses not offered in SFSC's programs and departments. By the 1967 academic year, the BSU

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<sup>52</sup> Bunzel, 258.

students has offered a full Africana Studies curriculum.<sup>53</sup> Poets Sonia Sanchez and Amiri Baraka both taught within the program.<sup>54</sup> The second resolution was to negotiate for a degree granting department outside of the EC. In 1966, a year prior to the full curriculum in the EC, Garrett and other BSU students fleshed out a proposal for a degree-granting program in Africana Studies, which the SFSC administration had received the same year and approved in 1967.<sup>55</sup>

In an attempt to show good faith to the frustrated students, during the spring semester of 1968, John Summerskill, the president of SFSC, hired sociologist and previous Howard University professor Nathan Hare to be the first chair of the department. Hare immediately sets out to reconstruct the EC curriculum and grounds it in "both ideological and pedagogical blackness." In doing so, Hare crafted a curriculum resembling Ture and Hamilton's two-step process to actualize Black Power. Ture and Hamilton called for Africana people to first redefine themselves; Hare's first objective was the expressive phase which would "build in black youth a sense of pride or self, of collective destiny, a sense of pastness as a springboard in the quest for a new and better future."<sup>56</sup> Courses in Black history, African history, Black psychology, and Black literature would achieve this aim.

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<sup>53</sup> Fabio Rojas, *Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 62.

<sup>54</sup> Oba T'Shaka, "Africana Studies Department History: San Francisco State University," *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (October 2012), 20.

<sup>55</sup> Karenga, 14.

<sup>56</sup> Hare, 42-50.

The second step toward Black Power is political modernization—that is, African people must be in full control of political, economic, and other infrastructure directly serving African people. Hare scripted a pragmatic phase to meet that objective, writing that it “operates specifically to prepare black students to deal with their society. The student’s ultimate use of his pragmatic skills can be directed toward overcoming (or, if need be, over-throwing) his handicaps in dealing with his society.” Black Math, Black Science, Black Politics, Economics of the Black Community, Development of Black Leadership, Black Statistics, Black Economic Workshop, and Black Political Workshop, for instance, are all courses that students can take in preparation to solve pressing social, political, and economic problems. The pragmatic courses are revolutionary because each course not only examines major continental and diasporic historical actors, theories, trends, and moments. But these courses provide students with historical examples of ways to shape and recreate one’s reality in the tradition of continental and diasporic peoples. Even Black Math and Black Science are revolutionary because the mathematical and scientific problems and theories posed to the students are grounded in culturally relevant and practical examples.<sup>57</sup>

The 1968 academic year, therefore, must be considered one of the most radical moments in the history of American higher education. As students were demonstrating across the nation, SFSC staged a strike and shut down the SFSC campus. But if the BSU’s proposal had been approved by the college president and Hare had been hired to

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<sup>57</sup> Hare, 42-50.

complete the curriculum, why the need for the strike? Black Power philosophy stressed that African people must move swiftly to gain political and economic control of their lives. The idea that methodical patience and legislation would reshape the conscience of generations of European-Americans so that they would grant African women, men, and children political, economic, and social equality in American society was over.

For BSU students, sympathetic residents of San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland along with Black nationalist organizations and many nationalist-oriented Chicano and Asian American students in the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) who also did not see themselves in the curriculum, time was up! Although Hare completed this curriculum by the fall semester of 1968, the SFSC Board of Trustees had yet to grant the BSU a department. Tired of negotiating and waiting for the Board of Trustees to confirm the department, the BSU submitted a final list of demands to the new interim President S.I. Hayakawa in preparation for a strike if the demands were not met. In recounting this moment in history, SFSC professor Oba T'Shaka writes that "when it became clear that the administration would only offer 2.5 teaching positions the BSU had no choice. They had to call for a strike."<sup>58</sup> The BSU list included these comprehensive demands:

1. That all Black Studies courses being taught through various other departments be immediately part of the Black Studies Department and that all instructors in this department have full time pay.

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<sup>58</sup> T'Shaka, 21.

2. That Dr. Hare, chairman of the Black Studies Department, receive a full professorship and a comparable salary according to his qualifications.
3. There will be a Department of Black Studies which will grant a Bachelor's Degree in Black Studies; that the Black Studies Department chairman, faculty and staff have the sole power to hire and fire without the interference of the racist administration and the chancellor.
4. All unused slots for Black students from fall 1968 under the Special Admissions program be filled in Spring 1969.
5. All Black students who wish to, be admitted in fall 1969.
6. Twenty full-time teaching positions to be allocated to the Department of Black Studies.
7. Dr. Helen Bedesem be replaced in the position of Financial Aid officer and that a Black person be hired to direct it and that Third World people have the power to determine how it will be administered.
8. No disciplinary action will be administered in any way to any students, workers, teachers, or administrators during and after the strike as a consequence of their participation in the strike.
9. The California State College Trustees will not be allowed to dissolve any Black programs on or off the San Francisco State College campus.
10. George Murray maintains his teaching position on the campus for the 1968-69 academic year.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Rojas, 69.



The strike was indeed successful. The strike began on November 6, 1968, and seven days later on November 13, 1968, the campus shut down; each day hundreds of students, faculty, and supporters demonstrated on campus, including many European-American students who were supporting the BSU and TWLF's demand for an inclusive educational experience. Daily, police attempted to control the demonstrations with threats of violence and intimidation, and many demonstrators were continuously arrested. This radical and dangerous strike lasted for five long months, ending on March 21, 1969, after ongoing negotiations and compromises between the students and Trustees. In the end, although the Trustees did not renew Nathan Hare's contract, most of the BSU's demands were met; these students who were heirs to the ancestral scholar-activist tradition galvanized behind Black Power as their guiding philosophy to determine the purpose of their education and ultimately the purpose of their lives. With the department offering its first courses in the fall of 1969, the discipline of Africana Studies was born and set the tone for a national demand for other Africana Studies units, Ethnic Studies, and Black Women's Studies.

## **CONCLUSION**

Given the scholarship on ancient and traditional African education, the purpose of education, and the pursuit of knowledge have always focused on learning about oneself and one's place in the world for the purpose of bringing balance and order to their

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communities. While the most ancient and traditional education concluded that coming to know one's self as a divine and a being that comprised a linguistic, cultural, and familial community, instances of this purpose-driven knowledge was often evident among enslaved Africans who used literacy to resist those who enslaved and oppressed their communities. It seems, too, that this drive to transform the consciousness of African people living under white supremacy during the centuries after enslavement at times was conveyed best through what becomes the scholar-activist tradition and echoed the research and writing of Africana women in particular who sought to center the lives of women as a central challenge to white supremacy and patriarchy. The body of writings by Africana women and men who sought to reclaim African civilizations, African history, and culture also speaks to the activist tradition. So too does the voluminous social science research on Africana communities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the continued education of Africana students at HBCUs before 1965, express this tradition. Student civil rights activists were also inspired by this tradition, not only to agitate for equal rights in this country but also to demand a radically inclusive and autonomous education that resulted in the emergence of the discipline of Africana Studies.

Fifty years after its institutionalization, the discipline has matured and continues to be a viable scholar-activist enterprise at HBCUs, PWIs, and at Hispanic-serving institutions. At the time of this writing, there are almost four hundred Africana Studies

departments, programs, centers, or institutes.<sup>60</sup> While some of these units are able only to offer workshops, seminars, and other forms of programing in the areas of Africa and the Diaspora, others house robust undergraduate and graduate degree programs, teaching a variety of courses and enrolling hundreds of students annually. For instance, there are currently eighteen doctoral programs in the discipline, all of which matriculate researchers, writers, artists, community organizers, educators, and performers. While many faculty and students do not necessarily adhere to Black Power as their philosophical framework through which to see the world, most are indeed dedicated to critical thinking, research, community engagement, and dismantling white supremacy. Looking back on half a century of Africana Studies education, the scholar-activist tradition remains rich and viable.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Define Africana Studies and its purpose and function
2. Discuss the African origins of the discipline and the scholar-activist tradition.
3. Describe the early racist views about continental and Diasporan African people articulated by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers and social scientists.
4. Identify and describe the unique obstacles that early Africana women scholar-activists faced during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

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<sup>60</sup> Craig Chamberlain, "African American Studies in the U.S. 'is Alive and Well,'" *Illinois News Bureau*, August 29, 2013.

**Writing Prompt**

Research one figure of the Black Power movement and discuss how their ideas promoted an Africana prospective.