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A Rhetorical History of Black Studies: Black
Power & Epistemology

by

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Honors Thesis

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Rhetoric and Communications Department
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Advisor: Dr. Armond Towns

My introduction into Black studies was by way of what was labeled as a political science course, entitled the Black Radical Tradition. The course mapped out a genealogy of Black radical thinking and introduced us to the experiences, epistemologies and ethics of Black radicalism. On the first day, Dr. Corey D.B Walker made it abundantly clear that it was a Black studies course housed in the political science department because the University of Richmond did not have any form of a Black studies department. The syllabus included titles such as “The Vocation of the Black Scholar” by Vincent Harding, *Black Marxism* by Cedric Robinson, *Freedom Dreams* by Robin D.G. Kelley and *If They Come in the Morning* by Angela Davis. These readings challenged what I thought I knew about knowledge (re)production, race, humanism and liberation. At the time, I knew very little about Black studies, but that course prompted me to immerse myself in the various discourses, theories and ideologies circulating in Black studies scholarship.

Black studies was clearly different from any other discipline that I encountered. I would argue that it exists on its own plane and functions differently than the academic disciplines I was accustomed to. I would soon come to learn that Black studies constitutes a resistance against Western epistemology, also known as man’s order of knowledge, an order that centers whiteness and teaches Western knowledge as objective truth. The epistemological basis is the major difference between Black studies and other disciplines. Sylvia Wynter refers to this epistemological difference as the “mutation of knowledge,”¹ a mutation that she argues is needed throughout all academia to fully recognize the humanity of all peoples. “No Humans Involved,” the text from which I cite Wynter’s argument, was

¹ Wynter , Sylvia. ““No Humans Involved:’ An Open Letter to My Colleagues .” (*Forum N.H.I Knowledge for the 21st Century*, vol. 1, no. No.1 , Fall 1994) p.70.

an open letter to her colleagues, significant in the fact that it was not merely an article written theoretically, but an intellectual work that had material consequence and purpose. Wynter urged her colleagues to think critically about their pedagogy and the role higher education plays in the dehumanization of Black people. Reading Wynter’s “No Human’s Involved” prompted me to think about the way that alternative epistemologies and resistance to the dominant episteme have shown up on college campuses. I began to ask questions like:

What were the conditions that allowed for and prompted Black scholars to challenge the established epistemology of the university on its own terrain? What role did Black students play in the formation of Black studies as a discipline? Who or what influenced the epistemology of the actors calling for Black studies?

These questions became increasingly more important when I joined forces with four other students at the University of Richmond—Akeya Fortson-Brown, Shira Greer, Miquell Shaw and Tracy Tann Jr.—to advocate for the creation of a Black studies department. I sought out these students in particular because I knew of their interests in Black studies, and I admired the work they put into other Black student initiatives on campus. In the spring of 2020, we created a proposal for the establishment of a Department of Africana Studies at the University of Richmond. In doing so, I was inspired by the words of W.E.B. Du Bois: “We can only, understand the present by continually, referring to and studying the past, when any one of the intricate phenomena of our daily life puzzles; when there arise religious problems, political problems, race problems, we must always remember that while solution lies in the present,

their cause and their explanation lie in the past.”² This quote summarized the Africana Studies Student Committee’s feelings that we were not alone in our desire to decenter whiteness in academia; rather, there was a long standing discipline we could pull from. We believed then as we do now that Black studies has the potential to change the intellectual terrain of the university and allow for the creation of liberatory spaces and ideas.

In this thesis, using my own experiences and research, I will map out a rhetorical history of Black studies and its relationship with the Black Power Movement in the late 1960s. Using Foucault’s method of genealogy, I will highlight the distinct epistemological assumptions that inform Black studies as a discipline by looking at the material conditions and moment in which the discipline was created. In order to do this, my thesis will interrogate three interrelated discourses of Black studies at the university level: first, the larger history of student activism and its relation to Black studies; second, my own approach to Black studies at the University of Richmond; and lastly, the trajectory that Black studies should turn to for the future. The rest of this introduction will be broken into three sections: first, I will give a historical overview of what Black studies is, where it comes from, and why it is important. In particular, this introductory chapter provides the historical overview of Black studies necessary to understand the discipline’s importance to transforming Western knowledge. Second, I will explain my rhetorical approach to Black studies, using the work of Michel Foucault and rhetorical theory. I will conclude with an overview of the sections in the thesis.

² W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Beginnings of Slavery,” *Voice of the Negro* 2, February 1905 p.104.

Man's Order of Knowledge & Black Studies in the University

Much of Western academia has been structured on man's order of knowledge. Man's order of knowledge, also known as the Western order of knowledge, is an episteme that invests in the replication of one pure being.³ Man's order of knowledge holds true the belief that the West, specifically white able-bodied wealthy males, hold the key to all knowledge, thus leading to an episteme that centered and prioritized whiteness as the epitome of humanity. This allowed for knowledge produced by the West to be viewed as natural, objective and universal. This structure of knowledge produced specific discriminations against nonwhite/Western people that justified acts of colonialism. Under this order of knowledge, Black people could only be thought through a colonial lens that commodified them and stripped them of humanity. An example of the products of man's order of knowledge is the fabrication of the Negro. The dominant order of knowledge taught that the Negro had no history⁴, thus no claim to knowledge. In other words, in the Western order of knowledge (that is still very much present today), there is a very narrow understanding of what it means to be human. The human in man's order of knowledge is white, male, propertied—the antithesis to the conception of the Negro. Anybody viewed as less than human is viewed as passive, something to be impressed upon, something in need of guidance by full humans. This order of knowledge sees white people as superior and all others as beings in desperate need of direction. One of the most insidious aspects of the Western order of knowledge, is that knowledge is defined by white people, specifically wealthy or propertied white men. Carter G. Woodson understood the important function of history as a form a validity

³ Towns, Armond. "Black Studies for Everyone." *Oxford University Press Blog*, June 2020blog.oup.com/2020/06/Black-studies-for-everyone/.

⁴ Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2000., 81.

in Western society. Woodson said, “If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated.”⁵ Woodson draws a clear connection drawn between history and knowledge and one’s humanity. This is why it is no surprise that many of the initial movements for Black Power were concerned with the origin and history of Black people before they were captured into slavery. Prior to the formal start of the Black Power Movement, groups such as the Garveyites concerned themselves with redefining what it meant to be Black, resisting against the myth of the negro. In 1919, from the platform of the Association’s Liberty Hall in Harlem, Garvey spoke of a “new negro,” promoting the idea of being proud of one’s blackness. Garvey’s early ideas of Black nationalism proved to be influential for the movements to come. Garveyism highlights how the Black Radical Tradition has always rejected the fabrication of the Negro even before it was explicitly stated during the Black Power movement. Decades later in the 1960s, proponents of the Black Power movement continued to reject the idea that White people are the epitome of humanity. Like the radical leaders that came before them, they did not buy into the fabrication of the Negro.

The assertion of Black humanity throughout time that was echoed and amplified by the Black Power Movement made clear the epistemological differences between the standing order of knowledge and the one derived to resist it. Rather than Blackness being viewed as a misfortune, the Black Power Movement subverted common knowledge by pulling from a long lineage of Black thinkers and deeming Blackness as a source from which one can derive knowledge, beauty and power. This can be summed up best by Stokely Carmichael’s

⁵ Woodson, Carter Godwin. *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. First Africa World Press edition., Africa World Press, 1990.

call for Black Power. Carmichael, who would later come to be known as Kwame Ture, coined the term “Black Power.” In his 1968 book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, Ture explained the meaning of Black Power: “It is a call 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 define their own goals, to lead their own organizations.”⁶ With this call, Ture participated in a much larger tradition of Black radical thinkers and actors, known as the Black Radical Tradition. In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson defines the Black Radical Tradition as “the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality.”⁷ One of the defining aspects of the Black Radical Tradition is the development of a collective consciousness that interrogates systems of white supremacy. The development of ideas of collective consciousness can be traced back from the Black Power Movement to groups like the Nation of Islam and the Garveyites, all the way to writings from W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*. The Black Radical Tradition has continually offered new and expansive ways to understand existing orders of knowledge and ways to resist them. The members of the Black Power Movement were able to pull on hundreds of years of radical thought before them to inform their thinking.

Ture himself read and was inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois, and spent time with Du Bois’ widow, Shirley Graham Du Bois.⁸ The importance of Ture’s and others’ connection to and

⁶ Carmichael, Stokely, and Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, VintageBooks, 1992.

⁷ Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

⁸ DeWitt, Karen. “Conversations/Kwame Ture; Formerly Stokely Carmichael And Still Ready for the Revolution.” The New York Times. The New York Times, April 14, 1996.

participation in the Black Radical Tradition is that it points to an alternative epistemology that exists outside of the Western order of knowledge. People like Ture and groups like the Black Panther Party pushed back against this order of knowledge, declaring that Black people were just as capable of knowledge production and reproduction, so much so that their commitment to a consciousness surrounding liberation went beyond the theoretical and highlighted the material. Black thinkers like Sylvia Wynter understood how man's order of knowledge directly affected the material conditions of Black people. According to Wynter, "Race and its classificatory logic lies in the founding premise, on which our present order of knowledge or episteme is based."⁹ But Wynter also recognized that it was from those very conditions that Black people were able to offer and theorize alternative epistemologies. Wynter claimed that under a Western order of knowledge there was no way for Black people to secure the full dimensions of their human autonomy.¹⁰ It is Wynter who proposed that the task of Black studies "should be that of rewriting knowledge."¹¹

In the midst of a dominant order of knowledge that claimed Black people had no history and that pushed individualistic ideas of humanism, the Black Power Movement offered an alternative, one where heritage was not only explored but embraced and the community was prized over the individual. This alternative order of knowledge declared that Black people were capable of leading and determining what is best for them and their survival, instead of their actions being controlled by what they called "the white man." It is no coincidence that the same time in which this discourse of the Black Power Movement popularized in the late 1960s, Black college students around the country began to look for ways to bring these ideals to their

⁹ Wynter, "No Humans Involved", 47

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 70

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 68

campuses.

On the Idea of Black Studies

The Black Power Movement included and also inspired Black college students. Because of *Brown vs. Board of Education* and other integration policies in the 1960s, for the first time there were a sizable number of Black students attending predominantly white institutions.¹² In the midst of the Black Power Movement that spawned the creation of multiple Black nationalist groups such as the Black Panther Party, students began to wonder how they could use their positions on campuses across the nation to join in the movement and move towards Black liberation. Students began to create and join organizations such as the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), Black Student Unions and college chapters of the Black Panther Party.¹³ These students viewed themselves as an extension of the movement that was happening outside of the university. Although they realized the value of education in their changing world, they also recognized that Blackness and the study of Black culture and history seemed to be outside of the university's purview. A conglomerate of students from various organizations, like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Afro American Student Union (AASU), and the Black Student Union (BSU), including two members of the Black Panther Party, would be key players in the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) strikes that took place in 1968 and ultimately led to the creation of the first Black Studies department at San Francisco State University. There is a clear connection in terms of tactics and strategy between the students participating in the Third World Liberation Front strikes and actors of the Black Power Movement. The

¹²Centra, John A. "Black Students at Predominantly White Colleges: A Research Description." *Sociology of Education* 43, no. 3 (1970): 325-39. Accessed April 15, 2021. doi:10.2307/2112070.

¹³ Rojas, Fabio. *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2007. Print., p. 35

TWLF's list of demands, submitted to San Francisco State's administration, was formatted similarly to the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program that was released two years prior in 1966.¹⁴ The Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program called for self-determination for Black people and education that taught the "true" history of Black people. Similarly, the demands of the TWLF strikes called for a form of self-determination for Black students inside of academia, an unprecedented form of intellectual autonomy. The students at San Francisco State showed that "highly visible militant intellectual culture could exist."¹⁵ Student activists in the late 1960s blurred the line between the grassroots and the intellectual, giving way to the realization that they are not two separate entities; rather, they are constantly in conversation with one another, informing each other's actions and aims. It is important to not view the intellectual and grassroots as separate, because before the institutionalization of Black studies, there was Black study. In other words, the tradition predates the academy and is what influenced actors of the Black Power Movement to perform acts of resistance.

It is no surprise that institutions like the university function as hubs for the proliferation of man's order of knowledge, necessitating Black student resistance inside of the academy. Thus, many of the Black college students, especially those who attended predominantly white institutions, viewed the university as a tool used to further indoctrinate them into what was said to be the natural order of things. However, with the words of the Black Power Movement ever present in the background, students began to resist the idea that what they were being taught was the only type of knowledge that existed. Often, there was

¹⁴ Newton, Huey. *War Against the Panthers: A History of Repression*. University of California, Santa Cruz, 1980.

¹⁵ Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies*, 37

little to no focus on the Black experience and students wanted more. Students were eager to learn more about their heritage and about great Black thinkers and history makers. Influenced by the ideology and episteme of the Black Power Movement, students began to demand that knowledge for Black people come from Black people and that consideration in the curriculum was more than a privilege, but a right entitled to them by their humanity. Black students at universities realized that in order for academia to be useful for them, it needed to be in service of total liberation. This means the university would have to be rethought and transformed to produce new discourses and epistemologies, ways of thinking that did not reinforce man's order of knowledge as natural.

As mentioned previously, in the mid and the late 1960s, students began to create and join organizations such as the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), Black Student Unions and college chapters of the Black Panther Party.¹⁶ The students at San Francisco State who wrote the demand for a Black Studies department (two of whom were members of the Black Panther Party) saw themselves as an extension of the movement covering challenges that were faced by Black college students.-The Black Power Movement argued that in order to create a truly free world, institutions had to be radically transformed. The Black Studies Movement echoed these sentiments by adopting the revolutionary episteme of the Black Power Movement. The proponents of the Black Studies movement of the 1960s and 1970s argued that educational institutions in American society (with an emphasis on, but not exclusive to, the university) had to be radically transformed for humanity's sake.¹⁷ It is critical to understand the creation of Black studies in its true historical context: it was not passively

¹⁶ Ibid., 35

¹⁷ Joseph, Peniel E. "Dashikis and Democracy: Black Studies, Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement." *The Journal of African American History*, vol. 88, no. 2, 2003.

influenced by the Black Power Movement; rather, it was actively a part of the Black Power. This is why Africana studies scholar Greg Carr refers to Black studies as the intellectual arm of the Black Power movement.¹⁸ Many historians do a disservice to accounts of the Black Studies movement by viewing it as separate from the Black Power Movement rather than as an active part of the movement. There is a tendency in academia to see Black studies as more “legitimate” than the Black Power movement because of its institutionalization, undermining the fact that the underpinning episteme is the same. The abstraction of Black studies from the Black Power Movement allows for Black studies to be historicized as a project of the university and academia, when in actuality Black studies is a movement intentionally derived from the Black Power Movement. The formation of Black studies was an extension of the Black Radical Tradition, providing a form of resistance for Black students at institutions that functioned within (and without) man’s order of knowledge.

Rhetoric and Black Studies

Black studies is a discipline that understands and theorizes history outside of the linearity of a Western order of knowledge. Because of this, in order to tell the history of Black studies, the retelling must be dynamic and involve reflexive thinking. This process of reflexive thinking is not often deployed by man’s order of knowledge, which utilizes more of an object/subject approach, coupled with a fabrication of history in which the subject overdetermines the actions of the object. Through this lens, there is no way to accurately portray the history of Black studies.

Black studies requires a historical approach that can accurately discuss the epistemic

¹⁸ Carr, Greg. “What Black Studies is Not: Moving from Crisis to Liberation in Africana Intellectual Work, Socialism and Democracy”, 2011, 25:1, 178-191, DOI: [10.1080/08854300.2011.569201](https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2011.569201)

shift that is attached to it. For this, I look to Michel Foucault's method of genealogy. To Foucault, a genealogy is an explanation of where we have come from, its purpose is to tell us how our current situation originated and is motivated by contemporary concerns. According to Úna Crowley, Foucault's genealogy "provides people with the critical skills for analyzing and uncovering the relationship between knowledge, power and the human subject in modern society and the conceptual tools to understand how their being has been shaped by historical forces."¹⁹ As a rhetoric scholar, I would contend that Foucault's genealogy is a rhetorical history and Foucault can be viewed as a rhetorical genealogist by definition. Rhetoric investigates how language is used to organize and maintain social groups, construct meanings and identities, coordinate behavior, mediate power, produce change, and create knowledge.²⁰ If this definition of rhetoric is applied, then there is a similarity in focus between genealogy and rhetorical history, both concerned with understanding knowledge production within social groups. Foucault understood actions of both past and present as proscribed and authorized by relations of power.²¹ With this understanding, Foucault's historical analyses focused on the tensions and contradictions created by power relations. Foucault's studies of dominant discourses are predicated on the moments of disruption and transformation.²² This understanding of Foucault coupled with the understanding of rhetoric, as defined earlier allows for a rhetorical genealogy that focuses on discourses, knowledge production and the way in which our relationship to power influences our interactions with our physical conditions.

¹⁹ Crowley, Úna. *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography & Genealogy*, MS number: 443

²⁰ "Rhetoric & Writing Studies." *What Is Rhetoric?* | Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies | San Diego State University, rhetoric.sdsu.edu/resources/what_is_rhetoric.htm.

²¹ Phillips, Kendall R. "Spaces of Invention: Dissension, Freedom, and Thought in Foucault." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, vol. 35 no. 4, 2002, p. 328

²² *Ibid.*, 342

Section Summary

It is important to understand Black studies as an alternative epistemology in direct resistance to man's order of knowledge. While man's order of knowledge is a Western-based colonial epistemology that centers whiteness as the one pure being, Black studies offers new ways of being. Pulling from the Black Power Movement and calls for autonomy and self-determination, Black studies answers the questions of what the world could be like if one decenters whiteness and take seriously the humanity of all peoples. By using Foucault's method of genealogy and the epistemological basis of the Black Power and Black studies movements, I will analyze our current moment and argue that academia is in desperate need of the alternative knowledges provided by Black studies.

In the following sections, I will examine the epistemological and contextual similarities between the proposal for Black studies produced by the Afro American Student Union at University of California, Berkeley in 1968 and the proposal for Africana Studies produced by the Africana Studies Student Committee at University of Richmond in 2020. My intention is to give a rhetorical analysis of the documents, using the historical contexts of the texts as well as the material conditions from which they were produced. In order to do this, it is critical to look at the influence of the Black power movement not just in the proposals themselves, but on the students and institutions from which the proposals came. As previously noted, the Black power movement served as the epistemological basis for the movement for Black studies in the late 1960s. One of the best examples of the connection between the Black power movement and the beginning of Black studies as a discipline is the Black Panther Party's influence on students in the Bay Area. In order to demonstrate continuity within the Black Radical Tradition, I will

provide the contextual background for both proposals, detailing the major actors and events leading up to the publishing of both documents.

Although over fifty years removed from the Black Power Movement, there is a clear continuation of thought, discourse and ideas of resistance. I will highlight a lineage of student activism within the Black Radical Tradition and the intergenerational aspirations for liberation. I will argue why the University of Richmond, as an exemplar for all universities lacking Black studies, is in desperate need of a Black studies department. Connecting the arguments from the proposal submitted in 1968 by the Afro American Student Union at University of California, Berkeley and the proposal submitted by the Africana Studies Student Committee, I will argue the potential that Black studies has to contribute to Black liberation by resisting against man's order of knowledge.

Black Panthers in the Bay Area

“In 1968, a coalition known as the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) was formed between the African American Student Union (AASU) at UC Berkeley and the Black Student Union at San Francisco State, along with other student groups at both schools, to lead a five month strike on campus to demand a radical shift in admissions practices that mostly excluded nonwhite students and in the curriculum regarded as irrelevant to the lives of students of color.”²³ Amongst other things, the strike resulted in the new academic discipline of Black studies stemming from a proposal produced by UC Berkeley's Afro American Student Union

²³ “Third World Liberation Front.” University of California at Berkeley: Center for Race & Gender. Accessed February 19, 2020 <https://www.crg.berkeley.edu/research/third-world-liberation-front/>.

demanding the implementation of a Black studies program. The strike and the proposal was the result of nationalist politics arriving on college campuses and influencing student activism. While the Black student population on both campuses were miniscule in comparison to their white counterparts, Black students still felt a sense of obligation to their Black community and a desire to use their education to help liberate Black people. In fact, the practice of identifying as Third World was a part of Black nationalist identity and informed Black Power ideology. “Frantz Fanon, author of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), urged readers to band together against oppression and colonialism, by pioneering a ‘Third Way’ meaning an alternative to the ways of the first world (U.S. & Europe) and also the second world (USSR & Eastern Europe).”²⁴ Identifying as Third World meant recognizing oneself as a part of a larger global colonial project and believing in the creation of spaces for liberation outside of coloniality. Third World identity gave way to a broader recognition of racism as an international issue that reached beyond domestic battles of civil rights. Organizations such as SNCC and the Black Panther Party adopted this international framework, inspiring students to inquire into the diasporic nature of Blackness and African identity. The introduction of Black Panther members to Bay area campuses served as a catalyst for students to dive deeper into the African diaspora and interrogate the Western order of knowledge that was centered in their education, an order that devalued third world thinkers and worked to separate the “negro” from the rest of the diaspora.

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) was founded in Oakland, California by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, who met at Merritt College in October 1966, just two years

²⁴ “Brown University.” TWC History at Brown | Brown Center for Students of Color. Accessed February 19, 2021. <https://www.brown.edu/campus-life/support/students-of-color/history>.

prior to the TWLF strike. The BPP was a revolutionary organization with an ideology of Black nationalism, socialism, and armed self-defense, particularly against police brutality. It was one of the most notable organizations of the Black Power movement.²⁵ The Black Panther Party was especially appealing to college students because of its youthful leadership and its hyper focus on self-determination as opposed to integration. During the two years preceding the Third World Strike, a handful of Black Panthers enrolled at San Francisco State College with the explicit goal of mobilizing Black students.²⁶ The quaint size of the Black community at San Francisco State, with a four percent black student population in the mid to late 1960s made it an ideal place for grassroots organization. Black students at San Francisco State were already beginning to mobilize and develop the tools that would later be used during the push for Black studies. In 1963, students registered the Negro Student Association (which would later be known as the Black Student Union) as an official student club.²⁷ ²⁸ These conditions made San Francisco State an ideal recruitment ground for the Black Panther Party. Members of the Black Panther Party enrolled in schools in the Bay Area with the sole purpose of organizing. One of these members was Jimmy Garrett, who enrolled in San Francisco State in 1966. Garrett, who was a member of SNCC before joining the BPP, said, “The reason I came to campus was to try to do some organizing. I wasn’t interested in going to school for any other reason than to organize the students.”²⁹ The Black Student Union would go on to elect Garrett as chairman, his primary goal being organizing Black students and introducing them to the radical ideology of the Black Power

²⁵ The Black Panther Party.” National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed February 20, 2021. <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/black-power/black-panthers>.

²⁶ Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies*, 51

²⁷ *Ibid*, 51

²⁸ Ethnic Survey. January 1969. RG 283 Records of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. Box 6. LBJ Library, Austin, TX. Page 1.

²⁹ Garret, James. 1969. Interview with Austin Scott. RG 283 Records of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, Box 2. LBJ Library, Austin, TX. Page 9.

movement. The Black Student Union and its members would go on to be crucial to the implementation of Black studies at San Francisco State with Garrett implementing tactics used by the Black Panther Party for consciousness raising on campus. One of the most notable tactics was Garrett's "rap sessions," casual gatherings of students where they discussed topics like racism, nationalism and colonialism. Holding spaces for conversation to discuss readings, ideas or even experiences surrounding racism was a method used by the Black Panther Party in Black communities to raise consciousness and make theory accessible to the everyday person. The most active students also traveled, talking to other Black activists in various parts of the country and spending time reading radical texts. Malcolm X, Kwame Ture, Frantz Fanon, and Che Guevara were among the writers and strategists' techniques and attitudes most frequently cited by Black student activists.³⁰ The mobilization of student activists at San Francisco State was not isolated; rather, Black student activism increased throughout the entire Bay Area. The Third World Liberation Front Strike, as well as the Afro American Student Union at UC Berkeley are evidence of the Black Power movement's influence on college campuses. In this way, the Black students in the Bay Area were calling upon the Black Radical Tradition, adapting a genealogical methodology that utilized the theory and praxis of the past as well as the thinkers of their current time period in order to inform their epistemological basis and practice.

A part of the focus of organizations like the Black Panther Party was to be critical of the epistemological underpinnings present in any institution Black people interacted with. Garrett carried this same focus into his student activist work, challenging his peers to identify and

³⁰ Orrick, William H. Essay. In *Shut It down! a College in Crisis: San Francisco State College, October 1968-April 1969 ; a Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence*. Washington: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1969.

question the ways in which the University was functioning under a white supremacist episteme: “I started pushing people on the issues...[and] they began to settle down to work projects, like how [to] cut out racism in different areas of campus.”³¹ Even though students began to see the university as a form of indoctrination into whiteness, this caused them to further understand the importance of education rather than fray away from it. Education was not the problem; rather, the issue was (and still is) the information and experiences deemed as knowledge being used to educate students. By decentering whiteness in education and teaching Black history and political ideologies, the academy could function as a means for liberation, as opposed to indoctrination. Students were inspired to find ways that the university could be used as a resource to serve in the liberation of Black students.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the push for Black studies swept across the nation influencing schools like Brandeis University³², Brown University³³ and Harvard University³⁴ to create some iteration of a Black studies program. By 1971, an estimated 500 Black studies courses and programs had been organized in the United states, and in several places abroad. The University of Richmond, however, is one of the schools that did not address the push for Black studies during this time. In 1968, while the Afro American Student Union at UC Berkeley was submitting a proposal for Black studies, the University of Richmond had just enrolled its first residential Black undergraduate, Barry Greene, in Richmond College.³⁵ According to the

³¹Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies*, 53

³² DeWitt, Karen. “Conversations/Kwame Ture; Formerly Stokely Carmichael And Still Ready for the Revolution.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, April 14, 1996. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/04/14/weekinreview/conversations-kwame-ture-formerly-stokely-carmichael-still-ready-for-revolution.html>.

³³ “Africana Studies at Brown.” Africana Studies | Brown University. Accessed March 1, 2021. <https://africana.brown.edu/>.

³⁴ “Department of African American Studies .” AAAS. Accessed March 1, 2021. <https://aaas.fas.harvard.edu/home>.

³⁵ “The Black Student Experience at the University of Richmond Main Campus: (1970 - 1992).” Accessed April 30, 2021. <https://memory.richmond.edu/exhibits/show/blackstudentexperience>.

University of Richmond's Race and Racism Project, "The University of Richmond's black student integration experience is a tale of feet dragging by the University administration, threats of defunding from the federal government, and some resistance from the student body."³⁶ Given the resistance to integration and only a handful of Black students enrolled by the early 1970s, it is no wonder that the University of Richmond was able to ignore the nationwide call for Black studies. However, over time, Black students continued to make sure they were able to cultivate spaces and initiatives to aid their college experience. In the 1990s Black Greek letter organizations were chartered on campus³⁷, a Black Student Alliance was formed³⁸, and in 2015, the Race and Racism project was established³⁹ to document the history of race and racism on campus. Five decades later in 2020, with Black students comprising of 6% of the total campus population,⁴⁰ and Black students having fortified the efforts to create a socially active Black community, the conditions were better suited to push for some iteration of a Black studies department.

In February 2020, the Africana Studies Student Committee (ASSC) at the University of Richmond—comprised of myself and four other undergraduate students(Akeya Fortson-Brown, Shira Greer, Miquell Shaw and Tracy Tann Jr.)—published a proposal for the establishment of an Africana Studies Department at the University of Richmond. I will detail the formation of Africana Studies at the University of Richmond, including the formation of the Africana Studies Student Committee. My intent is to use the proposals produced by the Afro American Student

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "The Black Student Experience at the University of Richmond Main Campus: (1970 - 1992)." Accessed April 30, 2021. <https://memory.richmond.edu/exhibits/show/blackstudentexperience>.

³⁸ "University of Richmond, Volume 90, Number 23, 15 April 2004." The Collegian. Accessed March 3, 2021. <https://collegian.richmond.edu/?a=d&d=COL20040415.2.17&srpos=1&e=-----20--1--txt-txIN-black%2Bstudent%2Balliance----->.

³⁹ "Race & Racism About-Fall 2015." Accessed March 3, 2021. <https://memory.richmond.edu/about>.

⁴⁰ Student Diversity - University of Richmond." www. Accessed March 8, 2021. <https://www.richmond.edu/about/consumer-info/diversity.html>.

Union and the Africana Studies Student Committee to map out the epistemological and genealogical connections. The ASSC highlighted the intergenerational influence of the Black Radical Tradition that was evident in the student movements of the 1960s and echoed in the proposal produced at the University of Richmond. Ultimately showing that the Africana Studies Student committee invoked the epistemological framework of the movement for Black studies that took place during the Black Power era.

The Black Radical Tradition at the University of Richmond

In my introduction, I referenced a course entitled the Black Radical Tradition, which was taught by the initial proposed chair for Africana Studies, Dr. Corey D.B. Walker. In the seminar's description, Walker posed a question that the class would be concerned with throughout the course, "What happened to the politics of liberation?"⁴¹ That question would go on to frame much of the motivation behind the demands and action steps of the Africana Studies Student Committee. Each day after class would end, I would meet with my classmate Miquell Shaw to expand upon the discussions we would have in class. Our lectures on genealogy, specifically the common epistemological assumptions held by Black radicals, pushed Shaw and I to imagine what work classes like The Black Radical Tradition could do if they were commonplace, and not merely one-off courses taught by visiting professors. Outside of Walker and a few other professors, Shaw and I did not feel the existing departments, programs and faculty at UR had the capacity to host questions such as "What happened to the politics of liberation?" which in the midst of the Movement For Black Lives felt more pressing than ever. For many students, Walker's class was the first time that what they were being taught something that was relevant and applicable to their identity and their reality. Walker's class prompted

⁴¹ Walker, Corey. "The Black Radical Tradition," (Syllabus, University of Richmond, Fall 2019).

students to look critically at academia, interrogating ways in which it could be in service to liberation and in alignment with a radical genealogy. The idea of being able to use education in service of liberation is what moved Shaw and I to begin going to Dr. Walker's office hours, as he served as a well of knowledge and formally introduced us to the discipline of Black studies. It was these meetings that made Black studies urgent to us. We felt as if the only way the University of Richmond could ever truly serve Black students was to properly teach Black students. During one of our regular visits to his office, Dr. Walker provided us with proposal for Black Studies that was produced by the Afro American Student Union at San Francisco State in 1968.⁴² Shaw and I met almost daily to discuss arguments for Black studies, the epistemology behind Black studies, and the benefits that it could provide to the University of Richmond.

Shaw came to realize that the arguments students made for Black studies in 1968 were similar to, if not the same as, the arguments Shaw and I were making for Black studies in 2020. It was evident that the proposal from San Francisco State could be used as a guide. Thus, we decided that a push for Black studies at the University of Richmond was possible. However, the conditions at the University of Richmond were less than ideal. As previously noted, members of the Black Panther Party and other Black Power organizations were able to provide widespread political education and had experience in organizing which made it easier to mobilize students using the respective schools' established infrastructures. Similar infrastructure did not exist at the University of Richmond in 2020; there was no widespread effort to raise political consciousness and no established protest culture. This difference in conditions led us to question how we would be able to replicate the results of collectivism without an established collective. It was naïve to think that every Black student at the University of Richmond would automatically want to put

⁴² Afro-American Student Union, University of California, Berkeley. "Proposal for Establishing a Black Studies Program." Accessed March 4, 2021. <https://revolution.berkeley.edu/assets/black-studies-proposal.pdf>

labor towards an Africana Studies department, and even more ridiculous to assume the rest of the University community would support such a department. The ASSC knew that we were entering into what would be a labor-intensive process which would involve designing a proposal, doing the research on various Black studies programs and departments and educating the campus community as to why Black studies was needed. It should be noted that the committee uses the terms Black studies and Africana studies interchangeably, yet ultimately decided upon proposing Africana Studies as the name for the specific course of study at UR because in our research we found that nomenclature greatly influences a university's response to supporting departmentalization.⁴³ I felt it was imperative to find students that were dedicated to learning more about Black studies and were willing to do long term work to bring it to the University of Richmond. I asked Shira Greer, Akeya Fortson-Brown and TJ Tann to join Miquell Shaw and myself in forming a committee with the goal of establishing Black studies at the University of Richmond. In our first meeting in January of 2020, we adopted the name the Africana Studies Student Committee (ASSC).

From 1968 to 2020

Members of the Africana Studies Student Committee viewed themselves as an extension of the long history of Black student activism on college campuses. The parallels between the Africana Studies Student committee and Afro-American Student Union (AASU) becomes obvious through analysis of the intentions of both groups, as well as the documents they produced. The language used in the document of demands published by the TWLF and San Francisco State's AASU provides a model for the argument of Black studies on college

⁴³ Kopkin, Nolan, and Erin N. Winkler. "Naming Black Studies: Results From a Faculty Opinion Survey." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 50, no. 4, May 2019, pp. 343–366, doi:10.1177/0021934719842444.

campuses. Subsequently, the proposal for Africana Studies at the University of Richmond was modeled closely after the proposal for Black studies at San Francisco State. Both the AASU and ASSC constructed documents with similar understandings surrounding the possibilities of Black studies and the urgency and necessity of Black studies not just at their respective colleges, but at all higher education institutions. The document produced at the University of Richmond was intentionally modeled after the proposal produced decades prior at San Francisco State. Both groups used their documents and actions to demand a radical change in the curriculum that decentered whiteness and included coursework relevant to Black students. In this case relevancy would be defined as knowledge that is applicable to sustaining Black lives, knowledge that could be used to understand Black history and an emphasis on knowledge that could be used to change the material conditions of Black people.

Students engaged in the Third World Liberation Front pulled their ideas of relevant education directly from the Black Power movement. The Black Power movement instilled the idea of power to the people, and the belief that Black people could make differences in their own neighborhoods without relying on white people. For Black college students, the exclusivity of college and universities already distanced them from their communities. Furthermore, it was evident that what they were learning did not equip them to create better conditions for the majority of their people. Students took inspiration from groups like the Black Panther Party that relied on communal spaces for knowledge reproduction as key to their overall goal of liberation. Not only was it necessary that those spaces exist, but it was vital that the knowledge being reproduced contributed to the Black community's lived conditions, rather than just alienating them from their realities. Black college students knew that their mere attendance at college did nothing to push for the liberation of the people from the communities from which they came.

The AASU stated, “Black students can no longer afford to be educated away from their origins. Henceforth, our education must speak to the needs of our community and our people.”⁴⁴ It was apparent that academia did not value Black knowledge. The education Black students were receiving was not informed by the realities they experienced. With whiteness at the center of academia’s episteme, there was no way for Black students to identify with or truly benefit from their education. Black students understood reorienting Western academia as vital to the empowerment and survival of Black people. “To carve out a place for itself in the politico-social order,” V. O. Key, Jr. wrote in *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups*, “a new group may have to fight for reorientation of many of the values of the old order.”⁴⁵ Kwame Ture cites this quote as especially important to understanding Black Power philosophy. Black students fighting for colleges to value and center Black knowledges in academia was not for purposes of validation but served as catalysts for consciousness raising and provided resources and spaces of knowledge reproduction for Black thought. It was their way of carving space for themselves inside of institution that would not have addressed their needs otherwise. Although students of the Afro American Student Union were aware that the university was not designed to serve them, they knew that there were ways to use the institution to their advantage. Still, in 2020, the Africana Studies Student Committee echoed the frustration of the AASU. Students at the University of Richmond desired a relevant and useful education, one that provided them with alternatives to whiteness. The creation of Black studies shows how movement participants inside a bureaucracy use the organization’s own resources as a tool for developing institutional

⁴⁴ Afro-American Student Union, University of California, Berkeley. “Proposal for Establishing a Black Studies Program.” Accessed March 4, 2021. <https://revolution.berkeley.edu/assets/black-studies-proposal.pdf>

⁴⁵ Ture, Kwame, and Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power : The Politics of Liberation in America*, Vintage Books, 1992, 57

alternatives.⁴⁶

The Africana Studies Proposal

In the midst of our initial planning meetings in January 2020, a series of racial epithets were written on the dorm room doors of three UR students.⁴⁷ This incident sparked an uproar around campus, causing racial tensions to climax. The university's response was multiple open forums, discussions and questionnaires that they believed sufficiently allowed students of color to voice their frustration. However, it was their lack of accountability to make concrete, material changes on campus and introspective work surrounding their own complicity in UR's racist campus culture that left students like myself and the other members of ASSC unimpressed. As students, we understood the ways in which the racial epithets weren't just a result of individual actions, but rather a symptom of an institution that functions to maintain man's order of knowledge and centers whiteness, especially in the classroom. It was evident to me that while the University could not control the actions of individual racist students, they were able to control what is being taught in the courses they provide. Off the heels of a racist incident that was plastered over local news outlets,⁴⁸ it was the perfect time to capitalize off the University's renewed commitment to fighting racial injustice. While the racial epithets were not the driving force of the proposal, it allowed the proposal to take on a new sense of urgency, because it seemed more relevant than ever before.

Initially, the Africana Studies Student Committee had a rough deadline of early March to submit the proposal, in hopes of getting it out before spring break. However, the commotion

⁴⁶ Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies*,

⁴⁷ Llanos, Jackie. "Racist Graffiti Found on Student's Dorm in Marsh Hall." University of Richmond's Student Newspaper, January 25, 2020. <https://www.thecollegianur.com/article/2020/01/racist-graffiti-found-on-students-dorm-in-marsh-hall>.

⁴⁸ Manzanares, Keyris, and Alex Thorson. "University of Richmond Investigating after Racist Slurs Found on Dorm Doors." 8News. 8News, January 28, 2020. <https://www.wric.com/news/local-news/richmond/university-of-richmond-investigating-after-racial-slurs-found-on-dorm-room-doors/>.

happening over the racial epithet incident in tandem with Dr. Walker's (our proposed chair) status as a visiting professor, it was pivotal to publicize the document quickly. The ASSC decided on publishing the proposal on February 19, 2020 to coincide with the beginning of the Wyatt Tee Walker symposium that was hosted jointly by Dr. Walker and his colleagues at the University of Virginia.⁴⁹ When discussing the significance of the date, Shira Greer, a member of the ASSC stated, "We knew there was a chance Dr. Walker, a visiting professor, might not have been offered a permanent position. It was important for us to implicitly highlight his work with the symposium as an example of his contributions to the University, work we hoped would continue as chair of the Africana Studies department."⁵⁰ The timing of the proposal, the wording and even the demands was heavily influenced by the corner the University's administration had been backed into. In order to get the best reaction from the administration, the proposal was designed to read as a solution to an overarching problem of higher education. While there was a degree of condemnation being placed on the University of Richmond specifically, the intent was to present UR's community with a feasible option to address systemic racism on campus.

Black students on predominantly white campuses are often put in positions to address systemic racism. Inside of their respective institutions much of their focus is put towards what they need to do to survive higher education, often abstracted from the realities of Black people outside of academia. The call for Black studies was not just for Black students inside of the academy; rather, Black students were requesting relevant education that would improve the living conditions of all Black people. In the opening paragraph of the proposal for establishing a Black studies program submitted by the Afro American Student Union (AASU), it reads, "We

⁴⁹ "2020 Symposium Schedule - Wyatt Tee Walker Symposium - University of Richmond." www. Accessed March 5, 2021. <https://www.richmond.edu/walker/schedule.html>.

⁵⁰ Greer, Shira, interview by author, Richmond, VA, March 6, 2021.

have been forced to the point where we must (and will) insist on those changes that are necessary to our survival. There is nothing less to settle for and nothing less to do.”⁵¹ Academia did not serve as a safe harbor for Black students, nor did it serve the immediate needs of the Black community. As previously noted, the academy was rooted in man’s order of knowledge, an episteme in which Black people were considered subhuman. In order for Black students to gain anything from higher education, an epistemic shift was required, a development of a discipline that decentered whiteness and centered total liberation for all peoples. The Afro American Student Union felt as if they were the “key link”⁵² in the survival of the Black community, saying, “we must therefore call unto and surround ourselves with resources of all kind and material which will aid us in preparing for this great task.”⁵³

The Africana Studies Student Committee was inspired by the AASU’s commitment to total liberation and recognized the potential of Black studies to provide tools to help actualize that goal. The ASSC drafted a proposal for Africana studies, modeled after the proposal produced by the AASU. Similar to the Afro American Student Union, the Africana Studies Student Committee insisted that changes had to be made to ensure the survival and wellness of Black students on campus. In the proposal for Africana Studies, the ASSC expressed this sentiment saying,

“We believe change starts with a holistic investment in education that decenters Eurocentric views. Not only are students of color, Black students in particular, isolated socially, but we are also impoverished academically. The normative

⁵¹ Afro-American Student Union, University of California, Berkeley. “Proposal for Establishing a Black Studies Program.” Accessed March 4, 2021. <https://revolution.berkeley.edu/assets/black-studies-proposal.pdf>

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

whiteness of academia has the effect of isolating Black scholars and their scholarship, preventing discussions and ideas from developing.^{54,55}

In line with the Black Radical Tradition, the demand for Africana Studies was an act of resistance towards man's order of knowledge. Black studies inherently rejects typical Western epistemology by decentering whiteness and giving way to marginalized voices to determine what knowledge is relevant and valuable. Although social isolation can be damaging to Black students, the emphasis on education is highlighted to indict the University of Richmond for abandoning the promise of a "holistic education" for all students.⁵⁶ As it stood, the University of Richmond stifled the learning experiences of Black students, providing them with a curriculum that was at best, minimally applicable to their lived conditions. Black students at Richmond desired an education that connected them with the struggles and the knowledge of their people. The ASSC wanted to demonstrate not just the continuity of thought, but the continuity of struggle between the Afro American Student Union in 1968 and the Africana Studies Student Committee in 2020. Even decades after the AASU's push for Black studies and its implementation worldwide, there are still higher education institutions that have yet to understand the urgency of the discipline. The argument then and the argument now are virtually the same and can be summed up by the words of the Afro American Student Union: "Black students can no longer afford to be educated away from their origins. Henceforth, our education must speak to the needs of our community and our people. We can longer prostitute our minds to

⁵⁴ Andrews, Kehinde, and Lisa Palmer. "Why Black Studies Matters." Discover Society, November 5, 2013. <https://discoversociety.org/2013/11/05/why-black-studies-matters/>.

⁵⁵ Africana Studies Student Committee. "Africana Studies at the University of Richmond." Google Docs. Accessed March 5, 2021. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZlvDDx_auLYTbCFhG6t9AtqanlxzkK86pgZC3cx1XYU/edit

⁵⁶ University of Richmond. "University, Mission, Values and Vision Statements." Accessed March 6, 2021. <https://strategicplan.richmond.edu/mission/index.html>.

the vain and irrelevant intellectual pursuits of Western society.”⁵⁷ With this in mind the Africana Studies Student Committee produced a document that centered the core assumptions of the Afro American Student Union in 1968. The proposal for Africana at the University of Richmond was written to speak to the needs of the Black community and demonstrate the potential Black studies has to improve not just the campus community, but people everywhere.

In the proposal for Africana studies, the ASSC asserts Africana studies is a discipline with a unique global perspective connected with the third world struggle against colonialism.⁵⁸ The influence of the AASU is evident in that assertion. Particularly their connection to the Black Panther Party and their participation in the Third World Liberation Front Strike. Members of the AASU identified themselves as Third World people and argued for a discipline that was relevant to that identity. It is within this context that the Africana Studies Student Committee understands Black studies as an anti-colonial international project, noting the ways in which Africana has the ability to provide an analytical framework for the Black experience, while resisting and rejecting a Western order of knowledge.⁵⁹ Black studies formed in direct opposition to the myth of the “negro”, an epistemological stance unique to the discipline. Black studies at its most expansive assumes and asserts the humanity of all people regardless of disability, class, gender, and sexual orientation. The appeal is evident to any student interested in combatting racism and prejudice on any level.

⁵⁷ Afro-American Student Union, University of California, Berkeley. “Proposal for Establishing a Black Studies Program.” Accessed March 4, 2021. <https://revolution.berkeley.edu/assets/black-studies-proposal.pdf>

⁵⁸ Africana Studies Student Committee. “Africana Studies at the University of Richmond.” Google Docs. Accessed March 5, 2021. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZlvDDx_auLYTbCFhG6t9AtqanlxzkK86pgZC3cx1XYU/edit

⁵⁹ Africana Studies Student Committee. “Africana Studies at the University of Richmond.” Google Docs. Accessed March 5, 2021. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZlvDDx_auLYTbCFhG6t9AtqanlxzkK86pgZC3cx1XYU/edit

For Black University of Richmond students who attend a school built on top of a slave burial ground⁶⁰, a school that has numerous buildings named after eugenicists and racists⁶¹, and a school that fought against integration up until admitting Black students in 1968⁶², it is painfully obvious how necessary it is to develop a critical intellectual framework that can properly conceptualize anti-black racism. The ASSC argued that Black studies has this capability. The type of scholarship produced within Black studies is expansive and creates relevant material that arm Black people with applicable knowledge and calls on a new generation of Black scholars to continue producing relevant work. Members of the Africana Studies Student Committee take this call serious, and in the context of this work view themselves as scholars and student activists. As both scholars and student activists members of the ASSC have focused on the impact that Africana can make on the campus community as a whole. As citizens of the university community, comprised of students, faculty, staff and alumni, there is a greater expectation for what Africana could offer beyond the classroom. Black thought does not just exist in the silo of academia, rather it reverberates throughout larger communities, establishing concrete connections between the material and theoretical, as evidenced in 1968 when the Black Power Movement influenced the formation of Black studies. Africana at Richmond developed from students seeking out something that could help them understand the world around them. In the midst of Black Lives Matter protests, the Trump presidency and a global pandemic, the need for Black studies was glaring to the ASSC, not just as Black students but as Black people apart of a

⁶⁰ Report on the Westham Burying Ground at the University of Richmond - Letters from the President - University of Richmond. Accessed March 7, 2021. <https://president.richmond.edu/initiatives/letters/institutional-history/january-2020-report.html>.

⁶¹ "Building Name Changes & Reflection." Accessed March 8, 2021. <https://memory.richmond.edu/exhibits/show/lostcauseideology/buildingnamechanges>.

⁶² Dewald, Matthew. "Steps Forward." Alumni Magazine - University of Richmond. Accessed February 30, 2021. <https://magazine.richmond.edu/silo/article/-/15974/steps-forward.html>.

globalized world. The assertion of Black humanity throughout time has manifested multiple different ways throughout the Black Radical Tradition. Using Foucault's method of genealogy, one can observe the ways language is used to organize and maintain social groups, construct meanings and identities, coordinate behavior, mediate power, produce change, and create knowledge.⁶³ I have demonstrated throughout this text how language and identity have shaped the production and reproduction of knowledge within the Black Radical Tradition. In the proposal produced by the Africana Studies Student Committee at the University of Richmond, it is stated that Black thought and the Black Radical Tradition exist both in and out of the academy.⁶⁴ The wealth of Black knowledge that has amassed from both formal and informal settings, pulling from intergenerational fights for freedom, is what informs Black studies. The long-standing genealogy of the Black Radical Tradition is what provides Black studies with an alternative epistemological approach, as opposed to other disciplines within the academy. Black studies provides an analytical framework in which people can interrogate the current order of knowledge and begin to question how it does or does not serve them and their communities. The call for collective consciousness was not new or original to the call for Black studies; rather, Black studies provided a way for consciousness raising to be a part of the curriculum, constantly pushing to subvert the Western order of knowledge that academia is rooted in. The potential of Black studies is touted in both of the proposals written by the Afro American Student Union at UC Berkeley and the Africana Studies Student Committee at the University of Richmond. Both the AASU and ASSC petitioned their respective institutions to produce relevant course material

⁶³ "Rhetoric & Writing Studies." *What Is Rhetoric?* | Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies | San Diego State University, rhetoric.sdsu.edu/resources/what_is_rhetoric.htm.

⁶⁴ Africana Studies Student Committee. "Africana Studies at the University of Richmond." Google Docs. Accessed March 5, 2021. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZlvDDx_auLYTbCFhG6t9AtqanlxzkK86pgZC3cx1XYU/edit

and pedagogy. The argument for Black studies was heavily informed by how Black student activists viewed their own reality and living conditions. It was their experiences as impoverished and undervalued scholars that led them to think critically about what was being taught. Academia being rooted in Western knowledge and white supremacy meant that what was being taught as the pinnacle of knowledge was seldomly applicable to the lived experiences of Black students. Black students at UC Berkeley in 1968 understood themselves as members of the Black Power Movement and aligned themselves with the ideals of self-determination and liberation. In the same vein, the Africana Studies Student Committee viewed themselves as a small piece rooted in a much larger Black radical historical context. The practice as identifying as a part of a Black radical lineage, speaks to the continuity of thought that exists within the Black Radical Tradition. However, continuity of thought does not exist only within the Black Radical Tradition; as previously mentioned, the western order of knowledge also evolves and adapts holding on to the same premise of dehumanizing nonwhite people. Higher education is rooted in anti-blackness, and universities have shown time and time again how they are still steeped in this colonial ideology.

In the proposal written by student activists at UC Berkeley, it reads:

“The colleges and universities have not been established for the sake of education. The colleges and universities are wholesale producers of designated mentality conducive to the perpetuation and continuation of America's president national life. A national life to which we have witnessed to be in total and complete contradiction to the wholesome development and survival of our people.”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Afro-American Student Union, University of California, Berkeley. “Proposal for Establishing a Black Studies Program.” Accessed March 4, 2021. <https://revolution.berkeley.edu/assets/black-studies-proposal.pdf>

This quote is referenced in the document produced by the Africana Studies Student Committee to not only demonstrate how the committee understood the intended function of the University, but also to explain that our contemporary moment still reflects the evils the AASU sought to combat.⁶⁶ It is for this reason that Black studies isn't just needed at the University of Richmond, but it is needed everywhere. The radical analytical framework that anchors Black studies can also provide a radical lens to a variety of disciplines. In "Black Studies for Everyone", Dr. Armond Towns argues, "the racial violence that prematurely ended the lives of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many more shows the necessity of bringing together critical knowledge & liberatory political practice."⁶⁷ It is necessary for Black studies to be in the university, as it is a discipline that becomes applicable in thinking through the realities of mass incarceration, state violence, Black identity and more. In the spirit of carrying on the Black radical tradition, I will echo Dr. Armond Towns and Dr. Robin D. G. Kelley: Black study is happening now,⁶⁸ in the streets filling with protestors, in social media dialogue between activists, in the Zoom teach-ins, reading groups and among the five Black undergraduates looking to change their University. In our present moment, there is no way towards liberation that does not include Black studies.

⁶⁶ Africana Studies Student Committee. "Africana Studies at the University of Richmond." Google Docs. Accessed March 5, 2021. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZlvDDx_auLYTbCFhG6t9AtqanlxzkK86pgZC3cx1XYU/edit

⁶⁷ Towns, Armond. "Black Studies for Everyone." *Oxford University Press Blog*, June 2020 blog.oup.com/2020/06/Black-studies-for-everyone/.

⁶⁸<http://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle>

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