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# Return to the Source: The Role of Service-Learning in Recapturing the Empowerment Mission of African-American Studies

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## Abstract

*This essay focuses on the role of service-learning in operationalizing the “empowerment” or “social responsibility” mission of Africana Studies. In doing so, it provides an overview of the history and impact of service learning; offers a case analysis of the implementation; and, concludes with a discussion of the utility of service learning as a potential “empowerment exemplar of the Africana Studies discipline.*

## Introduction

Beginning in the 1990s, the discipline of African-American Studies underwent a second renaissance in higher education. This renaissance is an extension of the struggle and foundation established for over two decades. The visibility, growth and institutionalization of the Africana Studies enterprise continues to flourish as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Contrary to its controversial formative era (1968-1972), the discipline of Africana Studies now receives primarily favorable national media attention. Moreover, several institutions of higher education have developed new African-American Stud-

ies degree programs, both at the graduate and undergraduate level. Yet, in the midst of its resurgence, observers of the discipline have noted the tendency among Black Studies academic units to neglect its “empowerment” mission (Sharlett, 2000, A18-A20). From its inception, at the core of the Black Studies enterprise was the central mission to empower people of African descent. And, in the 1980s, the National Council for Black Studies (NCBS), adopted and began to promote vigorously “academic excellence and social responsibility” (Aldridge and Young, 2000). Unfortunately, with respect



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to its social responsibility imperative, observers assert that “for the last two decades, Black Studies has been remiss in that mission (Karenga, 2000, 163).

This essay proposes that service-learning—“an educational process which involves young people in their own learning as they give valuable services to their communities”—can make a valuable contribution in addressing the current imbalance between the maturation of the discipline and its lack of systematic attention to the “empowerment” mission of Black Studies. This essay begins with a discussion of the discipline’s second renaissance and the paradoxical development that currently besets Black Studies. The two subsequent sections of the essay focus on the role of service-learning in operationalizing the “empowerment” mission of Africana Studies. We first provide an overview of the history and impact of service-learning, which is then followed by a case study of the implementation of service-learning in the Department of African-American Studies at Georgia State University (GSU). We conclude with a discussion of the utility of service-learning as a potential “empowerment” exemplar of the Africana Studies discipline.

### *The 1990s: Black Studies’ Second Renaissance*

Black Studies’ formal membership into the academy occurred in 1968 with the creation of the program at San Francisco State University. Soon afterwards, between 1968 and 1972, higher education experiences an explosion of Black Studies programs. The birth of African-American Studies during its formative era (1968 to 1972) as evidenced by the rapid growth of Black Studies programs across the nation marked the discipline’s first renaissance. During its controversial formative period (1968 to 1972), university administrators reluctantly consented to the creation of Black Studies programs and departments on their respective campuses. Although there was a proliferation of Black Studies programs in the discipline’s first renaissance, many of these academic units often lacked sufficient stature, qualified leadership and adequate funding. It was not until 1979 and extending to the early 1980s, that Black Studies begins to evolve as a discipline. According to Martin Kilson (2000, 174), two measures denoted the institutionalization of Black Studies in higher education: the appointment of scholars who possessed impeccable academic credentials to direct programs and the “penetration of established academic disciplines by Black Studies.” A further indication of the discipline’s evolution

was the development of the Ph.D. degree program in African-American Studies at Temple University under the leadership of its founding director, Molefi Asante. The Temple Ph.D. Program founded in 1988 was the first time that the National Council for Black Studies played a key role in a graduate programs’ initiation and development. Members of that original NCBS team involved in the Temple experience included the organization’s president, Delores P. Aldridge, Emory University, William Nelson, Ohio State University, James Turner, Cornell University and Tilden Lemelle, University of the District of Columbia. Several post-1990s disciplinary developments elevated the “systematic study of people of African descent” to unprecedented acceptance in higher education. Arguably, the past ten-year period (1993-2003) represents the discipline’s growing acceptance of legitimacy and stature within academe. Manning Marable observes, “African-American Studies, once considered an insurgent outsider in white circles, has in recent years become part of the intellectual establishment (2000, 189). Perhaps the most prominent manifestation of the discipline’s current stature has been the growth of African-American Studies graduate degree programs. Four of the five current African-American doctoral programs were initiated between 1993 and 2003 (See Table 1).

Table 1  
Graduate Programs in Africana Studies

#### **DOCTORAL PROGRAMS**

Temple University  
University of Massachusetts-Amherst  
University of California-Berkely  
Harvard University  
Michigan State University

#### **MA PROGRAMS**

Clark Atlanta University  
Columbia University  
Cornell University  
Florida International University  
Indiana University  
Morgan State University  
New York University  
Ohio State University  
State University of New York, Albany  
University of California, Los Angeles  
University of Iowa  
University of Louisville  
University of Maryland, College Park  
University of Wisconsin, Madison  
Yale University



The W.E.B. DuBois Department of African-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst developed the discipline's second Ph.D. program in 1994 while the University of California at Berkeley's Department of African-American Studies admitted its first class in 1997. Both Harvard (2000) and Michigan State University (2002) launched Black Studies doctoral programs at the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. [Table 1] It would be remiss, however, not to indicate that the first student to gain a Ph.D. in African American Studies was under the tutelage of Sinclair Drake at Stanford University with similar concentrations in African American Studies through the Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts at Emory University during the seventies and eighties.

Similarly, options to pursue a M.A. degree in Africana Studies increased significantly during the past decade. Six out of the current fifteen Master's degree programs in Africana Studies were established during the discipline's second renaissance (See Table 1). Moreover, other Black Studies academic units at Syracuse University and Georgia State University are presently developing graduate degree programs. A noteworthy feature of this expansion of graduate opportunities in Africana Studies has been its emergence in institutions of higher education in the South. Beginning with the first undergraduate degree granting program in the South at Emory University under its founding director, Delores P. Aldridge, there has since been an increasing number of southern colleges and universities offering both undergraduate and graduate programs in Africana Studies. Both the University of Louisville's Department of Pan-African Studies and Florida International University's African New World Studies program were initiated M.A. degree programs between 1993 and 2003.

This growth of Africana Studies graduate programs paralleled a similar growth at the undergraduate level. During the 1990s, several colleges and universities established new baccalaureate degree programs in Black Studies. Among this increase in new units include Tennessee State University, University of Arizona, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Georgia State University, Virginia Commonwealth University and Hood College. Moreover, several other Black Studies' academic units benefited from program enhancement. African-American Studies' elevation to departmental status at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the significant expansion of the Department of African and African-American Studies at Pennsylvania State University are but two such examples. The development of African Studies on the campuses of historically Black

colleges and universities (HBCUs) represents another distinguishing feature of the discipline's second renaissance. Beginning with the formation of the Department of Africana Studies in 1993 under the leadership of Amiri Al-Hadid with advocacy and developmental assistance from the National Council for Black Studies, several HBCUs have followed suit and established Black Studies programs, including Savannah State University, Morehouse College, Fort Valley State University and Delaware State University.

During the past decade, the discipline of Black Studies also benefited from substantial positive news coverage. In contrast to its turbulent nascent years when the media regularly ridiculed and condemned the insurgent discipline, Black Studies now receives more favorable media attention. Harvard University's Department of Afro-American Studies' revitalization under the chairmanship of Henry Louis Gates in 1991 signaled the beginning of a new relationship between the discipline of Black Studies and the media. Featured media stories, such as "Harvard's Black Studies Power House"; "The Black Brain Trust"; and "W.E.B. Institute: The Epicenter of Black Studies" were commonplace during the 1990s (See for example, Applebome, 1996; White, 1996; Kalb and Starr, 1996; *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 1999; and, Roach, 1999).

While the activities of Harvard University's Afro-American Studies Department contributed to this more favorable media attention, its coverage also impacted the discipline as a whole. Faculty appointment, debates, scholarship and controversies within Black Studies now regularly appear in the media. For instance, in the Op-Ed pages of the *New York Times*, prominent African-American Studies professors, Henry Louis Gates and Manning Marable, debated the merits of the role of activism in the academy. The *New York Times* also published a front-page story on "the State of Black Studies: Methodology, Pedagogy and Research" conference sponsored by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the African-American Studies at Princeton University. Media attention extends to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, a popular publication in higher education, which significantly increased its coverage of the discipline during the past decade. Recent relevant publications in this outlet include "Taking Black Studies Back in the Streets" and Nell Irvin Painter's personal reflections and assessment of the state of Black Studies (See Gates, 1998; Marable, 1998; Lee, 2003; Boynton, 2002; Sharlett, 2000; and Painter, 2000). In short, unlike its earlier heyday during the era of Black Studies' second renaissance, the discipline



benefits from a largely positive relationship with the media. Indeed, one observer comments that the "popular media saw Afrocentrism as 'news', one of the rare times an intellectual concepts from the black community has gone national( Adams, 1993, 42)." Another contributing development to the growing prominence and vitality of Africana Studies has been the continuing presence and effectiveness of a professional organization committed to promoting and strengthening the discipline of Black Studies. The National Council for Black Studies (NCBS), founded in 1976, continued its strong advocacy role during the late eighties and early 1990s. NCBS sponsored a series of summer institutes on curricula, as well as several administrative institutes. Under the organization's visionary leadership of Delores P. Aldridge, the unprecedented two term elected leader, considerable funding was garnered including a substantial grant from the Ford Foundation. The NCBS summer institute exposed young scholars untrained in Africana Studies to the canons and major paradigmatic issues and scholarship of the discipline while the administrative institute introduced novice administrators to the roles and responsibilities of directing Black Studies academic units.

Notwithstanding its current academic stature, the discipline of Black Studies is confronted with a troubling paradox in its current development. At the height of its prominence and academic legitimacy, the discipline is failing to address systematically its "empowerment" mission. Nathaniel Norment, Chair of the Department of African-American Studies at Temple University, appropriately declares: "there is a need for African American Studies to fulfill its mission to liberate African American people and to commit itself to the communities' needs. In this connection, African American Studies must once again become committed to addressing the consciousness, realities, and urgencies of African Americans' life situations ( 2001, xxxi). The discipline's recommitment to its "empowerment" mission is largely attributed to a disjuncture between theory and practice that presently characterizes Black Studies (Norment, 2001). Manning Marable (1998, 189) observes, "many Black Studies departments today no longer link the two."<sup>1</sup> This is a disturbing development in light of the discipline's origin. Talmadge Anderson, Emeritus Professor and founding editor of the *Western Journal of Black Studies*, reminds us that "the philosophy of African American or Black Studies grew out of the collective philosophical thought, writings, and rhetoric of Black ideologists and intellectuals from the slave, abolition, Emancipation, Reconstruction eras; through

the Harlem Renaissance' and other past and present civil rights movement (Anderson, 1993, 10)." Similarly, Abdul Alkalimat argues that Black Studies is "an enterprise in which the objective is not merely to understand the world but to also make it better (Alkalimat, 1986, 345)."

From its inception, at the core of the Black Studies enterprise is the central mission of empowering people of African descent. Early adherent of Black Studies often raised the issue of relevance in the educational arena. During the 1969 landmark Black Studies symposium sponsored by Yale University, Nathan Hare, a pioneer of the discipline, explained that "in order to involve the black community we feel that the [Black Studies] courses ought to be tied to there, that theory is useful for its own sake and as a means to application, but is not enough (Hare, 1969). Terry Kershaw, the Director of Africana Studies at Virginia Tech University, has made paradigmatic contributions that built upon the early proclamations for relevance in his formulation of the scholar-activist model. Kershaw (2003) posits that empowering the black community should constitute a discipline criterion. Marable (1992) offers another conceptual scheme of the discipline, which addresses the "empowerment" issue. He asserts that Black Studies reflects a black intellectual tradition that is best viewed as descriptive, corrective and prescriptive. Here, Marable explains Black Studies was also prescriptive in its efforts to suggest paths for the constructive resolution of problems which confronted African-American people (1992). We contend that service-learning offers Black Studies scholars an important element to address systematically the "empowerment" tenet. The following section presents a discussion of the history and impact of service-learning in order to ascertain its potential contribution to establishing an "empowerment" exemplar in the discipline of Black Studies.

### *Service-Learning: An Overview*

Service-learning is a by-product of educational reform, which occurred during the 1980s. Youth service work performed by high school students as a part of a 1983 Ernest Boyer community service initiative sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation preceded the introduction of the concept to post-secondary schools. William Denton, the director of the Community Education Leadership Institute at Clark Atlanta University, notes that the Boyer proposal triggered state boards in Washington,



Pennsylvania and Minnesota to authorize local programs and funding (Denton, 1997). The Campus Compact, formed in 1985, sponsors an array of activities that facilitate the effective implementation of service-learning, including summer faculty institutes and curricula development, has also contributed to the current prominence of service-learning in higher education.

In 1990, President George Bush signed the National and Community Service Act that authorized funding opportunities for community service programs in secondary schools and colleges. Three years later in 1993, Congress enacted the National Community Service Trust Act that also provided high school and college students with funding to perform community service for academic credit. The 1993 Trust Act allowed students to serve their communities in exchange for college tuition. Finally, this legislation created the Corporation for National Service, which sponsors and funds a wide range of national and community service activities, such as Learn and Service, a program that supports both K-12 and colleges students and AmeriCorps, a domestic Peace Corps (Hesser, 1998; Denton, 1997).

Although educational policymakers and politicians stimulated the recent attention to service-learning, the concept actually stems from the educational philosophy of John Dewey. Specifically, two strains of thought—knowledge to action and the relationship between the individual and society—characterize Dewey's educational outlook, which undergirds the philosophical basis of contemporary community service-learning. Dewey viewed the educational process as an active rather than passive affair in which experimentalism and reflective thought served as cornerstones of effective learning. Moreover, he insisted that education, as a social process is rendered meaningless until citizens define and contribute to a just society (Dewey, 1987). Another often overlooked philosophical underpinning of service-learning is rooted in African-American social thought. Charles Steven explains:

*In the black American experience, there is a long-standing interest in the community service ideal. This perspective in the context of African American social thought is manifested as a racial legacy dedicated to strengthening community to deal with internal problems and promote broader social change (Stevens, 2003, 25).*

According to the Commission on National and Community Service, the innovative pedagogical technique provides an educational experience in which students learn to develop through active participation in

thoughtfully organized and collaborative [school and community] service experience which addresses community problems. Moreover, the student's academic curriculum has structured time for reflection and dialogue about the service-learning experience. Students acquire new critical skills and knowledge derived from real-life community-based situations that enhance what is taught by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community, which helps to foster a sense of caring for one's fellow citizens. J. Beth Mabry, an evaluative consultant to the Service-Learning Center at the Virginia Polytechnic and State University, asserts that "potentially, service-learning is a tool for student acquisition of academic concepts and critical thinking skills, as well as civic values" (1998, 32). Empirical support for the multifaceted benefits of service-learning is evident in the academic scholarship on this innovative educational process.

Service-learning expands the available pedagogical options available to instructors to enhance academic outcomes. According to Edward Zlotkowski, a leading expert on service-learning and the founding director of the Bentley College Service-Learning Project, contends "by linking the classroom to the world of praxis, it allows induction to complement deduction, personal discovery to challenge received truths, immediate experience to balance generalizations and abstract theory (1998, 3)." In one study, Osborne, Hammerich and Hensley compared service-learning participants to non service-learning students. They found that students who engaged in the service-learning exhibited significant positive improvement on cognitive complexity, social competency and the perceived ability to work with diverse people. Likewise, the preliminary findings of a study conducted by Amy Driscoll and her colleagues at Portland State University found that "student interview data show support for all the predicted student impact variables, especially awareness of and involvement with community, self-awareness, personal development, academic achievement, sensitivity to diversity and independence as a learner (Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon and Kerrigan, 1996, 70; Hammerich and Hensley, 1998).

Several research studies discovered that service-learning participation enhances civic values. Service-learning serves as a socializing agent, which promotes social responsibility. Research findings of Eyler, Giles and Braxton (1997) indicated that service-learning was a predictor of valuing a career helping people, volunteering time in the community and influencing the political system. Astin and Sax (1998) also discovered a



positive relationship between service-learning participation and future civic participation. An educational experience that contributes to the development of a social and intellectual orientation that values a greater commitment to social responsibility coincides with the "empowerment" mission of Africana Studies. Therefore, service-learning can contribute to the vision of the discipline's pioneers who argued that Black Studies programs should serve as a nexus between the community and the academy. Early advocates of the disciplines expected Black Studies academic units to have a presence in its respective local Black community.

Service-learning also has the potential to impact positively the other side of this linkage between Black Studies and the community. Specifically, many community organizations whose mission is to serve the black community often lack adequate resources. By forming partnership with community organizations through service-learning, Black Studies programs offer invaluable assistance to these black advocacy groups. Students enrolled in service-learning classes can supply critical skills and resources to understaffed community organizations (Eyler, Giles, and Braxton, 1997; Ferrari and Worrall, 2000; and, Astin and Sax, 1998). In short, the implementation of service-learning offers varied benefits that include an expansion of available innovative pedagogical strategies; enhanced commitment to social responsibility and the addition of critical resources to community organizations. As with any new educational innovation there are costs and challenges to its implementation. Service-learning is definitely a labor extensive for the professor and student. Faculty members confront balancing the additional demands required in teaching a service-learning class with competing class competes both with the goal of a thorough treatment of the course subject matter, and meeting the requisite publications for a successful tenure decision. The optimal implementation of service-learning requires the instructor to allocate sufficient time placement of students and ensuring the appropriate opportunities in the course for student reflections. Consequently, service-learning courses do in fact, entail additional issues than do traditional classes. Notwithstanding, this time concern the implementation of service-learning remains possible critical component of "empowerment" mission of Black Studies.

Not surprisingly, one noted African-American Studies scholar, James Jennings (2000, 177) proposes that "community service and related efforts to develop programmatic linkages and neighborhood institutions and organizations represent a key component in the theory

and pedagogy of Black Studies." We now turn to an analysis of the implementation of service-learning by the African American Studies department at Georgia State University.

### *Case Study: African-American Studies and Service-Learning at Georgia State University*

Since the inception of the Department of African-American Studies at Georgia State University, service-learning has been a critical component of its curriculum. Founded during the 1994-1995 academic year, service-learning was first incorporated in a section of "Introduction of African-American Studies" (AAS 210) during the 1995 Spring quarter. Early in its development, the department embraced the university's commitment to what its President Carl Patton identifies as "value-added" community service. Central to the strategic objectives of the department's baccalaureate degree in African-American Studies was the promotion of service-learning and community outreach. Since its formative years, Georgia State's African American Studies department has grown to a seven member tenured track faculty (four Associate professors and three untenured Assistant Professors) with a fifty-one course curriculum and sixty-one students who are African-American Studies majors. In addition, the department's seven core faculty members are augmented by a seventeen-member associate faculty cohort with tenure homes in the various traditional disciplines with the exception of Women's Studies.

Faculty members of the GSU African-American Studies department sought to blend instruction and community service to enhance academic outcomes, stimulate civic participation and benefit the larger community. The department offers two lower-division courses "Introduction to African and African American History" (AAS 1140) and "Introduction to African-American Studies" (AAS 210). Both courses satisfy the University's social science general education requirement and are required courses for all students who either major or minor in African-American Studies at GSU. All sections of AAS 210 include a mandated service-learning assignment. Between the 1995 Spring Quarter and the 2003 Fall semester, the department offered thirty-four sections of AAS 210. During this nine-year period, a thirty-three of the thirty-four sections actually complied with the service-learning mandate. As a result, 1,352 students enrolled in the sections of AAS 210 participated in service-learning

projects during the nine year period (See Table 2). Presently, five upper-division courses have incorporated a service-learning requirement. Those courses include "Issues in the African-American Community" (AAS 4010); "History of African-Americans in Georgia" (AAS 3450); "African-American Male-Female Relationships" (AAS 4030); "African-American Women" (AAS 4660); and "Seminar and Practicum in African American Studies" (AAS 4980). Students enrolled in service-learning designated African-American Studies classes have volunteered with nearly fifty community organizations (See

Table 3). These groups address a wide range of social, education, political and economical issues and problems confronting the Black community. Our students assisted: AIDS outreach with ADIS Education Services for Minorities; youth outreach with the Youth Task Force and the Malcolm X Center for Self-Determination; mentoring African-American children with Inner Strength and Cool Girls, Inc.; and homeless advocacy while working with such community organizations as the Victory House.

Table 2  
Service Learning Participation in the Department of African-American Studies at Georgia State University

Academic Year	AA 2010 Introduction to African-American Studies # of Sections	# of Students
1994-1995	1	15
1995-1996	2	46
1996-1997	2	40
1997-1998	2	57
1998-1999	2	108
1999-2000	3	143
2000-2001	7	298
2001-2002	6	260
2002-2003	5	226
*2003-2004	3	159
(nine years)	(33 sections)	(1352 students)
*2003 Fall Semester only		

Table 3  
GSU Department of African-American Studies  
Community Service-Learning Partners (1995-2003)

*Aid to Children of Imprisoned Mothers (AIM)	*National Urban Coalition for Unity and Peace
*AIDS Education Services for Minorities	*Non-Profits for Non-Profits
*Atlanta Men's Homeless Shelter	*Project Healthy Grandparents
*Atlanta Public School	*Project Open Hand
*Atlanta Respite Services	*Project South
*Atlanta Urban Ministry	*Rehabilitation Exposure
*Atlanta--Cultural Diversity Class	*Revelation S.E.E.D. Workshop
*Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro Atlanta	*Robert E. McNair Foundation
*Brightside Academy	*ROOTS
*Cascade House	*Saturday Institute for Manhood, Brotherhood, Actualization (SIMBA)
*Center for Democratic Renewal	*Sign of the Times Productions
*Computer Literacy	*Sisterlove, Inc.
*Cool Girls, Inc.	*Study Hall
*Federation of Southern Cooperatives	*Trinity House
*Genesis Prevention Coalition, Inc.	*Umoja Farmer's Market, Thrift Shop, and Organic Garden Project
*Hammonds House Galleries & Resource Center of African-American Art	*United States Federal Penitentiary
*Inner City Games--Greater Atlanta	*Victory House
*Inner Strength	*Youth Prevention Services
*Lorenzo Benn Y.D.C. Consortium	*Youth Task Force



Regardless of the level of the course, the service-learning component is systematically structured and incorporated on the basis of the most recent service-learning scholarship. Most helpful in this process has been the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* (MJCSL). First published in 1994, this refereed journal publishes research, as well as pedagogical articles on service-learning in higher education. Other important resources utilized in integrating service-learning into the African-American Studies curriculum at Georgia State include: "Praxis I: A Faculty Casebook on Community Service Learning" and "Praxis II: Service-Learning Resources for University Students Staff and Faculty." Both are products of the OCSL Press, the publication component of the Edward Ginsberg Center for Community Service Learning at the University of Michigan. These resources, among others, have been invaluable in effectively implementing service-learning (See for example, Zlotkowski, 1998).

The service-learning assignment in "Introduction to African-American Studies" (AAS 2010) entails the student to volunteer a minimum of 15 hours with an instructor-approved community organization. If a student desires to complete the service-learning requirement with an organization not designated by the professor, then the student is responsible for facilitating an official contract between the community organization and student. Students are required to write a reflection narrative and make an oral presentation in class. The narrative includes a brief description of the community organization, the nature of the student's participation and how that involvement related to the class and its impact. All students complete a student-agency contract that is signed by the student and their supervisor at the community organization. Finally, the supervisor completes an evaluation form of the student's service to the organization. Research conducted by J. Beth Mabry underscores the importance of requiring a minimum of 15 volunteer hours and designating appropriate reflection time. Mabry stresses that, "students need to reflect on their service activities regularly, both in writing and verbally, to effect greater commitment to volunteerism and stronger beliefs about making a difference in the world (1998, 33).

Anecdotal evidence garnered from student narratives coincides with findings in the literature. One student who volunteered with the Saturday Institute for

Manhood, Brotherhood Actualization (SIMBA), an organization that provides educational programs for incarcerated youth inmates at the Lorenzo Benn Youth Detention Center, taught African-American history classes. The student wrote "I have completed my 15 hours of volunteer work, but I will continue working with them on Saturdays (Stewart, 1999). Many of the former student service-learning participants recognized the importance of serving the community. One such student recalled:

*I would have not participated in this project if it had not been for this African-American class. I am glad that I got an opportunity to serve my community. I think that it is a wonderful idea to encourage students to participate in helping out the African-American community. This should continue to be a part of the requirement for the course. I actually worked about 20 hours on this project, but it was worth it (Stewart, 2000).*

Debra Tasioudis, an African-American Studies major, notes:

*Before I began working with BRIGHTSIDE I was unaware that there are so many homeless children in Atlanta. Thought I was aware that there were a great number of homeless people in Atlanta, I never knew the extent of the problem. Children. I think that's what troubled me the most about this abandoned part of our society. Through my work at BRIGHTSIDE, I have been able to not just feel pain about the problem, but actually work to help fix the problem. For the children it is more than anything, a need to feel loved and wanted, in a society that looks the other way. BRIGHTSIDE helped to reawaken the sleeping good in my soul. The power behind volunteering is so great. There is no greater feeling, than knowing that a small portion of your time can greatly affect the entire life of a young person. I will continue to do work within the community, and now I wonder where I have been all this time (1998).*

The Department's implementation of service-learning contributed to the effectiveness of the African-American community organizations. In sheer work hours, students enrolled in the department's designated service-learning class volunteered over twenty-two thousand hours (20,280). For organizations with limited resources, these volunteer hours proved to invaluable. In a letter of appreciation the executive director of Nonprofits for Nonprofit, Inc. wrote:

*The students have come from your department have been enthusiastic, professional and have broadened our ability to respond to the many requests for service we receive. Nonprofits for Nonprofits is proud of the continuing partnerships it has throughout*



the community. It is because of innovative community leaders like you, that we are able to reach far beyond the boundaries of the limited resources we have to touch the population we serve in a meaningful way (1999).

Based on the department's service-learning participation during the past nine years (1995-2003), we have identified several facilitators that enhance the effective implementation of service-learning. We recommend that:

- 1) The instructor establishes a relationship with prospective community partners. It is imperative that the instructor is knowledgeable about the mission of the community organization and how that organization intends to utilize the student volunteers;
- 2) The instructor identifies a contact person within the community organization;
- 3) The Department sponsors a workshop for community organizations and service-learning instructors so that both parties are fully aware of each other's expectations;
- 4) The instructor invites a representative of the community organization to make a class presentation about the group's mission and activities. Students tend to volunteer at a greater level when they can establish a personal contact within the organization;
- 5) The instructor includes a mechanism (i.e. student-agency contract) to ensure the student's completion of the service-learning requirement and a venue for the community group's evaluation of the student's performance;
- 6) The instructor requires students to select a volunteer site during the first two weeks of the semester;
- 7) The instructor confines student service-learning participation to the approved list of community organizations. If a student insists on volunteering with a non-approved community organization, then it is incumbent upon the student to facilitate a contract with the prospective community organization. The student should have the community organization to inform the instructor, on organizational letterhead, of the group's mission, student duties and the means of evaluating the student;
- 8) The instructor should not allow students to split service hours among more than one community organization. This restriction ensures that the student level of participation (15 hours) coincides with research findings of the service-learning scholarship;
- 9) The instructor should emphasize the core social mission of Africana Studies by stressing the importance

of social responsibility by encouraging them to continue their volunteer work with the community organization after the completion of the service-learning requirement; and

- 10) The instructor should provide ample opportunities for student reflection.

### Conclusion

It is our hope that this essay will stimulate consideration of the utility of service-learning by Black Studies programs. More importantly, the above discussion is intended to facilitate the integration of service-learning into the Black Studies curriculum. Multiple benefits are accrued from the incorporation of service-learning. It offers an innovative pedagogical technique that helps to inculcate values of civic engagement, while also supplying invaluable resources to advocacy organizations in the African-American community. In short, service-learning represents a critical component in the development of the discipline's empowerment tenet.

We do not contend that service-learning is a panacea for the "empowerment" dilemma in Africana Studies. Nor do we assert that "empowerment" efforts are totally absent from the landscape of Africana Studies. Indeed, the Community Extension Center of Ohio State University's Department of African and African-American Studies is a prototype for empowering the black community. The Monroe Trotter Institute, an affiliation of the University of Massachusetts at Boston, also warrants duplicating by Black Studies units. In the Humanities, the "Poetry for the People" program, once under the direction of the late June Jordan of the University of California at Berkeley's Department of African American Studies demonstrates the wide range of alternative ways to make a contribution to the community. Students enrolled in the innovative class "Cyberspace and the Black Experience" taught by Abdul Alkalimat in the Department of Africana Studies at Toledo University assists community residents in developing web pages, as well as teach computer literacy classes for neighborhood black churches. Finally, of course, the activism of scholars involved in the formation of the Black Radical Congress and the "Critical Resistance" mobilization against the prison-industrial complex reflect the legacy of W.E.B. DuBois (See Upton, 1984; *UCLA Newsletter*, Spring, 1998; *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 2000).

While the above examples are certainly laudatory, they do not compensate for the lack of systematic at-

tention to developing the full potential of the “empowerment” pillar of the discipline. Moreover, a quick perusal of the discipline would undoubtedly indicate that there are far fewer current Black Studies academic units engaged in community outreach than was the case during the discipline’s formative period. In a similar view, there is a near absence of an applied concentration among the curricula of the various African-American Studies graduate degree programs. One notable exception has been the University of Maryland at College Park’s African-American Studies Program offers a M.A. degree with a public policy emphasis. At one time, discussions occurred between the respective Black Studies departments at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and the University of Massachusetts at Boston for the Boston campus to offer an applied concentration for the doctoral program housed on the Amherst campus. Unfortunately, this proposal never materialized.

In closing, our call for greater attention to the “empowerment” mission of Africana Studies should not be interpreted as a de-emphasis and/or neglect of scholarship. We are certainly aware of the professional currency of scholarly publications in the “publish or perish” environment of academe, particularly at the major research universities. Indeed, all four tenure applicants at the Department of African-American Studies were successfully tenured at Georgia State University. Rather, we assert that it is imperative for Black Studies academic units to sustain a proper balance between academic excellence and social responsibility. Black Studies programs should be more than an entrance to the ivy-covered walls of prestigious universities and colleges. In keeping with its original mission, Black Studies must “return to its original mission” and give greater attention to the “empowerment” of people of African descent.



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