

# Graduate Studies and Research in Africana/Black Studies: Reflections and New Directions

An Introduction

by

Karanja Keita Carroll, Ph.D.  
Department of Black Studies  
State University of New York, New Paltz

*Karanja Keita Carroll* ([carrollk@newpaltz.edu](mailto:carrollk@newpaltz.edu)) is the Associate Editor of *The Journal of Pan African Studies* and is currently an Assistant Professor of Black Studies at the State University of New York, New Paltz. He holds a Masters of Arts and a Ph.D. from Temple University's Department of African American Studies. His teaching and research interest include the disciplinary structure of Africana Studies, the intellectual history of Africana Studies, Afrikan (Black) Psychology, Afrikan-Centered Social Theory and Afrikan-Centered Theory & Methodology.

Black Studies<sup>1</sup> as an investigation of Africana people across space and time, from the lens of Afrikan cultural reality with the ultimate goal of changing the life chances of Africana peoples, has been a revolutionary discipline and intellectual movement within American institutions of higher education since the late 1960s. The demands made by students at San Francisco State College, Howard University, University of Louisville, Hunter College and many other academic institutions within the United States, are just a few of the examples of what young minds in coalition with radical faculty and compliant (but all too often resistant) administrators were able to produce. Shortly after the creation of undergraduate degree programs, graduate programs developed at various universities to provide specialization and training within the academic discipline of Black Studies. Beginning with institutions like the State University of New York at Albany, Yale University<sup>2</sup> and Cornell University, graduate degree programs within Black Studies began to continue the initial undergraduate demands but on the graduate level. However, it would not be until 1987<sup>3</sup> that the first Ph.D. program would be proposed and developed at Temple University through the contributions of the late C. Tsehloane Keto, Sonja Peterson-Lewis and Molefi Kete Asante, among others. Today there are over 10 Ph.D. programs in Africana Studies and close to 30 Masters of Arts programs at universities and colleges throughout the United States.

This special edition focuses upon the current state of graduate studies within Africana Studies and also showcases examples of the research produced by current graduate students and recent graduates of some of the discipline's premier programs. There is a rather small and limited amount of literature that directly engages the nature of graduate studies in Africana Studies.<sup>4</sup> While, on the other hand, there is a body of seemingly larger body of literature that discusses graduate studies within Africana Studies on a broader level, even this body of work is rather limited.<sup>5</sup> Thus this special edition, along with the forth-coming special edition of *The International Journal of Africana Studies*, should have a significant impact upon future discussions of graduate studies within the discipline.<sup>6</sup>

It is also important to note that this special edition on "Graduate Studies and Research in Africana Studies" focuses on research and discussions within Africana Studies that attempt to ground themselves directly within the discipline of Africana Studies. By this we mean our focus is upon engaging the foundational issues of intellectual history, nomenclature, definition, scope, pedagogy and other key factors that define and demarcate the space that the discipline occupies within Western institutions of higher education. Rather than randomly engage research in which the discipline of Africana Studies is an afterthought, the articles and interviews attempt to center and locate the discipline at the foundation of their analysis. In doing so, we attempt to refocus discussions upon Africana Studies and its future prospects as an autonomous academic discipline within American institutions of higher education.

We are glad to begin this special edition with an interview with the most recent and consistent scholar to produce research on graduate studies within Africana Studies, Stephanie Y. Evans. Dr. Evans, a graduate of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst's Department of Afro-American Studies, is currently an assistant professor of African American Studies and Women Studies at the University of South Florida. Evans' contribution to this special edition provides an overall context for the work to follow. Through an online interview, Dr. Evans reflects upon her current research on the state of graduate studies along with the possible future directions research on graduate studies in the discipline needs should go.

Regina A. Bernard-Carreño's "The Critical Pedagogy of Black Studies," is a timely contribution to discussions of pedagogy within the discipline of Black Studies. As a reflection upon her graduate training in Black Studies from Columbia University, Bernard-Carreño engages the transition from graduate school to professorship along with the multitude of challenges she faces as a professor of Black Studies. While focus is placed primarily upon the impact of graduate training on teaching at the undergraduate level, Bernard-Carreño's underlying concern is the need for further training of Black Studies professionals who are grounded within the intellectual and social history of the discipline, something that will only come through direct training at the M.A. and Ph.D. levels of Black Studies.

Ibram Rogers, currently a dissertation fellow in African American history at SUNY College at Oneonta and a doctoral student at Temple University's Department of African American Studies, provides a very important contribution to the intellectual history of Africana Studies via his interview with Jimmy Garrett, a founding member of San Francisco State College's Black Student Union. Rogers dissertation is tentatively titled, "Power Concedes Nothing Without Demand: A Narrative History of the Black Campus Movement, 1965-75." The potential contributions of Rogers work (this current contribution and his dissertation) speaks to the importance of teasing out the intellectual and social development of Africana Studies as it relates to the intellectual history of the discipline, with a special emphasis on the role of Black students. Through this oral history provided by Garrett, Rogers is able to link the history of Black Studies and the Black Student Movement to their current trajectories in modern academia. This is definitely an important contribution and is reflective of the possible directions that graduate research and post-graduate research in Black Studies can go.

Marquita Pellerin, also a current Ph.D. student in Temple University's Department of African American Studies, contributes a paper that was originally presented at the 19<sup>th</sup> AYA Graduate Student Conference at Temple University and the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual National Council for Black Studies Conference, entitled "A Blueprint for Africana Studies: An Overview of African/African American/African Caribbean Studies". While Pellerin covers a large body of literature on the discipline from issues of nomenclature, to the organization of knowledge and issues of theory building, it is her ability to do so grounded within the social and intellectual history of Africana Studies which undergirds the strength of her work and analysis. The arguments that Pellerin makes will be essential for current and future generations of Africana Studies scholars.

Another critical investigation of the current issues facing Africana Studies is provided by Shaun Ossei-Owusu in his "Posterity and the Disciplinary Implications of Interdisciplinarity, Post-Raciality and Affirmative Action." Ossei-Owusu a first year doctoral student in the University of California Berkeley's Department of African American Studies provides a clear and concise analysis of the possible implications of disciplinary structure, post-raciality and the issues of affirmative action as they impact upon the future of Africana Studies. Ossei-Owusu does this with a critical eye and like the previous contributions, he grounds his analysis within knowledge of the social history of Africana Studies.

Conversely, the previously mentioned works of Rogers, Pellerin and Ossei-Owusu speak to the potential of Africana Studies. As only a sample of work produced by current graduate students, these works provide examples and models for how future generations can engage the current realities of Africana Studies. The previous contributions ultimately suggest that this can only be done with strong grounding in the social and intellectual history of the discipline, without such scholarship Africana Studies merely becomes an academic enterprise separate from its 1960s foundation. Both the contributions of Evans and Bernard-Carreño also provide an important nuance to this discussion, as further evidence of the importance of graduate studies in Africana Studies.

Additionally, this special edition engages the numerous realities that reflect the state of graduate studies and research in Africana Studies. Graduate degree programs within Africana Studies provide mentorship, training and direction for the next generation of Africana Studies scholars. In doing so, the proper mentorship provides the guidance which is needed in moving the discipline in a direction that will advance Africana Studies and involve issues related to the development of the discipline.

Hence, all of the articles and contributions presented within this special edition speak to the importance of graduate studies for the advancement of Africana Studies, the Africana Studies scholar and the continued movement towards the accurate interpretation of reality from the perspective of Afrikan descended people. And as Africana Studies continues to advance itself within American institutions of higher education we must continuously revisit our status. And while it is true that Africana Studies is found primarily as an undergraduate major and minor in most institutions of higher education, with the recent development of new graduate programs within Africana Studies, it becomes important that we continuously engage the state, direction and nature of research which these graduate degree programs produce. This special edition attempts to be just one contribution and assessment.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this introductory essay “Black Studies” is used to refer to the discipline during its initial inception, while “Africana Studies” is used to refer to the discipline in its more recent manifestation.

<sup>2</sup> This is in reference to the 1978 Master’s of Arts program, not the early 1990s joint Ph.D. program.

<sup>3</sup> Stephanie Y. Evans, “The State and Future of the Ph.D. in Black Studies: Assessing the Role of the Comprehensive Examination,” *The Griot: The Journal of African American Studies* 25, no. 1 (2006), 1. Molefi Kete Asante, “Sustaining Africology: On the Creation and Development of a Discipline” in *A Companion to African-American Studies*, ed. Lewis Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing), 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> See Frank G. Pogue, “Graduate Education in African and Afro-American Studies: An Assessment at SUNY in Albany,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 1, no. 2 (1977), 87-92; Nancy Dawson (Nana Efua Sanka I), “Limitations or Liberation: An Investigation Into the Benefits of a Master’s Degree in Africana Studies,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 23, no. 3 (1999), 168-181; Mary Crystal Cage, “Graduate Students Have an Unprecedented Range of Choices as Ph.D.

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Offerings in Black Studies Proliferate,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 43, no. 10 (1996), A10-A11; Robert Paul Wolf, “A Training Ground for Black Studies Professors,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 21 (1998), 118-119; Katherine Olukemi Bankole, “A Preliminary Report and Commentary of Graduate Afrocentric Research and Implications for the Advancement of the Discipline of Africalogy, 1980-2004,” *Journal of Black Studies* 36, no. 5 (2006), 663-697; Stephanie Y. Evans, “The State and Future of the Ph.D. in Black Studies: Assessing the Role of the Comprehensive Examination,” *The Griot: The Journal of African American Studies* 25, no. 1 (2006), 1-16; Ama Mazama, “Graduate Studies Programs in African American Studies,” in *The Handbook of Black Studies*, ed. Molefi Kete Asante and Maulana Karenga, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 119-129.

<sup>5</sup> Of the recent anthologies containing Africana Studies related literature, Nathaniel Norment Jr.’s *The African American Studies Reader*, has the largest amount of work that touches upon discussions of graduate studies in Africana Studies. See for example Molefi Kete Asante, “The Afrocentric Metatheory and Disciplinary Implications,” in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, Jr. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 506-518; Daudi Ajani ya Azibo, “Articulating the Distinction between Black Studies and the Study of Blacks: The Fundamental Role of Culture and the African-Centered Worldview” in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, Jr. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 525-546; Alan Colon “Critical Issues in Black Studies: A Selective Analysis” in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, Jr. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 624-631; Donald Henderson, “What Direction Black Studies?” in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, Jr. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 113-125; Darlene Clark Hine “Black Studies: An Overview” in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, Jr. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 53-60; Nathan Huggins, “Afro-American Studies” in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, Jr. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 321-337; William A. Little, Carolyn M. Leonard and Edward Crosby, “Black Studies and Africana Studies Curriculum Model in the United States” in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, Jr. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 811-831; Nathaniel Norment, Jr., “Needed Research and Related Projects in African American Studies” in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, Jr. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 832-847; James Stewart, “The Field and Function of Black Studies” in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, Jr. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 44-52. Also see Mario Small, “Departmental Conditions and the Emergence of New Disciplines: Two Cases in the Legitimization of African-American Studies,” *Theory and Society* 28, no. 5 (1999), 659-707.

<sup>6</sup> See *The International Journal of Africana Studies* 14, no. 1 (2009).