

# From the Black Studies Movement to the Obama Era: Introduction to this Issue

by

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This special issue of the *Journal of Pan African Studies* contains articles written by faculty members of the University of Louisville's Department of Pan-African Studies as they, along with their students and the university community, commemorate the department's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary since its founding in 1973. A department exhibiting a similar history as others in the field, the Louisville's department was born out of strife and tension to establish a countercenter for the black community on campus (Rojas, 2007). The faculty and students of today's department carry the torch of those that came before us with continuing efforts to bridge our scholarship and teaching with our community connection to promote critical examinations of issues and ideas within and influencing the African diaspora. These efforts have not gone without challenge or near-death experiences for the department and its faculty. Many of these experiences and history are examined through Dr. Joy Carew's discussion of a recent oral history project, referred to as the PAS Elders Project. In her article, Dr. Carew documents how five key faculty members established, sustained, and grew the University of Louisville's department throughout years of waning support and doubt of the legitimacy and importance of Pan-African Studies in academia.

Dr. Tomarra Adams continues the exploration of the importance of Pan-African Studies in relation to students, specifically those that enter the University of Louisville's department. In her article, Dr. Adams discusses the "Black Studies Effect" as an integral facet of the field's departments and programs that assist students academically, interpersonally, and socially as they transition to college. Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley describes the positioning of graduate programs including the recently launched doctoral program in the Department of Pan-African Studies at the University of Louisville. This discussion also examines the responses from graduates of the first decade of the master's program to identify the key influences of a Black Studies degree and faculty on the intellectual and personal development of graduate students. Dr. Latrice Best and Dr. Carson Byrd continue the discussion of graduate training in the field by discussing the importance of incorporating more quantitative methods. By increasing students' knowledge of such methods, Black Studies graduates can contribute more critical perspectives to the issues and experiences of communities in the Diaspora as well as provide more informed feedback in the peer-review process in academia.

The second portion of this special issue engages a few critical avenues of research that shed light on issues influencing the scholarship and perspectives within the field. Dr. Latrica Best and John Chenault discuss the importance for the field to examine the increasing health-related research that utilizes biomarkers to identify members of the African diaspora. Their discussion points to the critical need to contextualize the measures and interpretations of race-related health research to avoid biological determinism, and promote more conversations of health inequality in the diaspora. Dr. Pearlie Johnson explores the relevance of the visual arts and art history for the field. Throughout her article, Dr. Johnson discusses several pieces of art and how they convey important information about the eras of African and African American history. In her article, Dr. Shirletta Kinchen discusses the importance of the long black campus movement, and examines how recent scholarship has framed the narratives and actions of those students who brought about massive change in higher education.

In closing, the current chair of the Department of Pan-African Studies at the University of Louisville, Dr. Ricky Jones, discusses the important opportunities for change that departments and programs in the fields can take advantage of to push the field into the future. In particular, Dr. Jones challenges not only the department at the University of Louisville, but Black Studies across the nation to continue progress toward the humanitarian project previous generations have worked on to develop a more just society as this is part of “what Pan-African Studies does.” These articles provide another forum to discuss important ideas and approaches to broadening the efforts of scholars and students in the field. Through a discussion of how these ideas and approaches have developed within the Department of Pan-African Studies at the University of Louisville, we hope to assist other departments and programs with expanding their roles in their students’, universities’, and communities’ experiences and understanding of the African diaspora.

*Guest Editor’s Note:* While this special issue of *The Journal of Pan African Studies* was in production, Dr. Susan Herlin passed away among family in Louisville. As Dr. Carew elaborates throughout her article, Dr. Herlin was a cornerstone of the Department of Pan-African Studies from the moment she arrived from graduate school. Her work created a truly interdisciplinary and engaged learning environment for all who studied and worked with her, both in the U.S. and abroad in Ghana, and in other locales. Although it is sad to lose yet another important figure in the field and the community, like those who passed before, we are certain that she will find her place among family, friends, and colleagues in the place of our ancestors. Peace be the journey...

## Reference

Rojas, F. (2007). *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a radical social movement became an academic discipline*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.



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CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF PAN-AFRICAN STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE