

On Strike, Shut it Down: The Past, Present and Future of Africana Studies

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Abstract. This paper explores the history of Black Studies, which began as a result of student protest movements—spurred on by the student strike at San Francisco State College in 1968—and spread across the country to hundreds of colleges and universities. Black students everywhere sought control over their education, including at the Claremont Colleges (5Cs), a small consortium of liberal arts colleges located in Southern California. The mobilization on behalf of Black students at the Claremont Colleges, and the subsequent administrative attempts to not only block the creation of a Black Studies department, but to delegitimize the department after its founding, tell a compelling, though seldom-known story about the character of Africana Studies. Uncovering this history through various archival documents helps to illustrate a path forward for the discipline, both at the Claremont Colleges and elsewhere. In particular, looking back to the past can help reorient towards a more radical, liberatory future by preparing students to center their academics around community-organizing and Black freedom, just as Black students did in the 1960s.

Keywords: *Black Studies, Africana Studies, student protest, Black liberation, radical pedagogy.*

How do we who are doing work in black studies tend to, care for, comfort, and defend the dead, the dying, and those living lives consigned, in the aftermath of legal chattel slavery, to death that is always-imminent and immanent?

-Christina Sharpe
 “Black Studies: In the Wake,” 59-60

In 1968, Black students at San Francisco State College (SF State) waged a pivotal battle in the world of higher education, demanding the creation of a department of Black Studies.¹ That same year, Black students at the Claremont Colleges, also referred to as the 5Cs, (along with hundreds of other institutions throughout the US) mobilized to establish Black Studies on their own campuses. Despite the significance of their organization, and the prominence of the SF State student strike, the Claremont story remains little known. The recent 50th anniversary of the discipline, however, offers a time to reflect on the past, present, and future of Africana Studies – both nationally and at the Claremont Colleges. Reflecting on the Claremont story illustrates the powerful ethos of Africana Studies at its founding and the necessity of an Africana Studies that promotes Black freedom. That this ethos has dwindled in the Africana Studies department at Claremont is indicative of the challenges many Africana Studies departments across the country are facing. Moreover, it is indicative of the need to reorient, bringing the discipline back to its radical roots.

As Christina Sharpe reminds us, Africana Studies *must* “tend to, care for, comfort, and defend” Black life in the wake of slavery (Sharpe, 2014, 59-60). This work requires that students, professors, and scholars of Africana Studies go beyond the academic, and instead, take up the collective fight for Black liberation. While Black communities continue to be subject to unending, unwarranted, systems of violence, those in academia cannot simply remain within the walls of the ivory tower. Because the university limits Africana Studies to a study of “Black stuff,” stripping the discipline of its political, community-oriented essence, it is imperative that we go beyond the walls of the ivory tower, and its prescription for what it means to be an academic discipline (Andrews, 2020, 20). It is only by breaking down these confines that we can ensure that Africana Studies is inextricably linked to Black liberation.

Born in a Struggle: the History of Africana Studies

In 1968, students at San Francisco State College (SF State) called for a campus-wide strike, demanding an independent department of Black Studies (T’Shaka, 2012). The strike lasted five months and resulted in the creation of

the first Black Studies department in the nation (T'Shaka, 2012). The movement spread to nearly 200 college campuses across the US as Black students everywhere called for sweeping reforms to curriculum, admissions policies, and general on-campus life (Biondi, 2014). These student protests took the form of strikes, sit-ins, and marches, and the US Student organizers utilized the momentum from broader social movements, such as Black Power and the Civil Rights Movement, to sustain their own movements and put pressure on administrators to comply. Africana Studies was born from the subsequent struggle these students endured – at SF State and nationally.

The Negro Students Association (now the Black Student Union, or BSU) at SF State was formed in 1963 to improve on-campus conditions for Black students facing racism and Eurocentric classes (T'Shaka, 2012). Heavily influenced by the San Francisco Civil Rights Movement, Black students had become increasingly concerned with embracing their identity and using their education to benefit the communities from which they came. Their organizing produced a student-run, highly innovative Black Studies curriculum at the Experimental College, which scholar Martha Biondi calls a “national prototype” for Black Studies, because all the courses were student-designed (Biondi, 2014, 46). Despite the success of these classes, however, there was an increasing desire for autonomy and legitimization – which could only be gained by moving beyond the Experimental College (which was student-run and taught) and into a separate School for Ethnic Studies (Experimental College Summer Catalogue, 1967). Emboldened by the Black Power Movement, in 1966 students formally moved to introduce Black Studies to the rest of SF State (Biondi, 2014). In this way, Black students “turned the ‘Black Power’ slogan into a grassroots social movement” to change academia as they knew it (Biondi, 2014, 2).

By March of 1967, fed up with the lack of progress made due to administrative inaction, Black students formally introduced a proposal for an autonomous Black Studies Department (Biondi, 2014). The proposal was drafted by James “Jimmy” Garrett² and included stipulations that the center have a board of 10 directors (seven of whom were selected by students), be shaped by Black educators, and include a Black majority in each class (Biondi, 2014). There was also a plan to increase admissions for Black students, hire Black full-time professors, as well as a Black staff member to direct the Office of Financial Aid (Biondi, 2014). The BSU also understood the importance of autonomy (in the form of departmental status), which would give them power over hiring, budgeting, and curriculum. Although administrators had appeared to be supportive of Garrett's plan – even going so far as to hire Nathan Hare to set up and direct Black Studies – progress was slow (Biondi, 2014). By 1968, there were only 1.3 Black

Studies hires, and the administration refused to move the existing Black studies courses to a new department or center for fear of “Black separatism and possible indoctrination” (Biondi, 2014, 54).

As a result, on November 6, 1968, students went on strike. The strike was headed by the BSU and the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), a coalition of cultural / ethnic affinity groups, including Asian-American, Latine, and Middle Eastern students, which came together to “battle the administration together” (Bates and Meraji, 2019, “Organizing for change”). The TWLF students adopted the slogan “on strike, shut it down,” in order to mobilize campus members, incite as much disruption as possible, and make their case heard (Biondi, 2014, 57). Though police aggression brought on by administrators originally increased widespread support for the movement, clashes between students and police began to worsen over the course of the strike. In fact, December 3, 1968, earned the nickname “Bloody Tuesday,” because SF State President S.I. Hayakawa declared a state of emergency and called in armed guards in full riot gear (Biondi, 2014, 62). The bloody confrontations continued throughout December, which students named the “December Days” (Biondi, 2014, 62). Over 80 students were injured over the course of the strike, and hundreds more were arrested.

As the months went on, it was hard to sustain such a large coalition for an extended period of time, especially in light of such police and administrator violence and swaths of arrests (Biondi, 2014). Fortunately, the administration was also growing weary of the continued demonstrations and on March 20, 1969, agreed to give into the demands of the BSU (Biondi, 2014). Effective in the fall of 1969, all Black Studies courses were to be moved to a new Department of Black Studies (with 11.3 faculty positions),³ and plans were made to launch a School of Ethnic Studies. This accomplishment was historic for Black students and for higher education, as Black students and faculty began to take control of their education everywhere.

On the East Coast, students at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, staged an armed occupation in April 1969 in order to establish Black Studies on their campus. After President James A. Perkins repeatedly denied requests for a separate, Black-run, Afro-American Studies college, the Black students on campus resolved to escalate matters (“The Agony of Cornell,” 1969). According to a *Time Magazine* article written shortly after the occupation, students “smuggled in a small arsenal of rifles, shotguns and knives” during Parents’ Weekend, and 120 Black students seized Willard Straight Hall (“The Agony of Cornell,” 1969, 1). After 34 hours of occupation, President Perkins, wanting to avoid violence, agreed to grant the Black students amnesty and gave into the demands for a Black Studies program (“The Agony of Cornell,” 1969). News of this militan-

cy swept the nation, as many media outlets and administrators criticized both the students for arming themselves, and Cornell for giving into their demands (“The Agony of Cornell,” 1969).

In the Midwest, at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, students compelled administrators to implement – among other initiatives aimed at improving the Black experience – Black Studies and affirmative action. Since 1965, Black students at Northwestern had been vocally critical of their treatment on campus (including athletes being told by coaches not to date white women) and created the For Members Only (FMO) and Afro-American Student Union (AASU) groups (Biondi, 2014). After Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, activism began to spike (Biondi 2014, 83). On April 22, 1968, the FMO and AASU heads issued a set of demands, including admitting more Black students, instituting Black Studies courses with Black professors, and fully desegregating Northwestern’s real estate holdings (Biondi, 2014). Twelve days later, on May 4, 1968, about 100 Black students took over the Northwestern Bursar’s office to force the administration to accept their demands (Biondi, 2014).⁴ Although President J. Roscoe Miller was eager to throw the students in jail, other administrators persuaded him to negotiate with students. Thus, after 38 hours of protest, Miller agreed to hire Black students in the admissions office, and to expand Black Studies courses (Biondi, 2014). Despite a mixed response to the action in the media, it was a decisive victory for Black students.

That these waves of student protests took place all over the country, at both private and public institutions, “illustrate[s] the diverse locations and goals of the Black student rebellion” (Biondi, 2014, 79). Moreover, according to Peniel E. Joseph, the “student unrest [on campus] exemplified the exponential growth of black radical consciousness by the late 1960s” (Joseph, 2003, 191). Hence, as Black students gained a sense of Black radicalism from organizations such as the Black Panthers, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, and the Afro-American Association, they quickly brought that same militancy to their campuses to fight for their education (Joseph, 2003). Students thus took matters into their own hands to institute widespread change in higher education, both as a whole and at their individual colleges and universities – resulting in the birth of Africana Studies.

The Claremont Colleges⁵

Inspired by the ongoing national Black student movement and the calls for Black Power, Black and Brown students at the Claremont Colleges (5Cs) came together to demand that ethnic studies be instituted at the 5Cs. At first, outward displays of support from the administration were sullied by stalling the creation

of the Black Studies Center (BSC). Once the Center was created, however, the administration attempted to undermine Center power and cut its budget, while also showing an overall lack of genuine concern for Black student recruitment and experience. In fact, from its inception, the Black Studies Center constantly risked being dissolved into an academic department, with continuous changes being made to the Center's operating structure and hiring process. Although on the surface these changes seemed to legitimize the Center, in practice they stripped the BSC of power and diminished the radical spirit at the heart of the BSC until it was ultimately disbanded in 1979 – erasing years of meticulous and diligent work by Black students and faculty.

The story of the BSC began in May of 1968, when members of the Black Student Union (BSU) wrote a letter to the presidents of the Claremont Colleges criticizing their failure to enroll minority students (Wilks, 1968). As a remedy to this lack of diversity, the letter contained a list of demands, including recruitment of minority students; hiring of a Black administrator to work with the BSU on recruitment; admission of five minority students selected by the BSU; and introduction of a curriculum relevant to the lived experience of Black students and their ancestors (Wilks, 1968). Though the administration seemed agreeable at first, they held the issue in a holding pattern for the next year: creating a committee, undermining the committee's authority, and creating another committee (Doggett, 1969).

Because of this inaction by administrators, and because of the continued underrepresentation of Black students, professors, and non-academic staff across the Claremont Colleges, the BSU rescinded their list of demands and instead issued a proposal for an autonomous Black Studies Center (BSC). They saw the Center as the only logical solution to the "impotent nature" of committees and the inability of white administrators to understand the Black experience (Doggett, 1969, 1). The BSC was proposed as a permanent and autonomous center, with equal access to classrooms, a new building, a 10-15% stipend from each college, and staff including an executive director, a dean of faculty, a development officer, and a dean of Black students (Doggett, 1969). It was intended to make education relevant to the Black students by not only allowing them to take courses in Black Studies but also allowing them to fight discrimination and learn how to engage effectively with the Black community outside the college.

Although significant student organizing went into the proposal for the BSC, the battle for Black Studies was long from over: the Presidents Council punted the issue of creating a Center to a variety of offices, delaying a decision – much like it had done earlier ("Memo," 1969). The BSU, no doubt drawing from the protests taking place across the country, then called for a mass rally on February

26, 1969. The rally was canceled after the explosion of two bombs on February 25 – one at Scripps College and one at Pomona College (“Two Bomb Blasts,” 1969). Although the BSU denied any connection with the bombing, it shocked the administration into cooperation. At a midnight meeting on Saturday, March 8, the BSU finalized negotiations with deans and faculty members to form a committee to implement the Black Studies Center in time for Fall 1969 when the Black Studies Center finally opened with Donald Cheek as the executive director (“BSU, Presidents Finally Agree,” 1969).⁶

The first few years of the BSC proved successful, and by fall of 1971, the Center had 597 students enrolled in its 49 courses across a variety of disciplines, including “Corporation: The Ghetto and the Minority Market,” “Black Social and Political Thought in the United States,” “Social Psychological Aspects of Black Identity” and “Community Organization, Theories and Practice” (“Black Studies Center Guide,” 1970). The Center was also chiefly focused working to help students retain Black identity and create a positive self-image, and preparing them to return to their community (Hazlitt, 1971). Notable initiatives included more extensive recruiting efforts, development of an orientation handbook, revising an existing tutoring program, and starting a six-week preparatory course for incoming first-year students (Hazlitt, 1971). The BSC also continued to expand community programs, such as developing a relationship with a local hospital, working with the Pomona Day School (an afterschool program for local Black youth), and supporting peer academic counseling initiatives for high school students (Hazlitt, 1971). Setbacks began, however, when the colleges threatened to withhold funds for the six-week, pre-freshman course, as the program cost \$6,200 per week (“Black Freshmen Plan,” 1971). This threat foreshadows later attempted cuts to the program, which became an almost annual issue for the BSC. Three courses were also given various no-credit statuses across the colleges because they were seen as lacking rigor, a clear indication that the colleges did not see Black Studies courses as truly worthy of being offered (Covey, 1971).

By the end of the 1972 school year, the majority of the BSC faculty and BSU members had lost confidence in Cheek and mobilized to have him fired from the directorship. (Claremont University Center Public Information Office, 1972). Nearly 100 students marched through Claremont in protest and symbolically buried a casket with Cheek’s name on it (“Anti-Cheek Demand Shows,” 1972). Although the colleges forestalled his termination by insisting on carrying out a full investigation, it was later believed that Cheek was allegedly hired by the colleges to keep Black students in line and “smother any political activity” in exchange for a substantial salary and fringe benefits (“The Struggle Recounted,”

1975, 5). The conditions of this directorship thus “made it virtually impossible for Cheek to serve both the Council of Presidents and Black students” (“The Struggle Recounted,” 1975, 5). Evidently, Cheek chose the Council of Presidents.

In October 1973, James Garrett was selected as the new BSC director. Garrett previously played a key role in the SF State student protests, helping to establish the first Black Studies program. After SF State, Garrett joined the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and played a role in various Black student protest movements across the country. Interestingly, the colleges either were unaware of his history as an organizer and student-advocate or wanted to hide it, as there is no mention of it in the press release announcing his directorship (“James Garrett to Head BSC,” 1973). Garrett’s goals were to evolve the curriculum to reflect Black students’ lives and build a sense of unity among Black students (“James Garrett to Head BSC,” 1973). At this point, however, the BSC was set to take a significant budget cut due to lack of enrollment in BSC classes and disparities in the Chicano Studies Center (CSC) and BSC budgets (“The Struggle Recounted,” 1975).

Unfortunately, each class offered by the Center averaged fewer than ten students – about half the size of non-center classes (of any discipline). In order to combat this low enrollment, the centers were allowed to make joint appointments for the first time, giving more legitimacy to the courses in the eyes of students who had previously been hesitant to enroll in them (Hagler, 1974). The option for joint appointments also allowed a path for tenure for faculty, as individual centers were not allowed to offer tenure to faculty. Although this seemed like a good solution on the surface, the joint appointments, along with the budget cuts, indicated that the Claremont Colleges had no intention of making the Center completely autonomous. Claremont Colleges administrators also wanted to lower the BSC budget from \$225,000 to \$195,000 (The Black Studies Center Family, 1974). This decrease would have forced the BSC to cut the tutor-counseling program, part-time positions, the assistant dean of counseling, a secretary, and a faculty member (Garrett, 1975).

Moreover, the pre-freshman programs were again in danger of being cut due to concerns about the cost and effectiveness of the program, and the BSU “Black House” (an on-campus bungalow used by Black students to organize, study, and host events) was taken away on a false accusation of “misuse” when the colleges claimed that the BSU was illegally using it as a dormitory (Roberts, 1974, 6). The colleges had also begun making their own Black Studies courses with white faculty, which were housed at the colleges rather than at the Center, and detracted students from taking Center courses (Garrett, 1975). Although the presidents claimed there was no bad intent in these actions, there was clear-

ly no concern for the retention of Black students or the continuation of Black Studies.

In April of 1974, The BSC Family⁷ was, therefore, forced to issue a memo to the Claremont Colleges, signaling the escalation of their struggle, writing that “the Black Studies Center believes itself to be part of a pattern to drive off the campus non-whites and institutions which respond to their needs,” allowing the Claremont Colleges to slowly revert back to institutions solely for the white, elite, and privileged (The Black Studies Center Family, 1974, 1). They explained that “if we are to be driven off campus, it will not be without struggle...there will be an escalation and it will be harsh in some cases” (The Black Studies Center Family, 1974, 1). Although it is unclear exactly what occurred as part of the “escalation,” it likely took the form of increased organizing, including protests, walkouts, and petitions.⁸ As a result, the pre-freshman programs were reinstated, the Black House was placed back under BSC control (along with an apology for the misuse charge), rent was only raised to \$2,500 instead of \$4,000, and the budget was raised back to \$215,000 (Weirick, 1974).

Despite this partial success in 1974, 1975 was once again a tumultuous year for the colleges. First, the directors of the CSC and BSC were notified in January that funds would not be available that summer for the pre-freshman programs (Rand, 1975). They adopted joint protest strategies against the “general racist atmosphere,” on campus including by wearing black and brown armbands (Hayward, 1975, 1). Second, administrators and faculty also began sending memos to each other about what to do about BSC faculty status and tenure *without* including seeking input from other BSC faculty, staff, and students, or the BSU. They were generally unconvinced of the necessity of the BSC’s services, viewing the Center as an unselective, “random grouping of courses” that no longer reflected the “social and political context out of which the concept of Black Studies arose” (Shelton, 1989, 1). As such, they saw the Center as somewhat irrelevant, particularly because “with perhaps ten times the number of Black Students on campus,” compared to the few students enrolled in 1968, the “sense of being alone should not be felt so keenly” (Stewart, 1974, 3). In other words, there was a pervasive belief that Black students no longer required the same support as they had at the founding of Black Studies – despite Black students insisting they did.

Thus, in May of 1975, a new plan for faculty appointments and promotions was put forth, forbidding any new “center-only” appointments entirely. Appointments to the college had to be at least the length of the appointment at the Center, and time off was allowed to complete degrees or do other professional development before being considered for tenure (Curtis, 1975). The plan was opposed by those who thought that the Center would lose autonomy, and facul-

ty would soon lose allegiance to the Center. Although the BSC and CSC faculty had wanted options for tenure and status, they did not want it at the expense of their ability to work solely for the Center. This move was described by CSC and BSC members as “murdering” the Centers by “eradicating the director’s control over both the faculty and the curriculum” (“A Luta Continua,” 1975, para. 2).

CSC and BSC students were thus forced to organize once again, but upped their tactics to the level of nonviolent civil disobedience with a takeover of Pendleton Business Building, the colleges’ financial center, on May 6, 1975 (“A Luta Continua,” 1975; Morgan, 1975). Though the sit-in was intended to disrupt normal college activities and bring about positive, material change, the presidents refused to negotiate while the siege was occurring and sought to end the takeover as soon as possible (Temkin, 1975). All students were subsequently summarily suspended, and filed for a restraining order (Curtis, 1975). The occupation ended shortly after that, and only three faculty and administrators, including BSC staff member Mimi Browne and BSC director James Garrett, remained in Pendleton (Temkin, 1975).

The provost used this fact against Browne and Garrett, recommending that they be immediately terminated due to obstructive and illegal activities (Savage, 1975). This move was almost certainly intended to silence Garrett after he decided not to be, in the words of *The Collegian* writer Stanley Crouch, “some well-paid running boy” for the colleges (“Trends of Administration,” 1975, 2). Despite countless student protests, Garrett and Browne were fired, and the role of BSC faculty and directors remained largely undefined (De Faria, 1975).

In January of 1976, the faculty tenure status at the Centers was once again called into question, representing the third time the tenure and hiring process was changed (Feuer and Kuperberg, 1976). At the time, the Center was operating semi-autonomously (and, therefore, distinctly from an academic department), and appointments had to be made as joint appointments between the Center and the colleges (“Ethnic Studies: A History of Tenure,” 1976). The proposed 1976 process (Option I) viewed the Centers as merely academic departments with regular appointments made in conjunction with the colleges – thus necessitating a position opening in both the Centers and a college (Feuer and Kuperberg, 1976). This plan functionally stripped the Centers of the last of their autonomy. The BSC faculty, therefore, submitted a counter-option (Option II), in an attempt to salvage their autonomy. Option II preserved the joint-appointment system but gave two methods for center faculty to obtain tenure. First, the colleges could give tenure after convening a committee and recommending a qualified candidate to an intercollegiate Appointments, Promotions, and Tenure committee. This candidate would be evaluated by the center director and

approved by the Claremont University Center president and Board of Fellows (Feuer and Kuperberg, 1976). Second, the colleges could appoint and promote faculty themselves, but only if the director of the center was involved at every level (Feuer and Kuperberg, 1976). In this way, the center director would have played a much more active role in Option II than in Option I. The faculty voted on these options in an executive session, opting to ratify Option I at Pomona, Scripps, and HMC (Feuer and Kuperberg, 1976). Although converting the Centers into academic departments appeared to have provided a level of legitimacy previously unavailable to the Centers, this move once and for all denied true autonomy to the Centers.

Moreover, moving the Center faculty to the colleges planted the seeds for the end of the Centers, and effective July 1, 1979, the BSC was dissolved into the Office of Black Student Affairs (OBSA) and the Intercollegiate Department of Black Studies (IDBS). The latter is now the Intercollegiate Department of Africana Studies (IDAS) ("The Reorganization of Black Studies," 1979). According to a 2004 document from all of the Intercollegiate Ethnic Studies Departments,⁹ Pomona College felt that the "academic integrity" of the first tenure-track appointment in Chicana/Latina Studies (presumably, the first tenure-track appointment in any of the Ethnic Studies) was obscured by the CSC and BSC's affiliation to the Claremont University Consortium, the coordinating organization for all seven Claremont Colleges of five undergraduate colleges and two graduate schools (Intercollegiate Ethnic Studies Departments 2004). Hence, they sought to move the centers to the colleges, assume administrative responsibility, and turn the centers into Intercollegiate Departments (Intercollegiate Ethnic Studies Departments, 2004, 2). By 1985, IDBS offerings were much slimmer than that of the Center; only 11 courses were offered to students, covering African history and literature. Additionally, there were only 200 Black students across all five colleges, compared to the 375 enrolled in 1972-73 year, and 330 enrolled in 1974-75 year. This sharp decline suggests the colleges seem to have abandoned proportional ethnic distribution goals. The number of Black faculty did not fare much better, as the IDBS only had five faculty: three history professors, one political science professor, and one English professor (Waldman, 1984).¹⁰ The dissolution of the BSC, and the challenges that other Africana Studies departments across the country faced at their founding are indicative of challenges the discipline continues to struggle with today.

State of the Discipline Today

Though Africana Studies has been subject to much scrutiny from those outside the discipline, this specific critique is informed by scholars from within the

field—many of whom I was first introduced to in my Africana Studies classes. Hence, this section is not meant to disparage the field or those inside of it but instead is an attempt to push Africana Studies to evolve and change in the interest of Black Liberation.

Today, many Africana Studies departments function in a way that is far from the radical discipline that many of the original proponents of Black Studies envisioned. First and foremost, the liberatory praxis and community engagement frameworks are notably absent. In the aftermath of the 50th anniversary of Africana Studies, the discipline has struggled to sufficiently empower students and to provide them the means necessary to engage in liberatory work (Jones et al., 2005). Instead, as Kehinde Andrews explains, many Africana Studies programs function as an “academic ghetto” – a space in which Black knowledge is “placed, placated and for the most part ignored” by the rest of the white institution (Andrews, 2020, 20). But as history shows, it is not only this relegation that erodes the power of Africana Studies programs: confining Africana Studies to the walls of the academy can remove its liberatory potential and community ethos, and replace it with a focus on knowledge for knowledge’s sake (Andrews, 2020).

Second, Africana Studies programs lack the necessary autonomy to create meaningful change. As Mary Phillips notes in “Black Studies: Challenges and Critical Debates,” most Africana Studies programs lack the authority to hire new faculty and grant tenure to existing faculty (Phillips, 2020). Control over these areas would allow departments to operate outside of the strict confines of the university, which minimize the liberatory possibilities of Africana Studies by forcing it to imitate white disciplines and departments in order to safeguard its place within the academy. In other words, in order to avoid being pushed out, Africana Studies departments often conform to the same standards as other disciplines and tend to restrict themselves to the intellectual rather than the practical and the liberatory. Africana Studies cannot live up to its radical potential when it is both in the university and *of* it – working within and in service of the institution instead of against it (Andrews, 2020). Hence, Africana Studies requires full autonomy in order to function as “an insurgent presence [in the university,] organically linked to the struggle for Black liberation” (Andrews, 2020, 27). It is only as an insurgent presence, “wholly separate from and in many ways in tension with the inner workings of the Ivory Tower,” that Africana Studies can truly serve the Black community the way it was intended to do (Johnson & Soliman, 2023, 6).

At the Claremont Colleges, Africana Studies faces similar challenges. After the Black Studies Center was dissolved into the Intercollegiate Department of

Africana Studies and the Office of Black Student Affairs, the department lost much of the BSC's earlier emphasis on community ethos. This loss has continued into the present, with the absence of a meaningful (i.e. not "charitable") community engagement element to most Africana classes. As a result, students cannot engage with course materials in the context of returning to their communities in the way that the founders of Black Studies envisioned. Instead, they are funneled into careers where the thoughts and ideas pertaining to relationships of power – which have been at the core of the Africana Studies ethos – are no longer connected to community and civic engagement. Moreover, Africana Studies students are not routinely given the chance to learn about what their studies can do to contribute to Black freedom. In this way, the liberatory potential of Africana Studies at the Claremont Colleges is significantly limited.

The Intercollegiate Department of Chicana/Latina Studies (IDCLS) at the Claremont Colleges offers a model for more meaningful community engagement. At least one course with a civic engagement or service-learning component is required for all IDCLS majors (Ochoa, 2024, personal interview). Moreover, many professors have a history of local community organizing which they bring to the classroom. For example, the Immigration Community Partnerships course partners with a local immigrant justice organization, where students can assist the organizations with detention cases, advocacy efforts, or with other needs (Ochoa, 2024). This collaboration with local groups helps to keep the colleges open to the communities and preserves the grassroots praxis efforts at the heart of Ethnic Studies (Ochoa, 2024). The Africana Studies Department could offer similar courses with a service-learning component such as hosting events, working with local students and organizations, and doing mutual aid work. Moreover, the department could make a concerted effort to recruit and hire new faculty who are either from the local community, or who have a history of civic engagement which informs their pedagogy and course offerings.

The Black Studies Collaboratory at UC Berkeley offers another path towards community engagement. Led by the African American Studies Department, it seeks to "take Black studies research outside of the classroom and into the local community" (Natividad, 2021, para. 3). They have partnered with many local organizations, including Critical Resistance, the Ella Baker Center, and the Center for Ideas and Society at UC Riverside. These partnerships are "mutually supportive," rather than charity-based or "extractive" (Phillips, 2022). Students and faculty are intended to learn from what has already been created and work together to build "more just futures" (Phillips, 2022). These efforts help to illuminate the understanding that the future of Africana Studies "doesn't just happen in the university," but extends into the community as part of a re-

imagining of what Africana Studies “can be and do” (Phillips, 2022). Hence, whether through a collaborative center or internal departmental initiatives, new community engagement efforts could change the trajectory of Africana Studies at the Claremont Colleges, reinvigorating its focus on Black liberation and collaborating with and learning from the surrounding community.

Additionally, there is a distinct lack of autonomy for the IDAS. For example, the Africana Studies Department cannot set its own budget, nor is it solely in charge of hiring and tenure decisions (because the colleges retain power over those decisions). In fact, even after the ethnic studies departments at the Claremont Colleges came together in 2004 to demand at least two full-time tenure-track professors in each department, Pomona College just hired the third sole-Africana appointment in 2021 (Intercollegiate Ethnic Studies Departments, 2004). Instead, many new hires come in as joint appointments with a more traditional department. The faculty in these joint-appointments must then conform to the standards of their other discipline in order to receive tenure, in a way that may take away from the mission of Africana Studies to distance itself from the Ivory Tower.¹¹ These issues are only exacerbated by the consortium model at the Claremont Colleges, which has created an inherently separated department: each college individually oversees all new hires and new promotions at their institution. This fracturing of the department – separated by college – creates a department that is only intercollegiate in name when it comes to criteria for tenure. Professors must, therefore, restrict their course content and teaching methods to those of which are acceptable to their respective institution, rather than to what may be aligned with the rest of the Africana Studies faculty and staff, in order to receive job security. That the white, traditional, standards for tenure are in tension with what Africana Studies may value in a professor, is indicative of a larger problem of the university only valuing certain types of scholarship.

Notably, if Africana Studies Departments and programs had true autonomy, they could put forth their own criteria for hiring and promotion that includes a liberatory pedagogy and community orientation. By adopting their standards, universities could better prioritize Black liberation. As such, the work that professors do in their courses and other engagements with students in service of Black liberation would count in their tenure review process. Moreover, Africana Studies could function as one unit, rather than a collection of professors from different governing bodies. The Keck Science Department shared between Pitzer, Scripps, and Claremont McKenna¹² offers a more specific model for intercollegiate autonomy. Keck has its own physical space / building, “cooperative” administration between the colleges, and shared hiring and tenure responsibil-

ities (Keck Science Handbook, 2024; Keck Science Department, n.d.). Hence, by imagining a new Africana Studies Department that operates more similarly to Keck, we can imagine a more autonomous, collaborative, and liberatory program.

Moreover, this vision for a new Africana Studies Department must center the original mission of the discipline, as Black students and faculty continue to experience inadequate institutional support. For example, in November of 2020, the Pitzer BSU wrote a statement condemning Pitzer's failure to appropriately guide and support Black students throughout their undergraduate years. Their letter to then President Melvin L. Oliver included a list of ways that Pitzer can ensure the success of their Black students (Pitzer College Black Student Union, 2020). The list included increased hiring of Black faculty and staff, "aggressive recruitment" of Black students, more robust financial aid, institution of a Black administrator in the Admissions Office and Office of Student Affairs, an implementation of a racial justice module in first-year and transfer student orientation, and direct support and mental health resources for Black students (Pitzer College Black Student Union, 2020, 3). It is critical to note that the Pitzer BSU did not present this list in a vacuum: they included the list of the original demands from BSU in 1968, writing "52 years and yet, our list of demands is almost identical to theirs. This point further shows that the colleges have failed their students with lack [sic] of sustainable policies in regard to admission and recruitment" (Pitzer College Black Student Union, 2020, 1). In this way, the Claremont Colleges have continued to act *against* the best interest of their Black students for over 50 years – alluring students with promises of diversity and community but failing to support them when they arrive on campus.

The Pitzer BSU's recall to the 1968 student demands showcases the importance of relying on an institution's / department's own history in order to re-establish its more radical roots. In other words, studying the local history can illuminate a path forward for Africana Studies. Borrowing from Jafari S. Allen's concept of "archiving the anthological," we are called to "re-member" and "(re) discover" the past together, constantly working towards bringing the archive to life in the present and in the future (Allen, 2021, 220). Moreover, Africana Studies scholar Abdul Alkalimat writes that documenting the local history is one of ten action plans to secure the future of Black Studies and Black life (Alkalimat, 2021). As Alkalimat notes, "each campus has its own story, part of a national movement, yet is unique in what actually happened," particularly in the areas of disruption of campus life, building research practices, and developing theories and administrative organizational structures (Alkalimat, 2021, 4). These unique stories are the key to forward progress in Africana Studies. By searching in the

archives, conducting oral histories and interviews, and scouring newspapers, press releases, and communiqués, we can begin to uncover the local history as a means to move forward towards a more radical future.

In fact, Africana Studies professors have an important role to play in this task: the Pitzer BSU learned about and chose to include the original 1968 demands students were exposed to in the Intro to Africana Studies course. Hence, going forward, Africana Studies professors everywhere ought to ground their syllabi in the local history at their institution and the history of the discipline, in order to inspire and best serve their students. As Africana Studies professor, Joshua Myers, writes in his book, *Of Black Study*, “[A]s we enter the second half-century of Black Studies, let us continue to re-member [sic] the origins of this disciplinary project, its roots in struggle, its promise for another kind of university, its hope for another kind of world” (Myers, 2023, 188). This remembering will push Africana Studies to a place of liberatory scholarship – a place where our “intellectual work” renders “liberation as a collective practice” as *entirely* conceivable (Myers, 2023, 189). The future, therefore, calls on all of us, as Africana Studies students, professors, staff, and scholars to return to and expand upon the existing archive of Black life – including the knowledge left by those individuals and organizations before us.

Crucially, the role of Africana Studies within the university is to be constantly evolving for the sake of responding to the present needs of the Black community – constantly imagining new, radical futures. The discipline, therefore, cannot sit comfortably in the institution; scholars, students, and faculty must continuously examine what it means to fight for Black liberation within the field. In other words, if Africana Studies is to be a part of the academy, it must always be reimagining, reflecting, and reorganizing around the goal of Black freedom. The strength of Africana Studies then becomes its capacity for change: scholars, activists, students, professors, and community members must be in constant communication and collaboration, coming together to bridge theory and praxis in service of Black liberation. It is only through this constant, dynamic transformation that Africana Studies can recapture the radical ethos at the core of its founding.

Notes

1. For simplicity, I have decided to use the term Africana Studies to refer to the discipline in general, because that is the name of the department at the Claremont Colleges. However, I use “Black Studies” to refer to the discipline at its founding, as the first department in the field was named the Department of Black Studies.

2. James Garrett later became the Director of the Black Studies Center at the Claremont Colleges.

3. 11.3 faculty positions refers to 11.3 full-time equivalents (FTEs), or 452 total hours worked by all employees per week.

4. Biondi seems to suggest this location may have been chosen because of the mainframe computer located inside, which contained financial and admission records of the entire student body.

5. The Claremont Colleges are a consortium of five undergraduate institutions in Southern California: Scripps College, Pomona College, Harvey Mudd College, Pitzer College, and Claremont McKenna College.

6. The BSC opened as part of the new Human Resources Institute, which consisted of the Center for Urban and Regional Studies, the Black Studies Center, and the Center for Mexican American Studies (Merwin 1969b).

7. The BSC Family is composed of BSC faculty, staff, students, and those outside the Center who align with their goals.

8. The lack of clarity about the “escalation” is because I have been unable to find or access any records that the BSC faculty and staff kept, which may include more details.

9. This includes Africana Studies, Chicana / Latinx Studies, and Asian-American Studies

10. The 1993 student takeover of Alexander Hall at Pomona College also illustrates further student concern for the fate of Black faculty at the Claremont Colleges. Spurred on by a rumor that the Pomona English Department and Intercollegiate Department of Black Studies had failed to agree on any three finalists for a joint position in the two departments, 50 students occupied the building and demanded increased racial diversity among the faculty (1993 | Pomona Timeline).

11. Professors with joint-appointments at other universities may also face all-white tenure committees, which have a history of unjustifiably denying tenure to Black professors (Flaherty 2020).

12. Claremont McKenna has announced plans to withdraw from Keck and create their own science department in the coming years.

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