

D R A F T

**The Academic Journals of Black Studies:  
A Preliminary Report**

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## 1. Introduction

*“An **academic journal** is a peer-reviewed periodical in which scholarship relating to a particular academic discipline is published. Academic journals serve as forums for the introduction and presentation for scrutiny of new research, and the critique of existing research. Content typically takes the form of articles presenting original research, review articles, and book reviews. Academic or professional publications that are not peer-reviewed are usually called professional magazines.”*

*from the Wikipedia entry for “Academic journal,” Nov 30, 2008*

The life blood of an academic discipline is the content of the peer reviewed journal articles that flow through the professional journals containing research and theory. This makes up the relevant professional literature of record. The critical factor is that these articles are peer reviewed, meaning they are judged to be of a high scholarly value without any personal

subjectivity guiding the decision to publish. Personal ties are trumped by professional standards. The self governance of every profession is in part based on this peer review process that manages the production and distribution of that discipline's scholarship.

This is a critical process for the field of Black Studies. The origin of Black Studies was created by the Black Freedom Movement, establishing a front of struggle in combating racism in higher education. This movement orientation meant that the initial Black Studies journal literature reflected the advocacy and polemics of the Black Arts Movement and Black protest in general.

There were several reasons that this protest literature was transformed into a professional literature based on academic scholarship:

Every new initiative in academic activity that finds a permanent place in the organization of the university in the end must conform to the standards of academic scholarship based on peer review. This includes tenure and promotion review for faculty and five year program reviews for all degree granting programs and departments.

A second generation of scholars emerged following the massive enrollment in higher education after the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968. These were people who did not participate in the struggle to set the programs up hence lacked a taste and appreciation for the polemics involved in the texts created by the first founding generation. This second generation adapted to the new situation without the battle readiness of their predecessors.

The journal literature is the basis for findings to be systematized into text books and the standardization of the curriculum in general. Every academic major is based on the peer reviewed professional journal literature of the discipline.

The journal literature is the basis for the intertextuality that is the fabric of the intellectual tradition, anchoring it in each case in the threads of academic scholarship. Each generation responds to the previous ones and charts a path to a new future, and each future creates a new past. The run of a major journal is an intellectual relay race through history.

The scientific method was necessary to overcome the impasse created by relying on purely ideological standards. Peer review promised greater democracy, clarity, and sustainability than ideological polemics.

### ***Why this report?***

The first reason for this report is that the Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois expressed a need for it to help with the evaluation of faculty. After it was discussed at an African American Studies faculty retreat, it became clear that a report was needed that clarified the issue for the entire campus. Knowing the journals helps people in the field or with joint appointments decide where to publish and evaluate where others publish.

People must be free to find academic outlets for their research, while at the same time a discipline needs to have a specific list of journals so that everyone in the field can literally be on the same page. Further, with Black Studies being a diverse field—multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, trans-disciplinary, and so on—it is necessary to have a nuanced approach to this.

A third reason for the report is that serials publication by and about Black people has been constant, but changing. As a measure of this, a 1981 study by this author found that the University of Illinois Library owned copies of 261 different serials about African Americans. At that time the African American Studies Departmental Library subscribed to 34, implying that 227 were no longer published. Today only five of those 34 continue: *Black Scholar*, *Crisis*, *Journal of Black Psychology*, *Review of Black Political Economy*, and *The Western Journal of Black Studies*. Clearly, previous work done by this author in 1981, 1993, and 2000 needed to be updated. The first report included data on 26 journals. The second report had data on 37 journals. The 2000 work was an online directory with links to 86 active journals. The current and fourth report focuses on 31 journals.

This report is a preliminary investigation of the current state of academic journals in Black Studies. The author first created the basic mission statement now generally adopted by the field for a 1977 conference at the University of California at Santa Barbara, "Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility." This slogan is the framework for the analysis of the 31 journals. It examines Black Studies academic journals relative to meritocracy (academic excellence) and to democracy (social responsibility).

Meritocracy means the journals' sponsorship and their affiliations with institutions and organizations of higher education and the profession of Black Studies. This will be measured by the characteristics of the editors and where the publications are housed. Journals are known by the company they keep like everything else.

Democracy means the journals' location relative to Black people in the United States. Black people are not randomly distributed across the country, nor are Black Studies programs.

This report does not go into several important aspects of journal publishing in Black Studies, and others are encouraged to pick up these threads:

1. It does not present data on the details of the peer review process, specifically rates of submission and acceptance.
2. It does not investigate the substantive threads and intertextuality of these journals and their articles.
3. It does not compare these journals with other mainstream journals.

### ***Method and data***

Selecting the journals proceeded in three stages. First, all previous lists (see appendices) were assembled and all journals housed at the office of the Afro-American bibliographer at the University of Illinois Library were added to make a starting list. This list was circulated to faculty affiliated in any way with African American Studies at the University of Illinois to get their take on what should be included. Finally, every journal was assessed according to three criteria:

1. Is it staffed by and serving an academic community?
2. Does it focused primarily on the African American (US) experience?
3. Has it published within the last two years?

Focussing only on the US experience is a very narrow approach given the global African Diaspora, but the report offers an example that others can start from to explore more broadly, taking, for instance, these approaches:

1. Diaspora Studies, emphasizing African identity and linking various global communities of Africa and its descendents. This would include such journals as *Race and Class*, *New Dawn*, *Transition*, *Third World Review*, *Presence Africaine*, and so on.
2. Ethnic Studies, a comparative approach in which African Americans are regarded as one among many immigrant communities. This would include *The Journal for Ethnic Studies*, *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, and the *Journal of Cultural Diversity*, and others.
3. American Studies, a literature that searches for a common narrative, hence the tendency to emphasize the American aspect of an African American identity. These journals include *The Journal of American Studies*, *The American Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*.

The data about the journals was collected from hard copies of the journals and from published sources available on the web such as journal websites and Ulrich's International Directory of Periodicals. Staff members of various journals were also very helpful when contacted by email and phone.

### ***The journals***

In the end 31 journals were recommended for inclusion and fit the specific criteria:

African American Review

Afro-Americans in New York Life and History

Afro-Hispanic Review

Afro-Latin/American Research Association. Publication

Black Music Research Journal

Black Renaissance

Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research

Black Women, Gender & Families

C L A Journal

Callaloo: A Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters

Drumvoices Revue: A Confluence of Literary, Cultural and Vision Arts

Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race

International Journal of Africana Studies

International Review of African American Art

Journal of African American History  
 Journal of African American Studies  
 Journal of Black Psychology  
 Journal of Black Studies  
 Journal of Negro Education: a Howard University Quarterly Review of Issues Incident to the Education of Black People  
 Langston Hughes Review  
 National Black Law Journal  
 National Political Science Review  
 Negro Educational Review: A Forum for Discussion of Afro-American Issues  
 Obsidian III: Literature in the African Diaspora  
 Philosophia Africana (Print): Analysis of Philosophy and Issues in Africa and the Black Diaspora  
 Phylon: The Atlanta University Review of Race and Culture  
 The Review of Black Political Economy  
 Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society  
 Transforming Anthropology  
 Trotter Review  
 The Western Journal of Black Studies

## 2. Historical background

There is not a great deal of research on the academic professional literature publishing in Black Studies. A major work by Johnson and Johnson (1979) periodizes journals as follows:

- 1900-1910, Away from accommodation: Colored American Magazine, Voice of the Negro, Horizon
- 1910-1928, Toward the Renaissance: Crisis, Opportunity, The Messenger
- 1916-1930, Black Renaissance: New Era, Stylus, Fire, Harlem, Black Opals, Saturday Evening Quill
- 1930-1940, Renaissance to Reformation: Abbott's Monthly, Metropolitan, The African
- 1940-1960, Aesthetics of integration: Negro Quarterly, Negro Story, Phylon, Harlem Quarterly
- 1960-1976, Black Aesthetic: Negro Digest/Black World/First World, Liberator, Umbra, Soul Book, Black Dialogue, Journal of Black Poetry, Nommo, Black Creation

This is a mapping of the broader journals of literary record, and reflects the autonomous publishing efforts in the Black community. Another way to think about the 20th century historical background to the present is to think of a literature of the Black public sphere, more likely based in the Black community, and a literature of Black academic scholarship.

1. Black public sphere: the Urban beginnings of the New Negro:
  - a. 1905 Chicago Defender (Abbott)
  - b. 1910 Crisis (DuBois)
  - c. 1918 The Negro World (Garvey)
2. Academic scholarship created by the first generation of Black PhD's
  - a. 1916 Journal of Negro History (Woodson)
  - b. 1932 Journal of Negro Education (Thompson)
  - c. 1940 Phylon (DuBois)
3. Black public sphere: Representation of the Black middle class
  - a. 1942 Negro Digest
  - b. 1945 Ebony
  - c. 1951 Jet
4. Academic scholarship created by the demands of the Black liberation movement

The 1960's Black Studies Movement represented a take off in the rise of autonomous journals. The key players were activist scholars, artists and writers. Key to the founding generation were the following journals and editors in Black Studies as a social movement:

- Negro Digest/Black World/First World: Hoyt Fuller
- Black Scholar: Nathan Hare and Robert Chrisman
- Journal of Black Poetry: Joe Gonçaves
- Liberator: Dan Watts
- Soul Book: Mamadou Lumumba
- Freedomways: Esther Jackson
- Ebony: Lerone Bennett
- Black Books Bulletin Haki Madhubuti

Many journals had short lives (see appendices). Black students alone have produced more than 100 journals, newspapers, newsletters and other publications across every region of the country.

### 3. The journals

The 31 journals form into three categories based on their self-definition: disciplinary, cross-disciplinary, and thematic. Eight journals define themselves as representing the academic field of Black Studies, or the discipline itself. One predates the 1960's (Phylon), and one reflects the social activist orientation of the founders in the late 1960's. The remaining six fit a more conventional model for an academic journal in Black Studies.

- African American Review
- Afro-Hispanic Review
- Black Scholar
- International Journal of Africana Studies
- Journal of African American Studies
- Journal of Black Studies
- Phylon
- The Western Journal of Black Studies

Cross-disciplinary journals include sixteen journals that are each linked to one additional academic discipline.

- Anthropology: Transforming Anthropology
- Art: International Review of African American Art
- Economics: Review of Black Political Economy
- Education: Journal of Negro Education, Negro Education Review
- Hispanic/Latino: The Afro-Hispanic Review and PALARA
- History: Journal of African American History
- Law: National Black Law Journal
- Literature: CLA Journal, Obsidian III
- Local history: Afro-Americans in New York Life and History
- Music: Black Music Research Journal
- Philosophy: Philosophia Africana
- Political Science: National Political Science Review
- Psychology: Journal of Black Psychology
- Women's Studies: Black Women, Gender, and Families

Thematic journals include seven special journals that have either a humanities or a social science perspective:



- Humanities: Callaloo, Langston Hughes Review, Drum Voices, and Black Renaissance
- Social Science: Trotter Review, Souls, and the DuBois Review

In general, this report will be based on this categorization. As indicated in the Introduction, our concern is with merit and representation, academic excellence and social representation.

**Sponsorship:** A key measure of academic legitimacy for a journal is its sponsor. Eighteen journals are sponsored or based in academic institutions, four in professional associations.

	University	Commercial Publisher	Professional Association	Non Profit Organization	Total
Cross disciplinary journals	10	3	3	--	16
Disciplinary journals	3	3	1	1	8
Special thematic journals	4	3	--	--	7
Total	17	9	4	1	31

**Geographic Location:** One measure of representativeness is to compare the regional distribution of the Black population, the degree granting programs in Black Studies, and the journals.

	East	Midwest	South	West	Total
Cross disciplinary journals	7	4	4	1	16
Disciplinary journals	--	2	2	4	8
Special thematic journals	4	1	2	--	7
Total	11	7	8	5	31

## 4. The editors

More can be learned by analyzing the editorial board membership, as these individuals actually link the journals to the broad community of academic scholars. Each editorial staff and board of editors has an academic identity, and we are arguing that who they are is what the journals are. They stand collectively as a definition of their respective journal. A good example of this is the advisory editorial board of the Black Scholar, which is dominated by senior scholar-activists of the founding generation of Black Studies, including the two main editors, Robert Chrisman and Robert Allen.

We have to begin this section by calling attention to the three most senior editors of Black Studies academic journals. Each of these editorial giants has guided their respective journal from social movement to the top tier of Black Studies academic journals: Robert Chrisman, Molefi Asante, and Charles Rowell.

Journal	Founded	Editor	Years of editorship
Black Scholar	1969	Robert Chrisman	39
Journal of Black Studies	1970	Molefi Asante	38
Callaloo	1976	Charles Henry Rowell	32

**Gender:** Women make up 40% of the editorial boards of academic journals in Black Studies. On the positive side four of the journals have a majority of women on their boards: Afro-Hispanic Review (13 men, 17 women), Black Women, Gender and Families (no men, 18 women), DuBois Review (4 men, 9 women), and Journal of African American History (8 men, 15 women). On the negative side at least three can be singled out for gender imbalance re men to women: Western Journal of Black Studies (17 men, 2 women), Afro-Americans in New York Life and History (21 men, 4 women), and Philosophica Africana (19 men, 1 woman).

**Academic Rank:** Of 540 editorial positions, 321 are held by tenured or tenure track faculty. Of these 90% are tenured (professor or associate professor).

#### **Editorial positions held by tenured and tenure track faculty**

Professor	205
Associate Professor	84
Assistant Professor	32
Total tenure and tenure track faculty	321

**Academic affiliation:** Of four main divisions of academic disciplines, the Humanities is by far the dominant connection and context for Black Studies editors, especially if one adds history. An interesting pattern emerges when one looks for tendencies linking ones affiliation with the type of journals. Editorial board members in Black Studies are more likely to be with disciplinary journals, while for Historians are more likely than the others to be in the cross disciplinary journals. Those in the social sciences and the humanities are more closely tied to the thematic journals. While editorial board members in the three types of journals come from all fields of affiliation, in each type here is a greater tendency for scholars affiliated with that subject area to be on that board. This is reassuring as it suggests that there is a subject specialty division of labor – expertise dominates.

## Editorial positions held by scholars in various disciplines

	Humanities	Afro*	Social Sciences	History	Other	Not at university	Not known	Total
Cross disciplinary journals	63	39	37	20	11	8	51	229
Disciplinary journals	38	34	28	7	6	9	61	183
Special thematic journals	45	24	27	8	5	5	14	128
Total	146	97	92	35	22	22	126	540

Leading institutions: There are 184 universities represented on the boards of all the journals. Of the top five, two are HBCU's, two are from the Ivy League, and the fifth is a major public research university.

**Universities holding the most editorial positions**

Atlanta University Center	26
Harvard University	17
Columbia University	15
Howard University	15
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	12

Leading individuals: The 540 editorial positions are filled by 487 people, 447 of whom holds only one position. Ten people hold at least 3 editorial board positions.

**Individuals holding 3 or more editorial positions**

Conyers, Jr., James L.	4
Aldridge, Delores P.	3
Cha-Jua, Sundiata K.	3
Davis, Angela Y.	3
Guy-Sheftall, Beverly	3
Karenga, Maulana	3
Kelley, Robin D.G.	3
Staples, Robert	3
Williams, Lillian	3
Williams, Vernon J.	3

**5. The academic mainstream**

As indicated in the historical background section of this report Black intellectual productivity has always been based in the Black community as a manifestation of self-determination. What is unique is the extent to which it has been transplanted into the mainstream as well. In the following table this is demonstrated by this typology comparing journals from a Black context and journals in the mainstream context.

Two paths for Black Studies journals, from the mainstream and from the Black community

	Mainstream		Black Community	
	Journal	Publisher	Journal	Publisher
Disciplinary	Journal of Black Studies	Sage International	Journal of Afro-American Studies	NCBS
Cross-disciplinary/ Humanities	African American Review	MLA	Journal of African American History	ASALH
Cross-disciplinary/ Social Science	Black Women, Gender, and Families	University of Illinois Press	Journal of Black Psychology	Association of Black Psychologists

















































































































