
Lifting as We Climb: #BlackLivesMatter and the Resurrection of Black Studies in America?

STEPHEN C. FINLEY- LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

DARI GREEN- LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

LORI LATRICE MARTIN- LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

DERECK J. ROVARIS, SR.- LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

Abstract

Black Studies programs across the nation have been in a fight for their survival for years. As colleges and universities choose the proverbial “ax over the scalpel” to cut budgets in the wake of decreased state and federal funding, Black Studies and other area study programs are often the first on the chopping block. Lack of interest and low enrollment are commonly cited as justifications for slashing or underfunding Black Studies programs, many of which are still in their infancy relative to other academic fields. #BlackLivesMatter is (re)igniting a resurgence of public displays of resilience and resistance, especially among Millennial college students. Moreover, there appears to be a much less understood phenomenon of the resurrection of Black Studies Programs across the country, as this generation seeks informed ways to access critically and analyze the value, or often lack thereof, of Black lives in America. Drawing from hegemonic theory, theory of consent, Afro-pessimism, and systematic racism theory, we create a framework for understanding why and how race matters in the 21st century and ways in which people of color challenge racialized social structures through #BlackLivesMatter and Black Studies programs. We examine the following research questions: What are the potential effects of #BlackLivesMatter on campus climate and enrollment in Black Studies programs at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) where a high profile police involved shooting resulted in the killing of a Black man? What are the implications for Black Studies programs and for future research on race and higher education?

Black Studies programs across the nation have been in a fight for their survival for years, according to some accounts (Alkalimat, 2007). Between 1969 and 1973, about 600 programs and departments were devoted to the study of people of African ancestry across the globe. By 2009, there remained only about 200 of these programs and reports about the elimination of Black

Studies programs continually circulate in mass media (Beeson, 2009). According to the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, Western Illinois University is among the more recent institutions to announce the elimination of the degree program in African American Studies, although students may still take courses and minor in



Stephen C. Finley is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and African & African American Studies at Louisiana State University and Director of the African & African American Studies Program.



Dari Green holds a PhD from Louisiana State University in Sociology. Dr. Green's areas of interest include race and ethnicity, mentoring, and Freedom Schools.



Lori Latrice Martin is associate professor in the Department of Sociology and African and African American Studies at Louisiana State University.



Dr. Rovari earned a Ph.D. in higher education administration from the University of Illinois. He is the Vice Provost of the Office for Diversity (OoD) at Louisiana State University.

the field (JBSHE, 2016). As colleges and universities choose the proverbial “ax over the scalpel” to cut budgets in the wake of decreased state and federal funding, Black Studies and other area studies programs are often the first on the chopping block (Kenney, 2016). Lack of interest and low enrollment are commonly cited justifications for slashing or underfunding Black Studies programs, many of which are still in their infancy relative to other academic fields (Kennedy, 2016). We contend that help for current Black Studies programs may come from two key sources: the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) movement and black students at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs).

#BlackLivesMatter is (re)igniting a resurgence of public displays of resilience and resistance, especially among Millennial college students (Page & Shedrofsky, 2016). Coupled with that, there appears to be a less understood phenomenon occurring, that is, the potential for a resurrection of Black Studies programs across the country as this generation seeks informed ways to access critically and analyze the value, or often lack thereof, of Black lives in America.

Drawing from hegemonic theory, theory of consent, Afro-pessimism and systematic racism theory, we create a framework for understanding why and how race matters in the 21st century and ways people of color challenge racialized social structures through #BlackLivesMatter and Black Studies programs. We examine the following research questions: What are the potential effects of #BlackLivesMatter on campus climate and enrollment in Black Studies programs at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) where a high profile police involved shooting resulted in the death of a Black man? What are the implications for Black Studies programs and future research on race and higher education?

We begin with a brief history of Black Studies in America and the role of student protests, followed by a discussion of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, consent theory, Afro-Pessimism, and sociologist, Joe Feagin’s, systematic racism theory. Taken together these theories and perspectives inform the persistence of racial disparities in America, and explains the rise in popularity of #BlackLivesMatter and the enrollment of young people of color in Black Studies programs.

Next, we analyze the published areas of focus for #BlackLivesMatters in an effort to demonstrate how the modern-day hash tag movement is one of the most important tools for resurrecting Black Studies programs across the country, especially at PWIs. A discussion of the data and methods we used to answer the aforemen-

tioned research questions follows, along with the findings of our study about the impact of #BlackLivesMatters on Black students at a PWI in the southeast region of the United States, where the fatal police shooting of a Black male occurred, inciting days of protests. We conclude with the introduction of a framework for capitalizing on the momentum of #BlackLivesMatters in ways that are true to historical traditions of the study of people of African ancestry that inform teaching and learning in higher education.

A Brief History of Black Studies in the U.S.

Black history is American history is a refrain heard commonly in the United States, especially from people of color, and particularly around the second month of the year when some in the nation pause to recognize the important social, historical, political, economic, and cultural contributions people of African ancestry made to the nation and the world. The official recognition of this rich history began in the early part of the twentieth century with a week-long celebration, which later became a month-long observance (February is Black History Monty, 2010). The period of reflection sought to counter some of the dominant narratives about the influences of African people on the continent, throughout the diaspora, and in America. The dominant narratives, to which many Americans subscribed, viewed Africa as a dark continent, void of any semblance of civilization, art, or culture (Hine, Hine, & Harrold, 2010). The inhabitants of Africa and other places occupied by people of color were portrayed as barbaric and in need of the dominant group to save them from themselves. It was this “white man’s burden,” which helped shape and provide a justification of public policies and practices that benefited whites and harmed black people, which included things such as slavery, race riots, sharecropping, convict leasing, second-class status, racial residential segregation, and school segregation, just to name a few (Alston & Ferrie, 1985; Barclay et. al, 2006; Barclay, et. al, 2006; Barnes & Jaret, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Lorenzo-Molo & Udani, 2013; Martin, 2015; Morris, 1984). African American scholars quickly disavowed these commonly held ideas through historical empirical research, which unearthed the existence of sophisticated governmental structures, rich displays of art and culture, profitable systems of trade of goods, and services (Franklin, 2010), in other words, complex civil societies.

Throughout much of the first half of the twentieth

century, black people worked to preserve their history, and worked tirelessly to push America to confront its own racial history, which most often contradicted its stated values (Martin & Jetson, 2017; Morris, 1984). The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s gave rise to many legislative victories and to an empowerment within the Black community. As the Black Power movement attracted a greater following with its emphasis on the black pride, black beauty, social and economic justice, and institutional racism, demands to move many aspects of black life and culture from the margins to the center became louder (Hamilton & Ture, 1992). One of the greatest and enduring manifestations of the increased demand for recognition of the contributions and humanity of black people was student protests, which led to the establishment of Black Studies programs in the western region of the United States and later throughout the country (Rojas, 2010).

Understanding Black Studies: From Theories of Hegemony to Systematic Racism

The historical significance of the Black Studies movement is, however, often mischaracterized and subsequently, misunderstood. Karen Miller (1990) argued that attention is devoted largely to the conflict and antagonism, which gave rise to Black Studies programs with little, if any, attention given to race and cultural hegemony. When the focus is on race and cultural hegemony, our understanding of the significance of Black Studies in the lives of black people directly and indirectly connected to institutions of higher learning becomes more salient.

Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony

The idea of hegemony is closely associated with the early works of Gramsci. He examined the various ways that dominant groups define reality and present their worldview in a way that is considered universal or reflective of a general consensus. Hegemony, according to Gramsci, manifests itself as domination and intellectual and moral leadership. Hegemony, albeit cultural, racial or otherwise, according to Gramsci, involves a combination of force, coercion, and consent. What is important, here, is that, while hegemony implies competing ideologies in which one dominates the other, the ideals of dominated communities, nevertheless, continue to function. They are never totally overcome

by the power of dominating groups.

Much has been written in support and in opposition to Gramsci's work on hegemonic relationships, (Olsarette, 2014). In a revival of Gramsci's work, Attack (2012) linked Gramsci's work on hegemony with the consent theory of power, another theory commonly used to understand nonviolent action, including the relatively nonviolent protests associated with the contemporary #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Consent Theory of Power

Consent theory of power expands upon Gramsci's ideas about the role of consent in relationships, which are inherently unequal (Resnick, 2000; Baker, Grady, & Rappole, 2012). Consent theory of power states, according to Attack (2012) that:

Ruling elites depend ultimately on the submission, cooperation and obedience of the governed as their source of power. If the cooperation is withdrawn, then this power is undermined. The role of nonviolent political action is to instigate and coordinate such non-cooperation in order to challenge and ultimately remove the sources of power of unjust, undemocratic regimes (p. 8).

Which is to say, power is never totalizing. Its functioning always depends, in part, on the tacit approval of the populous through participation in oppressive structures rather than strategic withdrawals, non-cooperation, or explicit opposition.

Afro-Pessimism

Afro-pessimism places an emphasis on structural factors for understanding intergroup relations, particularly those based upon race. Afro-pessimism is particularly important in times when white safety means black murder, and black resistance is characterized as black terror. There is a dire need to change the narrative from these dominant themes to a more comprehensive narrative characterized by both rage and hope (Lomax 2014). What Afro-pessimism offers theoretically is the language to describe deeply entrenched structural anti-blackness, a reflection that points to the urgency and necessity of structural dissolution of American racism.

Systematic Racism

Unlike afro-pessimism, which views racism as relational and grounded in anti blackness, systematic racism theory provides mechanisms for resisting anti-blackness and white supremacy, while simultaneously taking into account agency and structural factors (Sexton, 2016). Systematic racism includes six tenets: 1) white's unjust enrichment and black American's unjust impoverishment; 2) racial hierarchy with divergent group interests; 3) the white racial frame; 4) social reproduction and alienation; 5) extraordinary costs and burdens of racism; and 6) resisting racism (Regan, Carter-Francique, & Feagin, 2015).

For the purposes of the present study we focus solely on the last tenet, resisting racism. Systematic racism theory provides insights into ways of understanding majority and minority group relations but is not without important limitations, as is the case with Gramsci's theory of hegemony, consent theory of power, and afro-pessimism, since none present an "obvious and logical way to end oppression" (Reagan, et. al, 2015, p. 40). More important is the question of whether or not the end of such a system is even possible. Indeed, the theory of hegemony, the consent theory of power, and Afro-pessimism offers no explicit end to oppression, except to suggest theoretically that the oppressive structures must cease to exist. Systematic racism, on the other hand, contends that an end to oppression is possible. This perspective calls for intensive activism to achieve that end. While Afro-pessimism views slavery as an ongoing relational condition between black people and whites that merely changes form and not function, systematic racism views slavery as a period with a finite end. Systematic racism also points to the power of collective action to effectuate change, insisting that well-meaning whites can produce change and are critical for transformative change to occur in the U.S. and throughout the globe.

Afro-pessimism rightly challenges this notion, believing it to promote the Messiah- or White-Savior complex that many white allies embody when involved directly or indirectly in efforts to illuminate manifestations of racism, through activities aimed at resisting racial oppression. Some Afro-pessimists would likely reject the necessity of white participation in efforts to resist systematic racism and the assaults on black bodies that are derived from the existence and persistence of a racialized social structure. Clearly, none of the aforementioned theories and perspectives outlined here can alone unpack the multilevel and multidimensional system of racial oppression impacting black people and other people of color in the U.S., Africa, and throughout

the Diaspora, since anti-racist praxis also requires action as well as theory.

#BlackLivesMatter: Resisting Anti-Blackness and White Supremacy

To this end, resistance to anti-blackness on college campuses has increased in recent years. Examples of such bravery among college students at PWIs have occurred on campuses across the country, including UCLA, American, Michigan, and Missouri (Butler, 2014; Byng, 2013; Flaherty, 2013; Fortin, 2017).

Students at the University of Michigan engaged in powerful online and on-campus protests in response to an event sponsored by a university fraternity. In the fall of 2013, Theta Xi, was planning to host a party they dubbed, "Hood Ratchet Thursday." Black students were invited to share positive and negative experiences about what it was like being black at Michigan. A majority of the posts were negative.

Black students at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) used social media and old-fashioned protest tactics in response to a campus climate that students said criminalized them and was in many other ways very unwelcoming. The students staged sit-ins. Among the concerns levied by the students at UCLA were concerns about the treatment of professors of color and the relatively small numbers of black male undergraduate students. Black students were not pleased with the administration's lackluster response to their concern, that they were forced to learn in a hostile environment (Flaherty 2013).

In addition, students of color at Harvard University engaged in a campaign to draw attention to the isolation they felt at the PWI and to share the various ways students and faculty may treat them as if they don't belong at the university and have not earned their place there (Butler, 2014). The photos of students sharing many of the racists and racially charged comments made by their peers on dry-erase boards, were shared online. Indeed, students of color at PWIs across the country shared similar experiences in a show of solidarity (Butler, 2014).

What's more, when the football team at the University of Missouri joined campus protests in 2015 in response to the administration's reluctance to address anti-black sentiments on campus, it led to the requisite resignation of the university president, Tim Wolfe, and other institutional changes (Pearson, 2015). Wolfe's

resignation followed years of student complaints about racial issues on-campus.

In 2010, two white students placed cotton balls outside the Black Culture Center, which many black students interpreted as an attempt to harken back to the days of slavery when many enslaved black people were forced to pick cotton on plantations, especially throughout the Deep South.

Four years later, Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, Missouri by a white police officer less than 2 hours from campus. A few months after Brown's death, protestors at the University of Missouri blocked Wolfe's car during the annual homecoming parade because he had not responded to their concerns about the racial climate on campus. Wolfe's car made contact with one of the protestors, and protestors said the police on the scene used excessive force in breaking up the crowd. Soon after the homecoming incident, students organized a group and named it Concerned Student 1950, in recognition of the year the institution permitted its first black undergraduate student. The group issued a list of demands, which included a call for the removal of Wolfe and a more inclusive curriculum. After a highly publicized student protest, with the support of the entire football team, along with both black and white students and staff, Wolfe was out, and the struggle at the University of Missouri and other PWIs continued.

Recently, students at American University came together in support of the institution's first black woman student body president. She was the target of racist epithets. On the day she took office, for example, bananas tied to nooses were found all over campus with offensive messaging (Fortin, 2017). A recent article from the New York Times cites a study showing an increase in the number of incidents of racial harassment on college campuses from less than 100 in 2009 to nearly 2000 in 2016 (Fortin, 2017).

Among the most visible examples of so-called resistance to anti-blackness and white supremacy in the past few years is the #BlackLivesMatter movement, founded by Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors. Scholars, journalists, elected officials, and traditional civil rights leaders, have not come to a consensus on how best to characterize #BlackLivesMatter. Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, a professor at Princeton University, authored the best-selling book, #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation, which places the movement within the larger contexts of United States politics. Dr. Taylor explains the complexity of race relations in America throughout history and in contemporary times. She challenges readers to think of new and transformative

ways to bring about true black liberation (Taylor, 2016).

Some view #BlackLivesMatter as a new political movement or as an extension of the modern-day Civil Rights Movement. Among some whites, #BlackLivesMatter is viewed as nothing more than a radical terrorists group whose program empowers anti-white and anti-police sentiments among misguided angry protestors. Scholars, such as, Temple University's, Marc Lamont Hill, have found themselves in the midst of heated on-air debates denouncing that campaigns like #BlackLivesMatter is in anyway racist and at the same time clarifies what racism is and is not (Richardson, 2016). In fact, white backlash against #BlackLivesMatter led to alternate claims that #AllLivesMatter and the passage of a law commonly referred to as #BlueLivesMatter, a law aimed at discouraging attacks on police and first responders because of their occupational status. Irrespective of the disagreement about how best to categorize #BlackLivesMatters, there appears to be agreement on which aspects of the organization's activities and values to include in public narratives. Much of the attention on #BlackLivesMatter tends to focus on conflict and confrontation, a critique made of earlier scholarship of Black Studies Programs. Black Studies programs at colleges and universities across the country are under attack, and the popularity of #BlackLivesMatter among college-aged students, particularly black students, may assist in resurrecting or breathing new life into Black Studies programs through increased enrollment of black students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and especially at Predominately White Institutions. This may compel administrators, most of whom are members of the dominant racial group in America, to remove important programs like Black Studies from their budgetary chopping blocks and to invest more resources into the programs. We begin with a brief overview of the origins of #BlackLivesMatter. We follow the overview with a discussion of the organization's guiding principles and the relationship of each principle to the values and objectives of Black Studies programs at many colleges and universities across the country.

#BlackLivesMatter is described as "a chapter-based national organization working for the validity of Black life" (www.blacklivesmatter.com). The goal of the organization is "to (re)build the Black liberation movement." #BlackLivesMatter was established after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the killer of 17-year old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida in July 2012. The roots of the organization lie "in the experiences of Black people in this country who actively resist our dehumanization.

#BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society.” The organization finds it insufficient to ask black men, women, and children to embrace their blackness as evidenced in expressions of self-love and buying black. Instead, organizers affirm the lives and dignity of all black people moving historically marginalized groups from the margins to the middle.

The principles guiding #BlackLivesMatter coincide with the five tenets outlined in the previous section. While Black Studies Programs have struggled with reflecting many of the principles in the curricula, due to factors beyond the programs’ control, such as institutional constraints, or the unwillingness of program leaders to engage in self-studies and other forms of self-reflection to address the inherent ways in which Black Studies programs have historically marginalized some groups based on gender identity, social class position, and/or by expressions of spirituality. #BlackLivesMatter as an organization will undoubtedly confront many of the same challenges, despite its best efforts to be self-aware as an institution, to the social and historical context in which organizations operate and individuals must live.

According to the official webpage of #BlackLivesMatter, the guiding principles focus on diversity, globalism, black women, black villages, loving engagement, restorative justice, collective value, empathy, queer affirming, unapologetically black, transgender affirming, black families, and intergenerational communal networks (www.blacklivesmatter.com). Each principle is in line with Black Studies programs historically and contemporarily in many ways. The influence of #BlackLivesMatter on black college-age students is changing Black Studies programs, and our hope is that as more students and community residents (re)encounter Black Studies programs, they will influence #BlackLivesMatter. Together these programs may influence other efforts to transform the racialized social system passed down from one generation to the next.

Much like #BlackLivesMatter, Black Studies programs prepare students to recognize and celebrate similarities and differences within the Black population. Black Studies programs view populations of Black people in the U.S. and across the globe as one family. Although curricula at virtually every institution of higher learning privileges white males, Black Studies programs are increasingly more inclined to confront sexism and misogyny than other areas of study. Black Studies programs, then and now, share #BlackLivesMatter’s sentiment regarding Black villages as moving beyond

Eurocentric definitions of family to include “collective care for one another”(www.blacklivesmatter.com).

Black Studies programs, both inside and outside of the classroom, provide opportunities for not only theorizing about the challenging issues facing Black people in the United States but also “practicing justice, liberation, and peace” (www.blacklivesmatter.com). Black Studies programs and #BlackLivesMatter approach blackness, not from the prevailing deficit- or needs-based model but from the perspective of recognizing the humanity of and in blackness, the implicit violence toward blackness, and fostering a restorative climate in the midst of continued struggle. Moreover, #BlackLivesMatter and Black Studies programs see the need for the inclusion of Black people regardless of identity, where white, Protestant, hetero-normative, males are not privileged over and beyond other real and perceived identities. Historically, Black Studies programs, by design and by demand, seek to engage students with the experiences of people in Africa, in the U.S., and throughout the Diaspora as is the case with the organization #BlackLivesMatter. #BlackLivesMatter and Black Studies programs are “unapologetically Black” (www.blacklivesmatter.com).

While both #BlackLivesMatter and Black Studies programs are constrained by how much each can move the mark toward justice within a system bent and built upon the devaluation of black bodies and the denial of black humanity, together there is the potential to reimagine what an alternate view of reality might look like for black people. Secondly, there is also the potential to work collaboratively to prepare current and future generations to think critically about their roles and what is possible. We examine the various ways in which this is already happening at a Predominately White Institution in the southeast region of the United States. Much like crime dramas, including CSI and Law and Order drew many college-aged students to degree programs in criminal justice, criminology, and forensic psychology, to name a few, #BlackLivesMatter is likely bringing eligible black students to Predominately White Institutions and more specifically to Black Studies programs (McCay, 2014). We examine the potential link between #BlackLivesMatter and Black Studies programs using a case study discussed in the next section.

Data and Methods

In this study we use a single case study design, choosing a Black Studies Program at a PWI located in a city where a high profile police involved shoot-

ing took place and led to the death of a resident. The research takes an ethnographic approach, including semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participant observation in activities related to both the Black Studies program and the #BlackLivesMatter campus movements. We used pseudonyms for the student participant and for the university.

Case studies enable detailed exploration into real-world phenomena from multiple sources of evidence. In our study we used a variety of methods combining quantitative data of the number of students enrolled in the Black Studies program since 2012, participant-observation of several #BlackLivesMatter movements and semi-structured interviews and questionnaires shared with students in the Black Studies Program, to focus on a range of perspectives of participants. During meetings, campus movements, and interviews, field notes were taken and later informally discussed with interview participants. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and anonymized. Written informed consent was obtained from all interview participants. Documents, posters, and materials regarding both the Black Studies program and #BlackLivesMatter campus events were collected to inform our analysis. In addition to these data, the numbers of students that concentrated, minored, and/or participated in a student group associated with the Black Studies program were charted on a semester-by-semester basis from Fall 2012 to Fall 2016.

From these multiple sources, we analyzed the effect that #BlackLivesMatter is having on public displays of resilience and resistance, especially among Millennial college students, by focusing on student enrollment at a PWI located in a Southeastern city. More specifically, we focused on enrollment and involvement in the Black Studies Program at the University to examine the potential link between #BlackLivesMatter and the University's Black Studies program.

Results

The contention is that there has been a resurrection of Black Studies programs across the country stemming from the current generation's desire to have informed ways to critically think about and analyze the value, or often lack thereof, of Black lives in America. As per the data that we collected at this university, this may indeed be the case. When speaking with one student, Franklin, he explained his reason for concentrating in Black Studies, as follows:

"I will say that with everything that happen this

summer, my first two and a half, three weeks at [this PWI] was like Twilight Zone. I would sit in class and think I'm the only Black person in here, or I'm the only Black male in here, or the only other Black male is my cousin, literally. I want my existence to be more than a statistic. I want to feel that my 'diversity' is more than affirmative action."

In speaking with this student, as was the case with several others who participated in a small-scaled survey, there was a lack of representation that propelled them to find a place to belong. To be an underrepresented student seemed to have a social-psychological impact on the non-white students in the institution. Franklin explained his perspective on the matter:

"In a PWI it is [also] being critical of your education and miseducation of not only the Negro, but of everyone else, because you begin to realize, if you're conscious, that what your professor may be saying may not be true, especially when it comes to history. When white history is literally the standard and every other culture's history is an elective, that's problematic."

In an interview with the University's Black Studies program director, Dr. Isaiah Jones, this theme continued. In fact, the idea that students sense that they are "othered" in the learning environment seemed to be a common thread in many conversations with students and faculty of color, by and large. Dr. Jones expressed how and why he felt that being othered, coupled with the current social climate and #BlackLivesMatter, has had an effect on Black students of the University.

"The study of all these disciplines and fields are all structured toward and by whiteness. These kids aren't stupid. I can only imagine the cognitive dissonance when looking at how influential Black people have been in America and they take these courses and don't see themselves reflected. That has to create some type of issue for them emotionally and intellectually."

Given the number of students and campus activities that have focused on social justice issues, this

certainly seemed to hold true for many students on campus. Following the election of Donald Trump as president, there was a student-led rally in a highly trafficked area of the University where students of many different backgrounds, although most were students of color, expressed their disdain of the president, and took responsibility for what the campus might look like as America moves forward. That same evening there was a gathering at the Cultural Center for African Americans that had a tremendous turnout of students expressing their concern, in a state that voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump and a university where Trump also won a mock election.

The Vice Provost of Diversity on the University's campus, Dr. Lee Edwards, participated in an interview and explained that since June, there had been a continuous stream of activities around campus since the shooting of the night club in Orlando, involving conversations, engagements and rallies. When attempting to understand whether the high profile shooting in the area or #BlackLivesMatter had an effect on student enrollment, he stated that it is too early to measure the long-term impact of #BlackLivesMatter, given the protests in the city where the university is located but suspects that long-term the police involved shooting of a Black man is not hurting enrollment, as some might suspect, and has the potential to increase both enrollment at the university in general and in African and African American Studies in particular. Anecdotally, Dr. Edwards argues, "there were some who chose to come" to the university because of the police involved shooting, protests, and the killing of the law enforcement officers.

While this seemed to be the case for University enrollment, and while correlation certainly doesn't mean causation, the number of students as per data concerning students that have a concentration in Black Studies has increased by 140% following the high profile shooting and protests in town. Dr. Edwards admitted that,

"There's been a tremendous increase in engagement [on campus] by certain students, faculty, and staff surrounding the shooting of the police officers, in addition to Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, and the other names around the country that have been killed. #BLM has helped millennials see this in a way that they haven't seen it before," stated Dr. Jones, "They aren't the 'Civil Rights generation' and they haven't had to see this before in the way that they have in the age of Obama and social media. I would argue that the problems aren't

necessarily worse, but they are visible in a way that they hadn't been before."

Dr. Jones continually expressed his belief that the primary problem in America is Anti-Blackness, and that it has always been. *"It doesn't mean that's the only problem, but I think it's the primary problem. Going back to slavery, post-Reconstruction lynching that lasted all the way through 1960 to the Prison-Industrial Complex."*

This being the case, Dr. Jones expressed his belief that Millennials had not been taught to confront, Du-Bois' "Black problem." Given the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the racial climate in America, Jones explained that Millennials have had to come to grips with the fact that the "Black presence in America is a problem." He explained that:

"The system needs Black bodies for its own identity. Being a Black problem means that Black bodies have to be expurgated. For the system to maintain its own sense of purity it has to eliminate Black bodies. The system needs them, but they are also a problem. It's a dual complicated situation where it's based on both dependency and elimination."

This complex phenomenon is one that Black students at the PWI would now like to explore further. Franklin explained this as one of the reasons he chose to be a part of Black Studies, as well. "To be Black and to know oneself is to study Blackness. Being in a Black Studies program allows you to not only know yourself but to know your surroundings. It's inherent in Blackness to be aware." Franklin also saw his very existence at a PWI as form of resistance.

"Am I glad to be at a PWI at this time? Of course. One just to say: 'I'm here! My Black ass can stand on your white ass campus. I'm okay with that. I can, instead of dissolving into my Blackness, as I would at an HBCU... My existence is asserted here."

Based upon this case study at a PWI in the Southeast, which was also the site of the killing of a Black man by white police officers, we find preliminary evidence to suggest that #BlackLivesMatter is responsible, at least in part, to raising awareness about the unequal treatment

experienced by people of color, especially black people. The increased awareness has prompted college-aged students, including students of color to not only become more active in street protests, but to also become more informed about American history, particularly as it relates to the treatment of black people. Our findings also suggest that one of the few places at PWIs where black students, and other populations, can think critically and analytically about American society and their precarious position in it is in African and African American Studies programs and departments. Few PWIs mandate courses about the African American experience, though it is intrinsic to understanding America, and for institutions requiring some form of a diversity course only provides a general survey of race relations in America, which oftentimes sanitizes the brutality and complexity of the black-white dualism that has marked the nation's history from the onset. The numbers of majors at the university examined here are higher than ever in the past decade and the administrators and students are organizing various formats for the university community to talk about ways of thinking about the city's past, present, and future. The implications for future research on race and for higher education are far reaching.

Discussion

Lifting as We Climb

Black Studies programs must be intentional about helping students impacted by the spree of killings of predominately unarmed black men by white police officers in understanding that such violence is not new but is part of a continuum of dehumanizing and criminalizing black bodies. Additionally, Black Studies programs should also support and prepare students to respond to everyday experiences of feeling the effects of the criminalization of blackness from their classmates and professors. Black Studies programs, particularly those at PWIs, are uniquely positioned to help students of color realize that what is happening in the United States is more than a moment or a movement. Black Studies programs must help transition enrolled students from moment to movement to majors. This is already happening organically as evidenced in the case study presented here. However, if Black Studies programs are intentional, like the university described here, the cloud of uncertainty facing said programs is likely to dissipate—at least for now. Drawing on systematic racism and Afro-pessimism, Black Studies should focus

on theory and practice to provide students with tools to resist manifestations of racism in their everyday lives and to help them understand that revolutionary change is not likely to come during their four-years of study, but efforts to make a more equitable and a more just society remains important. Black Studies programs must be prepared to guide students from moment to majors by focusing on curriculum. Course offerings must reflect historical and contemporary realities. A course devoted to #BlackLivesMatter at the institution studied here was full shortly after the registration period began, which is a rarity at the institution and at similar institutions across the country. Recruitment of faculty from within and outside of the institution is required to meet the teaching demands. PWIs must be welcoming places not only for students of color, but for faculty of color too. Moreover, the faculty must be engaged in the conversations happening across the university and in the community, which will aid in the further recruitment of students to the program and enhance conversations occurring in community settings.

The university featured here held several conversations about race relations in the city that specifically addressed the police involved shooting, which featured professors from the institution's Law School and other conversations exclusively for students. Engagement with the community through internships and service-learning are among the experiential learning opportunities that can help students connect what they are learning in the classroom with what is happening in the broader society, in this case in the killing of unarmed black men by police and how the broader community is resisting, responding, preparing for change that is both revolutionary and transformative. A number of organizations are engaged in a collaborative effort to address the challenges facing black boys and men in the city and students from the African and African American Studies program are providing research and technical assistance. University professors, including African and African American Studies core faculty and affiliates, are also involved in conducting community-based, policy evaluation, and other forms of research. We contend African and African American Studies programs across the country can find themselves on the right side of history if they prepare themselves to shepherd black students at PWIs from marchers to majors and in some cases increase the life expectancy of their own programs, all the while lifting as they climb.

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