Introduction
On Working Through a Most Difficult Terrain

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Imagine heaps of indigenous bodies, covered by swarms of vultures, piled so high that they served as a marker for Spanish vessels approaching the shores of sixteenth-century Hispaniola. Among passengers disgusted by such a sight and encroaching smell was Bartolome de las Casas (1484–1566), the first ordained priest to visit the New World, whose stirred soul subsequently beckoned first King Ferdinand and then Charles I and Pope Paul III to take action against the looming genocide of such precious multitudes. Although the church had the formal mission of saving souls—a rationalization that often accompanied the conquistadors’ urgent search for gold—its power also stood with the crown on an edifice of great wealth that would be jeopardized by a decree abolishing forced servitude in the region. So it was decided by Spanish authorities in 1517, with the influence of Las Casas’s Historia de las Indias (1516), that forced labor would be drawn primarily from Africa, where there were people of the right physical countenance who held no claim to the New World and whose darkness of skin suggested a darkness of soul. Such a position gained popularity, in spite of the presence of darker-hued crew members at the beginning of Spanish and Portuguese exploration and colonial efforts, and so, too, began the debates, theories, and swan-songs to the ever-evolving, inevitably creolized world marked by the adjective “new.” That unfolding narrative and its critical interpretation are the stuff of which the study of Africa in America and African America is made, and its study, African-American Studies, struggled forth, although its formal introduction as an organized academic production of knowledge began in 1967 at San Francisco State University, when a group of poets, novelists, and playwrights, Apostles of the Black Arts and Black Aesthetics Movements, dared to announce that the dark lives on which their work was built offered the dignity of their souls.

The academic “field” according to some proponents, “discipline” according to others, has gone through a variety of conceptual transformations as it moved from “Black Studies” to “Afro-American Studies” to “African-American Studies” and now “Africana Studies.” The most recent designation—“Africana”—is a function of the presence of researchers on Africa and the Caribbean in many of even the most US-focused programs and departments. We decided to use “African-American” in the title, although the diasporic significance of the term “Africana” is the one we prefer, because “African-American” is still the term used by most programs, and, as some of the essays in this volume will show, the question of “African-American” versus “Africana” or even “Black” is one of ongoing contestation.

Scholars in African-American Studies have also debated the question of method and scholarly rigor from its inception, and they have moved through foci on social scientific approaches to explorations in the humanities and now, in some instances, to the life sciences, such as biology, medicine, and epidemiology. A tension has existed, however, that is unique to African-American Studies. More so than even political science, and regardless of its scholars’ intent, African-American Studies is an intrinsically politicized unit of the academy. It appears so because of the history of its institutional development and the constantly contested status of its subject matter: namely, people of the African diaspora. African-American Studies emerged out of the political hotbed of radical US politics of the late 1960s, a politics that marked a decisive shift from the integrationist aims of the Civil Rights Movement to the assertive and self-affirming claims of the Black Power Movement and its offspring, the Black Arts Movement and the Black Aesthetic Movement. Proponents of Black Power saw their task as economic, political, and pedagogical. The last took the form of black communities seeking control over their own and their children’s education, which led to discussion not only of the form and structures of that education but also its content. We could call this effort the goal of decolonizing the minds of black people.

The project of decolonization met early critical reception. There was, for instance, the age-old debate over the appropriateness and desirability of black separatism and black integrationism. The outcome had implications for the scope of the project of mental decolonization. It was immediately apparent, in such groups as the Black Panther Party, that decolonization of black minds required and produced a body of literature and pedagogical practices the consequence of which was the liberation of white and brown minds. This was so because of those activists’ stance of ideological critique: if white supremacy is an ideological imposition (that is, a kind of forced false consciousness) on the minds of Americans, then its eradication would constitute the emergence of truth. The result of this assessment of American society was a renewed understanding of what W. E. B. Du Bois called double consciousness. Although initially raised as a problem of dual membership or an anxious “twoness” of the lived reality of American blacks, the circumstances of the 1960s brought to the fore the doubled vision, and correlative doubled reality, of contested truth. Mainstream sites of knowledge production faced a demythologizing and demystifying challenge, wherein their claims to universality and legitimacy often rested on a hidden premise of white normativity. The Black Power Movement brought to the surface the reality of
conventional education as a training in Eurocentrism and white normativity. How could such claims to universality and legitimacy be valid when they relied primarily on Europe as the lit torch of reason and colonization as its movement?

The double reality that people of the African diaspora knew and lived was that there was always more to the story of history and its “underside,” its “modern people beneath modernity,” and to the movement of reason and truth. In a nutshell, conventional education told a story of black inferiority marked by delusion, short-sightedness, imitation, servitude, and diffidence, and the movement of whiteness as a beacon of clarity, prescience, creativity, freedom, and courage. Black people of the modern world knew and lived a different story.

Could, many seemed to ask, most white people survive a single day living in black people’s shoes? One could imagine the sense of betrayal that emerged as many students – black, white, and brown – began to look into the history of the human species and discovered that the contributions of dark peoples were significantly more than presented in the colonial narratives, from Leif Erikson’s voyage in 1001 and Columbus’s voyage of 1492, to the founding of the Plymouth settlement in 1620. Whatever racial background the student may have, it is his or her expectation that the teacher should do his or her best to offer the most truthful portrait of reality available. We call this the pedagogical imperative. It is a moral code, the violation of which is a betrayal of the implicit trust or, one could say, “ethics” of the teacher–student relationship. The Black Power Movement made it clear that the US educational system, from the then-budding preschools and more formal kindergarten through to the doctorate of philosophy, was infused with racial logics whose absence was rare. Although this argument can be found in the much earlier Négritude Movement in the Francophone Americas of the 1930s and 1940s, its Black Power formulation had a peculiarly Pan-African impact, which included the multiracial Black Consciousness in the South African thought of Steve Bantu Biko in the early 1970s.

As might have been expected, this criticism of mainstream pedagogy led to defensive measures on the part of many US schools and universities. They needed to show that they were somehow institutions of a racist society but not racist institutions. The formation of the first Black Studies programs emerged, then, by individuals taking on the task to teach that which dominant educators claimed either did not exist or wasn’t relevant or, in few instances, was already being taught. Added to this climate of conflict was another factor: most American institutions of higher learning, short of historically black ones, refused to hire black researchers and artists, and many of their departments still refuse to do so. A task of Black Studies programs then became that of hiring faculty of color in predominantly white institutions. Although an academic enterprise, Black Studies found itself quickly embroiled in an extra-academic, political controversy: the affirmative action debate. There are ironic dimensions to this debate, since in some universities African-American Studies departments are the only academic units that don’t hire their faculty on the basis of race, as witnessed by the history of whites and Asians teaching in those departments. Four high-profiled instances are the Harvard, Yale, Duke, and Brown programs, which employ white, East Indian, Arabic, Native American, and Latino, in addition to African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and African faculty.

Thus, African-American Studies is an academic program that produces knowledge about African peoples – their cultures, politics, history, thought, artistic expression – and the unique problems posed by such study, which include discourses on African peoples by non-African peoples, while negotiating its political relationships with such communities and the nation. The complex history of African peoples in the modern world leads to several challenges when they become the subject matter of academic study. Before the formation of Women’s Studies and Ethnic Studies programs, it stood as the only academic unit on campuses that received constant criticisms for being “too academic” and “too political.” This continues to be the case. Scholars and artists in African-American Studies find themselves having to demonstrate their academic and artistic credentials and mission to their university administrations more than do their white colleagues (because of being dubbed “political”), while having to defend themselves politically to their students and off-campus communities (because of being dubbed “too academic”). There are manifold contradictions here. Some scholars relate (as the following pages will attest) that some university administrations patronize African-American Studies departments as if their faculties don’t hold scholarship as their primary mission. Such scholars thus find themselves offering their scholarship to administrators who are “surprised” that the work is scholarly. And still others, in spite of demonstrating the scholarly nature of their enterprise, discover that administrators may see their programs as opportunities to diversify the faculty of their campus and are thus disappointed when they offer, say, a top white or Middle Eastern scholar in the field as a potential job candidate.

The community contradiction is on the level of expectation. On the one hand, there is a regularly voiced call for the cultivation of intellectuals. On the other hand, there is the suspicion of intellectuals qua intellectuals. This suspicion might be a feature of mass politics, as Ortega Y Gasset observed in Revolt of the Masses (1994), which would mean that anti-intellectualism among African Americans is perhaps more indicative of their Americanness than of anything else. We will leave the question of the cause here, since many of the chapters in Part I of this companion reflect on various dimensions of this pressing question. What is clear is that the demand for scholars in African-American Studies not to be academic reveals a contradiction in expectations. The importance of the truth their scholarship may offer is held subordinate to political demands that may militate against the conditions of discovering such truth. This is not to say that truth must be incompatible with such high aims as freedom and liberation. We do mean to say, however, that the determinations of the best routes to such aspirations are not always, if ever, known in advance, and that the situation of the scholar in African-American Studies is one of a constant tug-of-war in a world that wants the fruits of his or her academic work while simultaneously wanting him or her not to be academic.
Although this book appears as part of the Blackwell Companions in Cultural Studies Series, it should be borne in mind that its scope is broader than the formulations of the study of culture developed by the influential New Left critics E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, and Stuart Hall, the latter of whom, with Richard Hoggart, brought Cultural Studies to the international stage through his leadership of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, UK. Their important work is echoed by many of our authors, especially Hazel V. Carby and William Hart, but others also focus on conceptions of studying culture that emerge out of alternative sites of knowledge production and, as we find in Sylvia Wynter, to questions of human study that demand a critique of the notion of culture as a focus of study. A critical question in African-American Studies, in other words, is the nature of its relationship to Cultural Studies and any other approach to human studies. The variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary portraits of the study of black folks that emerge in this text is a testament to the many other critical approaches available.

This work is a companion to African-American Studies. It is not an encyclopedia, wherein summaries of central figures and concepts are outlined by experts in the field. It is, instead, an exploration of unsettled questions, of themes that should accompany reflections on African-American Studies. The demands – historical, political, and philosophical – on African-American Studies suggest a story untold. It is with that realization in mind that we decided to let the field or discipline “speak for itself.” Thus, we solicited reflective essays from scholars who participated in the first thirty years of building the formal academic study of the African diaspora. Most of this group of essays comprise Part I of the volume. The essays submitted reveal the continued presence of the slave narrative as a motif of African-American testimonials. In some instances the theme of the plantation as a geopolitical site of racist authority manifests itself as a metaphor in their depictions of African academic institutions. There are also themes of the risks faced in asserting their humanity and the legitimacy of their intellectual projects that bring to the fore the demands of freedom in ways similar to Frederick Douglass’s classic depiction of his fight with Covey the slave-breaker in his autobiographies. In many ways, the slave narrative’s depiction of the importance of literacy in the struggle for freedom continues in these authors’ reflections on their struggles.

We then contacted a group of young and mid-career scholars who have been thinking through the future of African-American Studies, and we asked them to formulate the unique challenges to African-American disciplinary formation posed by and to their generation. We decided to avoid the standard model of outlining the questions and categories, such as the usual rubrics of “black conservatism,” “liberalism,” and “radicalism,” or along dictates of “separatism,” “integrationism,” and “exceptionalism.” We made this decision, again, for the sake of making the field speak for itself. Thus, when the chapters were submitted, the organizing schemes emerged from the themes of the contributors. We organized each section in Part II according to classic phrases that exemplify those themes. Since some of the first group of scholars focused more on such dynamics in their contributions, their chapters are included in Part II as well. We organized each section in Part II according to classic phrases that exemplify those themes. We also noticed the emergence of two kinds of commitments to the production of knowledge, what we may call epistemological models, with a growing tendency in African-American Studies exemplified by two groups that receive description and criticism from the authors in this text.

The first group comprises the internationalists. Such scholars look at African-American Studies as a global enterprise. It pertains to the entire black diaspora as both an object and source of study, and its reach extends not only across the geographical globe but also the temporal one – where the history of the African diaspora is ultimately no less than the history of the human species. Thus their goal is to organize knowledge of at least 220,000 years of \textit{homo sapiens sapiens}’ existence and thereby stimulate a shift in humanity’s consciousness wherein it is able both to recognize and face its exclusively dark-hued past. In more contemporary terms, the internationalists attempt to make the connections between things African and the entire human world. Thus, African-American Studies always becomes “black and . . .” to illustrate the African dimension of creolization processes, whether with indigenous America or Asia. The philosophical question of whether scholarship can in principle avoid any universalistic impulse is explored in the essays in Part II and the concluding section.

Critics of the internationalists argue that every intellectual project requires a limit on its scope. The limit leads to a “grounding” of the project, which, in academic terms, means specialization and methodology. We call this second group the localists. Although internationalists are not antipathetic to specialization and the rigors of method, localists regard them as too “broad” in the scope and formulation of their projects. They prefer a more traditional disciplinary point of departure “anchored” by concrete accumulations of data, whether they be archival, oral historic, ethnographic, economic, or demographic. Localists thus prefer scholarly identities such as “a specialist in African-American history of the 1960s” or “a specialist in recent African-American literary theory” or “a specialist in recent African-American politics.” For them, African-American Studies is a group of specialists collaborating with each other to construct their piece of the larger picture.

Localism is not limited to specialization and methodology. There are also nationalist localisms and regional localisms. Nationalist localism emerges when a particular group within the African diaspora ascends from an individual scholar’s focus to the \textit{department} or program’s focus. In such programs, African-American studies means the study of blacks who are descendants of people enslaved in the US and whose religious cultural formation is Baptist and Anglophone and whose migration practices took them in post-slavery years from the south to the urban centers of the northern United States. Such localists tend to forget Canada as part of North America and the strong historic mixtures of black and Native American peoples, and they treat the Caribbean, Latin American,
and continued influx of African and Asian influences as foreign. For them, the term “black community” often literally means the brothers and sisters down the street or at best within the neighborhood of their US university.

Regional localism tends to refer to cities and states, islands and continents, and it can at times appear to be broad in scope. The emergence of Black Atlantic Studies is one example. That version tries to focus on the so-called Black Atlantic culture that emerged in modernity, which makes African-American Studies an academic enterprise whose foci are the people of the modern world understood as a function of the Atlantic slave trade. The significance of the Arabic slave trade and slavery along the East Indian Ocean, or the many creolizing practices in Africa itself and the connection of East African cultures to those central and west, north and south, fall to the wayside in this approach.

There is, however, a kind of localism that goes against the grain of localism as we have thus far articulated it. Consider the following from Michel Foucault’s reflection on his own work:

When I say “subjugated knowledges” I am also referring to a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity. And it is thanks to the reappearance of these knowledges from below, of these unqualified or even disqualified knowledges, it is thanks to the reappearance of these knowledges: the knowledge of the psychiatricized, the patient, the nurse, the doctor, that is parallel to, marginal to, medical knowledge, the knowledge of the delinquent, what I would call, if you like, what people know (and this is by no means the same thing as common knowledge or common sense but, on the contrary, a particular knowledge, a knowledge that is local, regional, or differential, incapable of unanimity and which derives its power solely from the fact that it is different from all the knowledges that surround it), it is the reappearance of what people know at a local level, of the disqualified knowledges, that made the critique possible. (Foucault 2003: 7–8)

Foucault goes on to argue that such an approach challenges conceptual domestication and thus relates to the dominating systems of knowledge as “insurrectionary.” From this perspective, a critique of the previously discussed forms of localism, especially those rooted in so-called traditional disciplines, is that they enter African-American Studies as a project of domestication. This consequence can be avoided through reversing the order of legitimation – that is, by making the traditional disciplines function as what Foucault calls “tools” instead of ends in African-American Studies. It is clear that the very project – indeed, the very notion – of Black Studies is an adventure into the struggles over the suppression and liberation of “subjugated knowledges.” This conclusion suggests that it is not necessarily the case that internationalists and localists must stand on opposing fronts. Both could meet by situating their disciplinary and methodological commitments in their greater commitment to the unleashing of the subjugated knowledges that constitute African-American Studies. Although we have used Foucault’s formulation, the black intellectual project of liberating subjugated knowledge has been a feature of black intellectual production from the dawn of resistance to the dehumanization of black peoples in the modern world.12

We should like to add to the debate between internationalists and the Foucauldian consideration that being international is not the same thing as being internationalist and being local is not the same as being localist.13 An international problem could be addressed in a highly localist fashion, especially regarding audiences for whom it is most relevant, whereas a local problem could be addressed in an internationalist way with claims to audience and concepts beyond the immediate interests of the local community or field of inquiry. This distinction usually leads to a historic reality: the latter is often of wider enduring interest, whereas the former is often appealed to as the smaller contributions on which the larger ones rest. A key example is W. E. B. Du Bois’s The Philadelphia Negro. Although a study of a local population, the concepts and analyses he drew from his study were internationalist in tenor. The absence of contemporary relevance of the localist scholars’ research in Du Bois’s day cannot be used as a criticism of them because their aim was not to address scholars across the ages beyond being accurate representations of their present. Any act of liberating them as “subjugated knowledges” requires transcending their being locked in their time by the fact of their “appearance” in the present. Although the debate will continue, it is clear that the relationship of these two approaches may also be more dialectical than their proponents may be willing to admit. It is clear that many of the contributors to this volume share our position.

Although internationalism and localism are the predominant epistemological commitments, both face the growing impact of what we call market nihilism, the tendency or temptation to view scholarly and political interests as primarily functions of market forces. Scholars who take such a view will study whatever the market demands, and that is whatever is most profitable at the moment. It is thus not necessarily the case that they are committed to what they study. What is important is that it will lead to an excellent position in the academic job market and that the various avenues of academic production – whether research, publishing, lecturing, or institution-building – prove lucrative. This means that exemplars of this group are perpetually “on the market.” While it is not an independent epistemological commitment like internationalism and localism, market nihilism is already showing signs of competing with them as an independent category, as universities increasingly pressure scholars to generate research that garners external funding. Scholars outside of the funding juggernauts often find themselves vying for other than scholarly means of demonstrating their marketability. The result is unfortunate, since market-motivated scholars often, though not absolutely, ignore the dictates of scholarly rigor and take advantage of the demagogic demands of race politics to produce texts and oral performances that are often popular (whether for or against black people) and low in sophistication on the one hand, or overly obtuse for the illusion of expertise and shallow in substance on the other. The presentation of evidence and commitment
to truth are often absent in work motivated by market nihilistic tendencies, and in fact such work is at times defended through a postmodern stand wherein theory, truth, and evidence are rejected in advance as unfashionable or silly. Nihilism abounds here because of the incoherence of being “committed” to the market itself. Think of the paradox of the market itself sometimes not being marketable. In a less extreme variation, the market exemplifies a form of relativism in which ideas function more like measurements of the stock market. In the context of a politicized field or discipline such as African-American Studies, market nihilists offer a completely relativized portrait of racial reality while at the same time serving as race representatives and at times even “authentic” experts on the African diaspora. The white world, in other words, will have its domain, and these scholars will have theirs. As E. Franklin Frazier and Frantz Fanon observed in the 1950s and 1960s, such a group, which Frazier characterized as a “lumpen-bourgeoisie,” depends on racism with its Manichean distribution of labor and value for its marketability, which means that the value of such scholars’ work depends on commons places that do not, in the end, upset prevailing racial consciousness and cultural capital. The presence and impact of their work are evident in the misrepresentation of African-American Studies that dominates popular culture and on the African-American Studies shelves of many university bookstores, where serious scholarly works versus popular journalistic portrayals unfortunately stand, in some instances, as a genuine minority voice.

These criticisms of market nihilism and market nihilists do, however, come upon a limit in an important respect. Market nihilists remind us of the industrial dimension of the academy, that in the end there is a “bottom line” to be met and that many American and European institutions will only work with scholars who study black people on the condition that it will be profitable. That is why such scholars are expected to sell more books than their non-African-American Studies counterparts in the publishing industry, why they are expected to do more work than their counterparts on university campuses, and why such scholars experience greater pressures of professional performance than scholars in other disciplines and fields. More, their attention to the bottom line leads, in their view, to the development of employment for scholars in the field, and their market challenges raise the standards of living for black scholars in a world that does not complain about white scholars who receive higher pay for less work, both in quantity and quality.

Although some African-American Studies programs tend to have more members of one of these groups than of the others, most programs have a mixture of internationalists and localists, and some market nihilist variations of both. It is also not unusual to find these tendencies embodied in a single individual at different stages of his or her career. Most scholars begin their career with a dissertation that grants them specialization of discipline and subject matter, and they often expand their analysis – whether by comparison or extension – to determine their global significance. They might be affected by market forces throughout, from the initial dynamics of seeking employment, to main-

taining employment in mid-career, and subsequent efforts to render their projects successful, or simply to protect whatever they have built up over the years. It should, however, be borne in mind that the commitments exemplified by these groups are not necessarily endemic to African-American Studies, but may be features of professional knowledge production in our time. They appear more starkly in African-American Studies, however, because of the politicized environment in which such research takes place. Tension tends to emerge from a postmodernist perspective, for instance, where there is no room for a dialectical relationship between localism and internationalism beyond the conflict between localism and “imperialism.” Internationalism simply is, from that point of view, a universalization or “totalization,” a forcing of reality under a standard that distorts it. The philosophical question of whether scholarship can in principle avoid any universalistic impulse is explored in many of the essays in Part II of this volume, but especially so in those of the concluding section of Part II.

The reflective essays that comprise Part I offer strong testimonies against and in support of internationalism and localism. Paradoxically, it is not marketable for market nihilists to espouse market nihilism; hence, no scholar in this volume explicitly refers to him or herself as fundamentally driven by such forces. However, some scholars in Part I do describe some of their colleagues as clearly guided primarily by market forces, and in chapter 10 Hazel V. Carby provides prescient criticisms of the opportunism and market dynamics that attract white intellectuals to lay claim to “discovering” black ones. Because we did not choose scholars on the basis of their political commitments, but instead on the basis of their reputation or growing reputation in their fields and the diverse range of African-American Studies programs they represent, we thus have the unique result of a collection of writings by scholars who are both friends and foes. In the spirit of letting the field speak for itself, some of the scholars have written highly critical statements on the effect of their adversaries in the field’s or discipline’s development, and others have done the same with regard to the academic institutions that served as context for their reflections. In some cases, the result is an epic narrative with added tales of sullied heroes and catastrophic disappointment. Others reveal Sankofic tales of looking back in order to move forward. And more, there is the sober optimism of bold efforts to change the world of reason itself.

The essays in Part II and the concluding section explore a wide range of issues from the humanities and social sciences through to the life sciences, but they do so through a constant critical awareness of the task of developing the epistemological and phenomenological challenges posed by their work. We say epistemological because they are attempting to expand not simply the quantity of knowledge, but the kinds of knowledge and the conditions and location of knowledge in their work. We say phenomenological because every essay raises the problem of consciousness and its role in the constitution of intellectual work and in the transformation of worldviews. Instead of summarizing each chapter, we have decided to highlight some features that we’ve noticed that are persistent and new.
Our first observation is that the undisputed, most influential intellectuals in the development of African-American studies are W. E. B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon. The main reasons for their influence are (1) the enduring significance of double consciousness as a feature of black studies and (2) the role of social diagnostics (in Fanon’s term, sociogenetic analysis) in the study of black people. Other central issues emerging from these two thinkers are (3) the uniqueness of problems with regard to the study of black folk, and (4) the complexity of normality and its sociogenesis. Many of the scholars in this volume also credit Du Bois with producing the foundations of, or being a pioneer in, ethnography, epidemiology, urban stratification theory, critical race theory, Pan-African Studies, African-American philosophy, theories of methods in the human sciences, interdisciplinary methodologies, black ethnomusicology, and more. From Fanon, they work through metaphilosophical questions, social psychology, psychoanalysis, social diagnostics and transformation theory, dialectics of recognition, semiotics, problems of method, critical race theory, cultural critique, and more. In addition to Du Bois and Fanon, pioneers like Anna Julia Cooper (especially because of her theories on human value and linguistics), Toni Cade Bambara (her creative juxtaposition of the humanities and social sciences), Barbara Christian (her prescient use of poststructuralism in the formation of black feminist literature in African Diasporic Studies), and Houston Baker, Jr. (his creative defense of the poetics of black popular culture) emerge with enough frequency and appreciation to suggest that what counts as foundational and essential for scholars in African-American Studies is radically different from the portrait of the field that appears in such mainstream publications as the New York Times and the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Our next observation, both from Part I and Part II, is of the shifting nature of the subjects of African-American Studies. The range of human communities and disciplinary problematics advanced in their study suggests an extraordinarily creative and diverse community of intellectuals, many of whom exemplify the forefront of knowledge in their fields. Such topics as epigraphicalism, jazz consciousness, Africana existential foundations of slave pedagogy, African-American poetics and historicism, dialectics of double consciousness and borderland theory, African-American Queer Studies, and post-European and postcontinental reason, to name just a few, indicate an unusual level of intellectual vibrancy. African-American Studies is, in other words, exemplifying Anna Julia Cooper’s efficiency theory of value; its scholars are producing in quantity and quality far more than is invested in them. The high achievements of some of the top scholars in African-American Studies should, in many cases, elicit profound respect from their colleagues in other disciplines; however, the Fanonian adage of reason leaving rooms when blacks enter seems to prevail. The theme of being considered “crazy” for expecting not to be treated like wards but instead as having an equal right to membership and respect at the table of academic recognition and institution-building surfaces throughout the many reflections in Part I, especially in Houston Baker Jr.’s reflection on his experience of participating in the founding of the Yale African-American Studies program. The charge of being crazy is also attributed to white scholars who are committed to African-American Studies and work on the level of colleague with black faculty, as Robert Paul Wolff’s effort at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst attests.

Finally, many of the authors affirm the importance of institutional support by university presidents or high-ranking officials such as a provost in the development of African-American Studies programs. In an environment where black folk and their supporters are considered crazy, and at times “dangerous,” it is important that power intervenes as a voice of reason with a very big institutional stick. As Martin Kilson shows, the liberal public stance of Derek Bok masked a deliberate limiting of resources allotted to Harvard’s Department of Afro-American Studies from 1971 to 1991, and it was Neil Rudenstine’s proactive 1991–2001 effort, which involved providing economic and institutional resources for the program and public political support (in Kilson’s words, “political muscle”), that provided the infrastructure for that program’s contemporary renown. For most programs, the reality is one of building programs in the trenches, under very hostile conditions of little interdepartmental collegiality and a lack of administrative support from high university officials. There is an environment in which African-American Studies is “tolerated” at best, even in some places where African-American Studies faculty constitute the institution’s and the nation’s most influential scholars.

The perseverance of scholars, artists, and public intellectuals in African-American Studies in the midst of so many obstacles brings us to concluding this introduction by reiterating that familiar pearl of wisdom voiced in black communities across the globe: could their white counterparts (in this case, “white” disciplines and their departments) have survived such challenges? This companion is a testament to what it means to produce knowledge under extraordinarily hostile conditions. The list of recently deceased scholars to whom this work is dedicated consists of only two individuals who did not die below the age of sixty. Death for many came by way of hypertension and cancer, and for others through circumstances of severe social isolation that made them vulnerable to exacerbated consequences from minor illness. The struggles and circumstances faced by such people inevitably lead to the question, why should the rest of us go on?

The answer comes from what many in the African diaspora immediately recognize as “the ancestors,” people who dedicated their lives to building foundations for a better future. It is frightening to think of what the world would be like today had our ancestors abandoned their calling. The scholars to whom we have dedicated this volume have now joined that honored community. It is only fitting that we close our introduction with words from one of their greatest spokespersons:

Let then the Dreams of the dead rebuke the Blind who think that what is will be forever and teach them that what was worth living for must live again and that
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which merited death must stay dead. Teach us, Forever Dead, there is no Dream but Deed, there is no Deed but Memory.25

Notes

1 It should be borne in mind that Las Casas eventually renounced all slavery. It took the thought and political efforts of the court historian Ginés de Sepúlveda, premised upon Aristotelian notions of “natural slaves” and “natural masters,” to provide the prevailing ideology of expansion through conquest and enslavement (see, for example, chapter 9, this volume). For discussion of slavery in the Caribbean, see Shepherd and Beckles, Caribbean Slave Society and Economy (2000), and for discussion of the Spanish conquest and their treatment of the indigenous peoples, see Tzvetan Todorov, The Conquest of America (1984). Recent research has also introduced a twist in the story of Africa and the Central and South American regions. Paleoarcheologist Walter Neves of the University of São Paulo has uncovered 50,000 year-old human artifacts and 9000–12,000 year-old skulls that, after forensic reconstruction, revealed that those people were “negroid” in appearance. Neves and his colleagues argue that these people were part of the Australian Aboriginal groups who migrated to Australia 60,000 years ago. They further argue that their descendants were conquered by northern groups of Asiatic peoples between 9,000 and 7,000 years ago, during which they suffered near extinction save for the few hybrid descendants that have survived over the millennia in such places as Terra del Fuego on the southern coast of South America. This research suggests an interesting consideration for the question of African-American Studies. Although the notion of “America” or “the Americas” is meaningless during those paleolithic times, it raises interesting questions about the impact of early African and African-descended cultures on the geographical terrain that has come to be known as such. It also raises profound questions about the subsequent histories of conquest, making the tragedies of the New World more old than new. See Neves and his colleagues’ groundbreaking work (Neves and Pucciarelli 1998; Neves, Powell, and Freitas 1999; Neves et al. 2003).2

2 Molefi Asante adds “Africology” at the end of this list as beyond Africana. See his reflections in chapter 2 of this volume, where he also challenges the “field” versus “discipline” distinction as a function of ongoing academic struggles for resources. Discussion of the name for this branch of human inquiry emerges in nearly every essay in this volume.

3 We focus here on Black Power and its philosophy of education. The contributors to this volume present many reflections on the Black Arts Movement and the Black Aesthetic Movement. For further reading, see especially S. Wynter’s Sankofa (2003).


5 See, for example, the two issues of The Black Scholar 31, 3 (Fall–Winter 2001) and 32, 1 (Spring 2002) devoted to “Black Power Studies” and J. Gordon (2001: ch. 3, “White Power”).


7 See the Argentinean philosopher, theologian, and historian Enrique Dussel’s The Underside of Modernity (1996) for the first formulation and Cornel West (1996: 128) for the second.

8 This reality is lost in the “past discrimination” rhetoric of affirmative action policy. The actual practices of American institutions of higher learning raise the question of continued discrimination against blacks.

9 Kenneth Knies (2005) characterizes these academic units under the term post-European sciences to emphasize their promise as sites of new epistemic possibilities. With regard to at least African-American Studies being “too political,” perhaps two developments over the past thirty years best illustrate this assessment: (1) it is well known that Black Studies programs and departments have been targets of the US counterintelligence program’s (COINTELPRO) interventions and surveillance, and (2) the conservative charge of “political correctness” is almost synonymous with Black Studies and subsequently Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Queer Studies programs. See the testimonies in the reflective essays of Part I of this volume, as well as Churchill and Wall (2002) and O’Reilly (1989).

10 There are many histories of cultural studies that can be consulted, but see especially David Morley’s introduction to Morley and Chen (1996).

11 For discussion of the dialectics of freedom manifested in Douglass’s narratives, see L. Gordon (1999b: 2000a: 6).

12 This is a theme in many of the chapters of this volume, but see especially those in Part II.

13 We would like to thank Kenneth Knies for this observation in discussions of these concepts.

14 Consider, for instance, the etymology of “theory,” which is the Greek word theoria (to view). The relationship of this word to another Greek word, theos or thes or Zeus (all of which mean “god”), reveals the kind of viewing this concept involves. Should one be able to see the world as a god or God would see it, one would see the way things are; one’s view would, in other words, be identical to the truth.

15 See Frazier (1957a) and Fanon (1963). Both criticized this group in their time as changing no infrastructures because they lacked genuine capital, yet they were able to accumulate great wealth in their work of mediating between white and black communities.

16 Grant Farred (2003) has edited an excellent collection of discussions on the question of a local versus imperial globalism dynamic, under the title Reconfiguring the Humanities and the Social Sciences in the Age of the Global University. The title of Ricardo D. Salvatore’s article in the same collection illustrates our point: “Local versus Imperial Knowledge: Reflections on Hiram Bingham and the Yale Peruvian Expedition.” For an exploration with striking similarity to ours on the contemporary university and which brings together our three categories of internationalism/globalism, localization, and market nihilism, although not under those titles, see Walter D. Mignolo’s article in Farred (2003): “Globalization and the Geopolitics of Knowledge: The Role of the Humanities in the Corporate University.” And for a collection of essays with an avowed international commitment against an imperial conception of knowledge, see Carole Boyce Davies et al., Decolonizing the Academy: African Diaspora Studies (2003).

17 Sankofa is an Akan word that means “return and get it.” It is symbolized by a bird stretching its neck to its back while moving forward. Its message is that we must reclaim our past so that we can move forward.

18 See Cooper’s classic essay “What Are We Worth?” in Cooper (1988).

19 “Reason was confident of victory on every level. I put all the parts back together. But I had to change my tune. That victory played cat and mouse; it made a fool of me. As the other put it, when I was present, it was not; when it was there, I was no longer” (Fanon 1967b: 119–20).

20 Ralph Ellison provides a wonderful allegory of this craziness in the fasico at the Golden Day bar, where a group of well-educated “crazies” produce mayhem on their day out from the sanitarium, in chapter 3 of his classic novel Invisible Man (1952).

21 In addition to the daily obstacles posed by hostile institutions, most of the contributors to this volume have experienced death threats, hate mail, or hate calls, often for doing such
"crazy" things as insisting upon fair treatment and equal respect as academics, doing research that expresses the humanity of black people, or simply being present as faculty on their campuses in the course of their career. Receiving such threats has unfortunately become a mundane feature of teaching in African-American Studies in North American and European universities. For a sociological study of this phenomenon, see Feagin, Vera, and Imani’s *The Agony of Education* (1996).