IMAGINING A HIGHER EDUCATION CAREER IN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES[1]

Turquoise Brewington, Erica Dugué, Germalysa Ferrer, Josiah Gouker, MiKayla Green, Dannelle Gutarra Cordero, Ashley Hodges, Maya Houser, Makailyn Jones, Aisha Tahir, & Fedjine Victor[2]

[2]*Princeton University, USA*

Abstract

This article was written during the 2020 summer seminar "Imagining a Higher Education Career in African American Studies" at Princeton University, coordinated by Dr. Dannelle Gutarra Cordero. This summer seminar aimed to be a safe and restorative space for ten undergraduate students of Princeton University from underrepresented backgrounds that intend to pursue or explore a career in higher education in African American Studies. This article is the culmination of the scholarly collaboration throughout this summer seminar, where, as research associates, all participants researched the possibilities and challenges of a higher education career in African American Studies in the United States. This article explores institutional anti-Blackness in higher education in the United States, identifies research challenges for scholars of African American Studies, and advocates for educational reform in the institutional valuation of mentorship, of decolonizing academia, of tenure justice, and of anti-racist and reparative support for Black faculty and students.

Keywords

African American Studies, Higher Education, Tenure, Mentorship, Pedagogy, Research, Activism, Anti-Racist, Decolonizing

It is before dawn, but the University is already awake. Breakfast is being carefully placed in buffet-style containers in cafeterias and dining halls. Floors are being mopped before the rest of the university community arrives to their offices and classrooms. College transportation workers start another shift after another unrelated night job. The University is awake, but the intellectual production of the people that are already awake, and work the most for it, has to be invisible very soon. Their exhaustion and economic distress has to be invisible very soon, as soon as the predominantly White staff, faculty, and student body arrive. Just as the foundations of powerful higher education institutions in the United States lie on the violent silencing of the painful exploitation of the enslaved, today Black essential workers in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) are "essential" due to their economic exploitation and racialized institutional disposability. And the imagery of Blackness in a "serving role" within privileged White spaces is not supposed to be disturbing for its desired gaze. In fact, in the White supremacist gaze the University so vehemently protects, it is what makes these spaces prestigious and alluring. It is dawn, and the University is awake, but those who are already tired are not allowed to call it their own.

The University is being made every day. Every day, "selective" universities in the United States make the decision to perpetuate institutional anti-Blackness. "Prestigious" universities celebrate the "beauty" of their campuses, "beauty" shaped by the colonizing conquest of indigenous lands and the excruciating suffering of the enslaved. The economies of elite universities refuse to listen to divestment activism and are thus still stained with blood, the blood of the prison industrial complex and corporations that profit from environmental crimes and contemporary slavery that in turn disproportionately distress racialized/policed communities. Curricula are still

---

grounded on imperial canons, "devil's advocacy" of scientific racism, and the use of both racial slurs and coded language by racists as "permissible" anti-Blackness in the classroom. Black staff, faculty, and students are indoctrinated on how to "respond" to "microaggressions" in their "welcoming" orientations to PWIs. And they are supposed to be "patient," to withstand their racialized oppression, to understand that these universities have "complex histories," that these powerful institutions are committed to "diversity and inclusion," and that things cannot change in a day. White supremacist actions are defended through the rhetoric of "free speech," while Black student activism is criminalized and policed. The University is made every day, and yet it does not want to be called anti-Black.

For students from underrepresented backgrounds, to imagine a higher education career in African American Studies in PWIs of the United States is to pursue a radical imagination. It is to pursue a meta-reflection about the stakes of dedicating intellectual production to structurally racist institutions that do not promote a sense of belonging for their identities and that encourage "affirmative action" shame, silencing their actual embarrassingly low percentages of Black faculty and students. It is also to visualize both the immense possibilities and repercussions of scholarly activism and anti-racist advocacy in higher education policy. Throughout the United States, departments of African American Studies take on the burdens of restorative justice through decolonizing curricula, pedagogy, mentorship, research, and advocacy, while other imperial departments keep their racist practices and intersectional oppression until they are held accountable, and, even then, they unhurriedly respond. For students from underrepresented backgrounds, to imagine a higher education career in African American Studies is to brainstorm how academia can be a space where reparations are central to its reimagining.

Institutional Anti-Blackness and Higher Education

Academia consists, arguably, of two major functions: the research component, where knowledge is "discovered," and the education component, where that knowledge is "imparted" to students. The academy relies on these functions for self-preservation - the pursuit and discovery of new knowledge beget further scholarship. This replicative process raises concern when we consider that access to the academy has been historically restricted on the basis of characteristics such as race, gender, and class. While people of color, for example, are now more present and visible in this environment, many vestiges of this historical exclusion remain. We would explore the creation of an antiracist academia, then, by applying antiracist thought processes in examining these functions.

In the world of academia, a scholar is encouraged to engage with existing discourses to question, to explain, or to dissect the ideas of their peers in the academic conversation. Reading "against the grain," or in careful questioning and argumentation, of sources is part of the training of undergraduate students, who, during their first semesters of college education, are just beginning to examine the discourses within the discipline of their choice. It is important, however, to question how often, if ever, these fledgling academics will be asked to justify the existence of their disciplines, the canons upon which their disciplines are founded, or the institutions themselves which train them. A lack of critique of the systems under which the scholar is working results in an acceptance of the way things are status quo, which is decidedly not anti-racist.

In order to establish an anti-racist academic epistemology, then, it is important first to question that which already exists. The modern "Western" university is deeply rooted in the traditional humanities, embracing the "rediscover[y of] the ancient authors, who, as representatives of pagan antiquity, had fallen into oblivion" (Rüegg, 1991, p. 444). The continuation of this tradition can be seen in the maintenance and esteem of university departments that study the classics, in addition to the schooling of students in Latin and Greek. The practices of many prestigious institutions of higher learning today can draw a direct line to the practices of the oldest universities, if even they are not in themselves the same. The prestige of these universities comes in part, if not majorly, from the preservation of this intellectual tradition.

On the other hand, for a newer discipline like African American studies, its existence is in direct tension with the academic orthodoxy - its recognition as a "legitimate" field of study only came about relatively recently. Having "resulted from the gains and pressures of the Black Freedom Movement in the mid-1960s," it is today still a newcomer in the established lifespan of academia (Hall, 2010, p. 15). But its value as a discipline comes about from its divergence from previous ways of thinking and its "fundamental challenge to the epistemological foundations on which universities function" (Hall, 2010, pp. 17-18). Perry Hall writes of the struggle for the addition of African American Studies to the academic roster being not mainly a fight on the premises of race and racism, but one of coded combat over "'intellectual standards' and 'academic principles,'" where what was truly at stake was the distancing from research based on traditional academic canons (2010, pp. 19-20). This discipline, it then seems, does what no other will: it encourages criticism of the academic establishment, calling into question the legitimacy of the intellectual canon, and deservedly so. In order to challenge racism throughout the academy, this practice must extend into other academic fields as well.

Indeed, the eradication of the problems illustrated in this article calls for an approach that diverges from traditional academic practice, because tradition itself is the problem. The academic orthodoxy failed at the time to produce convincing thought that condemned the racist practices of slavery, eugenics, or segregation in the midst of

their existence, if it did not readily argue to justify them, which is evidence enough of shortcomings of the more traditional academic disciplines. In order to ensure that racism is eradicated in the academy, it is imperative that scholars in these disciplines question why their disciplines did not require anti-racist ways of thinking from their inception. Anti-racism should not be brought into question because of its novelty; rather, the academy must be scrutinized because of the lack of anti-racist thought therein.

Naturally, the practice of anti-racist "against-the-grain" critique of the established academic norms and canons should precipitate the same scrutiny of traditional pedagogy. This should mean a reevaluation of not only what is being taught, but also of who is performing the teaching. Even longstanding approaches to discussing racism in the educational realm fall short of the mission of anti-racism that should be at the forefront. When conceptualizing and operationalizing anti-racism, it is important to note that anti-racist education is not carried out within the traditional molds of multiculturalism - that is to say that we must resist the tokenization of the experiences of marginalized students and instead combat the systems and processes that force them to the margins.

This means centering the analysis of "the role of class and capitalism and the relations of domination in the social construction of difference along race, class, and gender" (Kailin, 2002, p. 54). Doing this will combat the further marginalization or educative tokenization of students of color who might be either rendered invisible or asked to share their stories for the edification of White students (see Blackwell, 2010, pp. 473-474). Thus, in enacting an anti-racist academia, it is important to ensure that it is done without thrusting the brunt of anti-racist work onto the racially marginalized. From this intersectional perspective, academic work can serve an educative and revolutionary purpose, offered to a wider audience. The academy, generally speaking, should benefit from this newer practice of self-scrutiny. It should expose not just the aspects that hinder the mission of the discovery and dissemination of knowledge, but also the practices that are more effective in the same pursuit. In the questioning of the practices of the tradition, we enable an increased self-awareness in the works of the academic.

Black studies have, in fact, existed long before its institutionalization within the academy. With its focus on political education and anti-racist organizing, the practice of Black studies emerges from struggle. Its conception outside the formal university is, in many ways, a protest of the Eurocentric university which was built upon on racist and colonial practices. Not differentiating the University from the nation-state at large, Black studies are the practice of analyzing and dismantling systems of oppression. Centering liberation at the very heart of its project, the departmentalization of Black studies creates a contradictory tension between the label of "objective" scholarship and activism. This tension can only be contextualized by situating the role of violent and nonviolent students protests in the departmentalization of Black studies. At San Francisco State College, in 1968, Black student activists staged a strike to demand a Black studies program. A multiracial coalition of students demanded that their educational interests be represented within the formal academy. This model followed throughout the country as student activists protested for the departmentalization of Black studies. This tradition of protest that birthed the department is one that situates itself directly in relation to the larger struggle of Black and oppressed people throughout the world. This legacy of protest is imbedded deeply within the tradition of Black studies which student activists followed, and Black scholars proudly identify with.

As historian and activist Robin D.G. Kelley (2016) says, "Black studies was conceived not just outside the university but in *opposition* to a Eurocentric university culture with ties to corporate and military power. Having emerged from mass revolt, insurgent [B]lack studies scholars developed institutional models based in, but largely independent of, the academy." And because of this opposition and revolt, Black scholars have often identified predominantly with being activist-scholars. Keeping struggle and freedom at the core of their work within the academy, they reject the model of colonial, racist education, which produces a dedication to professionalization and capital over justice and freedom. Black studies, these scholars argue, are liberation studies. A discipline which values lived knowledge and reject all structural and interpersonal hierarchies. Cathy Cohen (2016), a self-identified activist-scholar at the University of Chicago, explains that "the academy as The Academy is, like any other American institution, often an oppressive force and contradictory in nature to antiracist and feminist activism, but those of us within the academy who as individuals subscribe to antiracist and feminist politics can have authentic ties to activism." These ties are what simultaneously both reject *becoming* of the academy while *existing and using* its resources to dismantle its colonial and racist foundations. Perhaps being activist-scholars within the academy is always recognizing the limitations of the academy and knowing that real knowledge is produced outside the walls of elite institutions. It is to become subversives in the academy who, while existing in it, are also looking for ways to dismantle it. And that is the reason Black studies were birthed out of protest, and Black scholars are able to keep struggle at the very heart of their existence within the academy. Because their very presence, and the presence of Black studies, is a threat to the entire project of the academy.

Seeking to dismantle White power within the academy, Black studies are a reminder that it will be the destruction of the institution that will achieve that goal. By departmentalizing Black studies, student activists have created space for Black scholars to identify with activism and thus have created a network of allyship that ultimately tilts the world a bit more towards justice. Activist students and scholars are then able to work together to expose and resist the academy's labor exploitation, its gentrifying practices, its endowments which are built on misery, its class privilege often camouflaged in multicultural garb, and its commitments to war and security

(Kelley, 2016). This insider-outsider relationship allows the complicated contradictions of Black studies in the University to co-exist, while never forgetting that freedom lies outside the ivory tower.

Throughout the United States, there are thirty-seven graduate programs in a variation of disciplines collectively termed Black Studies. There are nineteen master's programs, eighteen doctoral programs, and numerous other certificate programs or programs of secondary study, the latter being characterized by the Harvard Graduate School of Arts as a means for "PhD students to broaden their course of study and enhance the professional reach of their degree" (National Council for Black Studies, 2020). Of these many degree-granting programs, only one of them is housed in a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), at Clark Atlanta University in Georgia. This means that, for the countless students looking to deepen their research pursuits and academic engagement in the dynamic and interdisciplinary field of African American Studies, their choices are limited to a handful selection of PWIs.

Every introductory website for each of these thirty-seven graduate programs in African American Studies has developed the careful language to convey the deep imperative of an academic tradition that distorts the boundaries of the Westernized canon: centering the organizing history and political frameworks of those whose labor built the nation, as well as the traditions and lands from which they were stolen. Yet, none of these departments' websites explicitly articulate the necessary steps to be taken in supporting, providing care to, and devoting contextually-specific resources for their current Black graduate student body, whose very presence in the University was secured by the institutional rebellion, lived experiences, and political theory and praxis that composes the departmental curriculum. Though the scholarship produced by these graduate programs and their students actively acknowledges the historical systems of oppression that the discipline's founders had to navigate and overcome in the cultivation of formalized Black academia, this recognition falls short of identifying how these same abuses iteratively repackage themselves as updated manifestations of institutional anti-Blackness that contemporary Black graduate students require interpersonal support in challenging and dismantling. In other words, Black graduate students in African American Studies move through the highly individualized, independent, and isolated world of graduate studies, while continuing to contend with the many lived experiences of anti-Black racism and systemic discrimination and devaluation - the same dynamics their universities subsequently expect they give course lectures on and commodify as intellectual capital by way of scholarly papers and conferences.

Though these PWIs claim some of the most well-respected graduate studies programs in Black Studies, churning out many of the fields' most inspiring and fervent minds, there is often a paradoxical reality for these academics. In a broad sense, there tends to exist much solace and support within their respective African American/Black Studies department, built through Black connectivity and community-building, but the department itself then stands alone as an island in the wider sea of the White institution. As Eric Anthony Grollman (2017) writes when speaking about the racism they experienced as a Black graduate student at a PWI, they warn prospective students, "don't assume that the presence of other, critical programs (e.g., African American Studies) will compensate for a lack of diversity or race consciousness in your own (more traditional) PH.D. program (e.g., sociology)." Cognizant of the heightened inevitability of racial discrimination within other academic programs, Black graduate students may be simultaneously *pulled* by the compelling interdisciplinarity of African American Studies and *pushed* away from the latent racism in their primary field of interest. This deepening experiential gap between African American Studies and other complimentary departments illustrate the manner by which African American Studies, as it provides greater solace from the specter of racial violence, may find itself cast apart from the rest of the academy.

Furthermore, tenure serves to maintain White supremacy in academia by intentionally silencing Black faculty. As of 2017 at doctoral status institutions, Black faculty made up 4.05% of tenured faculty and 4.48% of instructional faculty; since 2013, these numbers have increased by .10 and .22 percentage points respectively (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2019, pp. 28-30). This change between 2013 and 2017 is not substantial, especially since Black faculty continue to be underrepresented when compared to the population of the United States. These statistics also evidence that, while both types of positions have shown a rise, though insignificant, non-tenure positions have increased more. On the surface, it seems that universities are becoming slightly more diversified by hiring more Black faculties. In truth, Black faculty remain at the margins of academia because most of their positions are untenured. And institutions get away with parading Black faculties under claims of diversity and inclusion, while in reality marginalizing their work by limiting tenure.

There is an intentional silencing of Black professors that is coded in the tenure process, since there are different tenure processes for Black and White faculty. The article "Marginalizing Merit?" lays out discrimination within the tenure process for tenure-track faculty, using Black faculty experiences as evidence and defining the racist, differentiated processes for tenure as a "myth of meritocracy embedded within tenure review" (Griffin, Bennett, & Harris, 2013, p. 505). When Black faculty produce scholarship, it is typically met with skepticism, especially if they are creating work related to marginalized groups. Being Black and engaged in work related to race is always questioned with a concern about "validity" (Griffin, Bennett, & Harris, 2013, pp. 503-504). Ultimately, the tenure process is racialized because institutions uphold different standards for Black faculty.

Institutions then hide behind a facade of "diversity and inclusion" commitments, allowing them to claim

that they are anti-racist without making substantial commitments to elevate Black faculty through tenure. Repetitive claims of diversity project a false sense of commitment to marginalized groups. James M. Thomas writes that "the commitment [to diversity and inclusion] is framed as the transformative action that calls into being what it names. And all that is called into being is the commitment itself, rather than any tangible or material transformation" (2020, p. 123). Higher educational institutions falsely claim to value diversity and inclusion and, by doing so, do not have to engage in actual anti-racist work because the commitment is seen as a "marker of diversity's action" (Thomas, 2020, p. 119). Institutions parade Black faculty in the public sphere to further propel their performative claims of an anti-racist space. They are willing to commodify Black voices and experiences while consistently dismissing their work by racializing tenure. Institutions only "value" Black faculty when they can be used to elevate university status. Tenure for Black faculty, then, is not a priority of the University because they can get away with spewing lies about "diversity and inclusion" as long as they have token Black faces.

Tenure was apparently conceptualized with the intention of creating an academic environment in which "free speech" was not only permitted, but fostered and protected. According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure" (2020) has been widely accepted as the definition and purpose for tenure positions; along with freedom in research and teaching, the document asserts tenure as a position of "economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability". The tenure system has consistently shown, though, that only certain faculty members at institutions for higher education should be afforded such protections. Having inequality in tenure makes the "diversity and inclusion" that universities claim they value performative. The tenure process stands against its core values: fostering a rigorous environment of free academic speech when it limits whose voices are a part of these conversations. Creating more tenure positions for Black faculty is an actionable step towards diversity and inclusion and dismantling White supremacy at institutions of higher education.

Research Challenges in African American Studies

Data doesn't lie because it is a part of science. It is an empirical fact, not opinion. This, in and of itself, is a paradox. How could data, human-curated information confounded by complex emotional and social variables, not somehow convert into opinion? The answer lies within the definition of data itself. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, data is "something known or assumed as fact, and made the basis of reasoning; an assumption or premise from which inferences are drawn" (OED, 2020). Assumed as fact, here, numbers become human, points of reference calibrating life.

While data is crucial in all research, its value is often reserved for disciplines in the social sciences, such as Sociology, Economics, and Politics. Through these fields, data and statistics extend a form of fact-based credibility to studies on human social relationships. However, when data is used by and in the context of a historically oppressed group, it is invalidated and deemed as emotional banter. By exploring African American Studies as a case study, a tension arises between the history of data in the social sciences and perceptions of validity. On one hand, African American Studies in higher education is viewed as a distinct yet interdisciplinary subject without the prestige of concrete sciences. On the other hand, the foundation of social sciences is rooted in anti-Blackness that historically "justifies" subjugation and Black criminalization. As a result, scholars from African American Studies are often excluded from the social science narrative and have to construct their own datasets disentangled from colonial hegemony. Thus, not acknowledging how the social science's scholarly validity is contingent upon the propagation of anti-Blackness fails to encompass the paradoxical significant difference in data's perceived neutrality and basis as assumed fact.

First, Sir Francis Galton created "modern" statistics, where "data" was used to construct Black criminality and a "need" for racial policing. Amid propagating eugenics, Galton argued for fingerprinting and "composite portraiture" as the backbone for his statistical methodology (Galton, 1883, p. 1892). Through this work, Galton relied on the "difference" of Black bodies as a mechanism for sustaining bondage and disenfranchisement. Scholar Khalil Gibran Muhammad notes how "the statistical rhetoric of the "Negro criminal" became a proxy for a national discourse on black inferiority. As an "objective" measure, it also became a tool to shield white Americans from the charge of racism when they used black crime statistics to support discriminatory public policies and social welfare practices" (Muhammad, 2012, p. 8). In other words, Galton set a precedent in which data's supposed objectivity validated racialized statistics to maintain the social hierarchies of the United States. Moreover, anti-Blackness is intrinsic to the social sciences curriculum premised on driving argumentation with statistical analysis.

Therefore, relegating African American Studies as a distinct academic discipline apart from the social sciences perpetuates Black subjugation and erasure through data collection and dissemination. Scholars in African American Studies are often tasked with generating entirely new datasets within their work. This additional labor furthers an immense barrier to producing scholarship and must be adopted by the entire field. To decolonize data, the current archaic practices entangled with racial oppression must be abolished. This is especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic where data drives narrative and perception. As mortality disparities unveil the racialized toll of the pandemic, negligible institutionalized data sustains Black erasure and death through underestimations.

Consequently, new data practices such as those from Data 4 Black Lives and the Ida B. Wells Just Data Lab created by Dr. Ruha Benjamin must become commonplace. To do so, the exclusion of African American Studies from the social sciences must cease.

In the end, refusing to reconcile the history of anti-Blackness embedded into statistics and the social sciences pedagogies allows exclusionary data practices to persist. Data was, and always will be an *assumed fact*, which entails the confounding variables of human bias. Most importantly, statistics would not exist without Black lives, even though these same Black lives are reduced to statistics. *One in three Black men will be jailed during their lifetime. Black pregnant people are 4x more likely to die in childbirth than their White counterparts.* Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution of the United States reminds us that *the Black body constitutes three-fifths of a person.* These numbers are human lives, panting "I can't breathe" before being filed away in a dark judiciary cabinet - suffocating.

Meanwhile, when writing History, archival materials are traditionally used to support, further, and even differentiate narratives. However, because of how these historical documents are written, gathered, and even maintained, they often fail to provide a full portrayal of history, especially the history of marginalized people. The history of marginalized groups within archival material is often dismissed, undermined, and even criminalized. To further this methodological oppression, archival material related to marginalized people is usually poorly maintained and labeled so horribly that it continues to silence their history and makes it downright traumatizing to utilize archives.

In her book *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*, Marisa Fuentes analyzes key challenges when writing about the violence that Black enslaved women faced in the history of slavery (2016, pp. 1-12). Despite wanting to write about the experiences of Black enslaved women, Fuentes denounces how, although there are tools to write about the narratives of the enslaved, those narratives are unfortunately most likely contextualized from their enslavers' transcripts and writings due to the history of archival erasure. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot elucidates how most of the archival material that does exist from marginalized communities also frequently is purposely structured to assimilate within the existing power structures (2015, pp. 31-69). Therefore, there is not merely a question of maintenance or upkeep of the archives of colonial history, but also a question of construction and intentionality of the imperial gaze.

In contrast, Angie Cruz's archive does not rely on the tools of oppression that are typically integrated into archives. While researching for her novel *Dominicana*, Cruz could not find enough images within existing archives about the Dominican experience in 1965 New York City. Since she could not find sufficient archival materials, Cruz created Dominicans NYC on Instagram and asked the public to send in their family photos and stories associated with the time (Bansinath, 2019). Through public sourcing, Cruz has managed to create a form of digital public archive that is built, owned, and accessible for the public. Cruz's creation should be seen as a means to further the research and liberation of Black and Brown communities in higher education, because her online archive shows that there is a possibility for archives about marginalized groups that does not rely on integration into existing structures and that more archives can be built to fill in the current gaps. Therefore, in addition to providing resources to better maintain current archival materials about marginalized communities, and continuing to acknowledge that the very origin of most of our archival materials is flawed, there is also the potential to intentionally create new forms of archives that do not rely on traditional institutional methodology when documenting the history of Black and Brown communities.

Imagining an anti-racist academia

It is during her sophomore spring at her PWI that she feels most lucky. She finally has a professor who looks like her: brown skin and blossoming afro in all its glory. She finally felt seen, like she did not have to hide behind code-switching, flat irons, and other masks to hide her true self. The professor took to her as well, initially offering words of support and advice pertaining to the student's work, and evolving into creating safe spaces for open conversation beyond the classroom. The professor carefully listened to the student, helping her build social and professional capital: she constantly was on the lookout for opportunities for the student's professional growth, even if that meant creating them. Hours upon hours were spent cultivating this meaningful relationship. Through their relationship, the student and professor formed a network of solidarity, which the professor saw as the most meaningful part of her career, the student viewed as the reason why she did not give up, and the PWI labeled as a waste of time.

Within the field of higher education, mentorship is powerful, especially for Black faculty and undergraduates. Black students view mentorship as an opportunity to create visibility, social capital, and professional development (Yehia et al., 2014, p. 5). Yet for Black faculty, mentoring, though personally rewarding, often comes at a high price: timely promotion and tenure (Stanley, 2006, p. 719). Though mentorship of undergraduates is a valued and critical part of higher education for many Black faculties, it produces a clear problem for Black faculty as they are burdened with the choice between service and professional advancement. The devaluation of mentorship in academic professions disproportionally affects Black faculty, as they find themselves

forced to choose between their community and themselves. Such a heavy choice weighs on Black faculty more so than their White counterparts, and hinders their professional development. This complicated choice ultimately reflects the omnipresent power structures in higher education that enables Whiteness to be centered as the norm. Where there is White privilege, there is Black hardship.

Black students, especially at PWIs, often gravitate toward Black faculty members as mentors (Stanley, 2006, p. 720), safe havens, a phenomenon so apparent, it is like metal drifting toward a magnet. Though Black faculty may want to serve as mentors for various reasons, mentorship is a notoriously heavy workload that puts promotion and tenure at risk (Stanley, 2006, p. 721). Once Black faculties make the decision to mentor, the commitment is serious, and the relationship often merges into a "surrogate family" (Booker & Brevard, 2017). However, working with students of color is not always straightforward as experiences with institutional racism inform the mentor-mentee relationship. Conversely, White professors are not burdened in the same way because White students do not face the same systemic challenges that Black students do. Thus, when it comes to Black faculty, due to the rigor and importance, one stands to question: why is mentorship punished with potential loss of time and effort dedicated towards tenure, rather than valued in higher education as an important skill set? Mentorship exposes the myth of academia as a meritocracy. Higher education conceptualizes the success of its professors in terms of their scholarly production, not necessarily their role as educators. Promotion is not based on hard work within the university context. If it were, faculty of color would be encouraged, rather than dissuaded, to help members of their underrepresented communities. If it were, mentorship would matter.

The re-imagination of higher education allows for an understanding of the reparative capacity of mentorship, which requires a drastic change in the value system of higher education, and subsequently removes the burden of mentorship from Black faculty. Scholars Penelope Moore and Susan Toliver identify potential incentives to recognize the significant role that Black faculty members play in mentoring students of color, including the creation of "rewards in the form of credit in performance evaluations" and "compensation for time" (2010, p. 944). While these suggestions illustrate critical tangible steps that can (and should) be taken to relieve Black faculty of this difficult choice, we need to start on a foundational level to accomplish institutional change. Mentorship is never featured on scholars' CVs, which are supposed to represent one's life work. Based on the current academic hierarchical structures, despite the immense time commitment, emotional investment, and mental engagement experienced by faculty of color, mentorship is merely not regarded as part of "one's life work." Allowing professional elevation of mentorship through academic CVs is the first step in recognizing mentorship as a valuable skill and experience, decentering White privilege, and decolonizing higher education.

Hence, decolonizing higher education requires that we re-evaluate the relationship between mentorship and a revitalization of pedagogy. Black faculty are disproportionately burdened by the devaluation of mentorship, which consequently upholds the existing oppressive systems within higher education. In this context, institutional reparative justice would value mentorship, from the CV to opportunity for compensation. Successful decolonization requires that we question the orthodoxy of higher education, including the unique role of mentors as "gatekeepers" to academia and the narratives that are centered; only then can we truly move forward.

Moreover, policies in higher education institutions rarely take on the nuances of racism, presenting only buzz words such as "diversity" and "inclusion" to address the more particular realities of inequality. Institutions treat these concepts, rather, as far-off phenomena - too heavy or theoretical to be tackled. The result is a substandard attempt at racial justice in higher education. Black faculty are then left to become advocates for anti-racism within their lectures, seminars, and daily interactions with students and other faculty members. These faculties are also relied upon to be representations of diversity at their institutions. This unequal load - compounded by the lack of measures in place to combat racism in every corner - allows racism to act unchallenged in higher education spaces. Thus, the relationship of Black faculty to the campuses at which they teach is one of exploitation.

Institutions fail to implement anti-racist strategies because there is a disregard concerning the root of racism in these spaces. The root is the White supremacy that sits comfortably as the "bedrock of organizational culture and is embedded within institutional structures and processes as well as knowledge production and canonization which in combination enable racism 'to melt into thin air'" (Tate & Bagguley, 2016, p. 293). A primary opposition to this White supremacy is the radical self-determination of the oppressed, as White supremacy is rooted in Black dehumanization (Dancy II, Edwards, & Davis, 2018, p. 190). Radical self-determination materializes in many ways. This is why introducing more Black students and faculty does not precipitate equality, as Black people can be "welcomed" into a space in which they are still exploited and dehumanized. As such, "diversity and inclusion" initiatives tend to only target the image of White supremacy and not the root of it.

It is then especially unprogressive when the Black faculty hired are, more often than not, onboarded as contingent faculty. The American Association of University Professors (2014) has seen "a steadily shrinking minority faculty with tenure, as increasingly unable to protect academic freedom, professional autonomy, and the faculty role in governance for themselves…" The title of contingent faculty leaves Black faculty even more vulnerable to exploitation and job insecurity. The position usually lacks professional mobility and development, the ability to fully control curriculum development, and administrative or technical support (Kezar & Sam, 2013, pp. 56-57). Contingency discourages faculty from building a curriculum that reflects anti-racist principles, as they have

less control over it. They are also often paid less to teach more (AAUP, 2014). The title of contingent faculty perpetuates the narrative that certain disciplines and certain people are more important than others. Evidently, contingency equates to less agency, value, and thus fewer self-determination capabilities. Because of this, contingent faculty must not be the rule but the exception if higher education is to tackle the systems which perpetuate harm for Black faculty.

Anti-racism work as reflected in policy must then be consistent and committed to the intellectual and positional integration of Black faculty. As Shirley Anne Tate and Paul Bagguley write, "a shift in organizational structure" is needed to sustain any anti-racist agenda (2016, p. 293). Anti-racist policy incorporates strategies to dismantle racist narratives and structures from within. An example is re-imagining hiring practices, pushing for the tenure track to be the norm rather than the exclusive idol of academic success. Habitually, racist occurrences are approached as isolated incidents severed from the broader context of Black suffering (Dancy II, Edwards, & Davis, 2018, p. 189). A diverse body of faculty must be a part of the disciplinary and resolution proceedings for all infractions, no matter how allegedly "small." Finally, higher education institutions must establish a governing body of Black faculty that has a direct and consistent influence on the passing of new policies. These reparative shifts in policy and structure will attempt to diminish exploitation by uplifting the power of Black faculty.

Institutions must recognize White supremacy as central to how higher education institutions function and how deep-seated practices maintain this culture. Colleges and universities, especially older ones, were designed to teach and cultivate the minds of White cisgender men while, at the same time, enslaving Black people (Dancy II, Edwards, & Davis, 2018, p. 182). Black faculty cannot be expected to teach in an environment that inherently organizes a similar culture wherein certain positions are reserved for some and less valued positions are given to others. Institutions must enact decolonization methods that upend the status quo and institute Black determination (Tate & Bagguley, 2016, p. 296). For there to be genuine efforts moving forward, universities must work with Black faculty to improve on these racism-feeding power dynamics and draw up better futures for their institutions and the people that keep it afloat.

One can imagine an institution with faculty and staff that supports its undergraduate and graduate students of color in and beyond the classroom. Those who go above and beyond to ensure that their students feel secure, supported, and valued. Until there are policies in place that promote this commitment to student rights in all universities, students of color may have access to higher education and resources, but they may never actually feel included or a sense of belonging. This level of institutional support to students is a core value that is embedded in HBCUs (Flowers III, Scott, Riley, & Palmer, 2015, p. 61). Within their work, scholars Flowers III et al. explain the way that "othermothering," the act of faculty going beyond the academic needs of students to sustain caring relationships, leads to "increased levels of social and academic integration for students" at HBCUs, with much impact on its students and their sense of belonging (2015, p. 59). The role of an active and intentional professor should be universal and supported by all universities in their policies, not merely projected as an individualized, voluntary task. All universities should value students enough to normalize intentional, caring relationships between students and faculty that do not rely on institutionalized power-dynamics and privilege that protects its prestige. Providing a safe space for students to be themselves and interact fully in and out of a classroom environment is crucial to the valuing and success of marginalized students.

There needs to be an emphasis placed on educating professors on their responsibility to uphold student rights to increase the quality of their interactions with students of color. It is commonly understood that more frequent student-faculty interactions lead to a positive increase in academic performance: office hours, mentorship, and faculty letters of recommendation carry much power in higher education. It is commonplace to hear students have an abundance of resources, and office hours are available to all, but access to resources does not mean students from marginalized backgrounds are comfortable or are invited to create authentic relationships with faculty. The discomfort of marginalized students often stems from the conditioning of power dynamics in their educational background, but is maintained through brief conversations, lack of social awareness, and a lack of care demonstrated by professors. Often Black students at PWIs have difficulty developing meaningful bonds with White faculty because White faculty are sometimes "culturally unaware and insensitive," for example, due to their failure to "tame culturally charged comments or remarks within the classroom settings" (Flowers III, Scott, Riley, & Palmer, 2015, p. 62). An open office hour door does not immediately mean an open and inclusive space. Professors, who understand and contest the power dynamics at play, and genuinely care about the fact that some students are not comfortable, can more readily create open space for dialogue and authentic relationships than those who heavily insist that it is the student's responsibility to initiate and maintain relationships.

Office hours and teacher interactions can be a resource that elevates the college experience for privileged students and simultaneously a tool that further imposes barriers on marginalized communities. Teacher interactions are a part of a hidden curriculum, the unsaid rules, and expectations that permeate higher education that provides students who are aware of this said curriculum with more opportunities (Illing, 2019). Anthony Abraham Jack (as quoted in Illing, 2019) explains the importance of uncovering this curriculum in a recent interview: "But we all know that it's not just what you know or who you know. It's who knows you and how well they do. The non-privileged poor don't know that in the same way and they feel uneasy getting ahead by being more social…" By

emphasizing the point that "it's who knows you," Jack reinforces the importance of the relationships that one must have with professors to have a chance at accelerated social and academic progression. Placing the weight of reaching out and intentionality on the shoulders of professors and staff is a mechanism that changes the way students feel about interacting with a space that may bring them discomfort. The intentionality on the part of the professors and staff builds trust, visibility, and authenticity that negate the power-dynamics that perpetuate prestige and unapproachability.

There is thus an urgent need for policies that prioritize students by placing the role of intentionality and relationship building on the professors and staff at the universities, eradicating hidden curriculums. Professors need to stand for their students inside and outside of the classroom where they are going beyond their professional role to make sure that the student is protected from culturally charged comments. Students should not be sent to cope with the trauma experienced by racial slurs while the slur itself is protected by institutional policy. With policy that orients the support and care of its students at its center rather than elitism and norms, there is room for marginalized students to begin to be included and ultimately develop a sense of belonging on college campuses.

Decolonizing academia is then a colossal project that seeks to dismantle the colonial logics that operate insidiously as the default within academia. Colonial logics are the set of systems and principles that center White people as the "pioneers" for an optimal way of living and knowing. Decolonizing academia upholds anti-racism as the standard for epistemological processes within universities, therefore directly opposing colonial logics. Decolonizing physical academic institutions and academic pedagogy can only be accomplished by centering those who have been dispossessed.

Anti-racism is an entryway through which decolonizing academia must occur because the establishment of Western institutions of higher education came into existence due to the dispossession and enslavement of Black people (Wilder, 2013, p. 28). The oppression of Black people is tethered to the existence of universities: the first documented enslaved Black person in the New England colony labored for Harvard University's earliest students (Wilder, 2013, p. 28). Although this article positions anti-Blackness as an epicenter of higher education's modern-day destructive practices, the universities' role in the erasure of indigeneity via colonization must be acknowledged. These violent acts of oppression from which academic institutions originate are not a series of historical events that can remain siloed within a bygone of colonization. In fact, to see the oppression of Black people at the hands of Western academic institutions as immemorial is ahistorical. Even in this present moment, and for as long as the University operates alongside the harmful colonial logics from which it was founded, Western higher education enacts violence against Black students.

The University presently reproduces colonial logics at the expense of their Black students through the weaponization of time, among many other manifestations of coloniality. It is critical to remember that the means through which we are able to decolonize academia can be best understood by looking at the origins of the same communities that were disrupted by the creation of the University. Decoloniality exists within and between Black communities as methods of epistemology, care, and healing, informing how these communities come together in times of celebration and crisis. These methods are the framework through which decoloniality should be understood as an opposition to universities' coloniality. Time is a colonial logic that organizes our lives. It's impact on the well-being of Black students is detrimentally understated. Because of the fact that time is deployed as a metric through which our lives must function, its adverse effects are taken as the norm rather than as an entryway for decolonial thinking. Riyad A. Shahjahan describes time as a "coercive force" that is essential for the operations of the "neoliberal academy" (2015, p. 491). Within the University, students are taught to abide by the clock as an organizing principle: "excessive" tardiness is a means for a point reduction on a student's final grade, students' work is organized by strict deadlines, and they are penalized for "late work." Shahjahan names time as a colonizing force that pushes our bodies to operate under the guises of early, on-time, and tardy. Through his radical redefinition of time, we are able to see the clock as a colonial tool.

What is not acknowledged about time, even in Shahjahan's analysis, is how it forces Black students and their minds, bodies, and work to be contorted into a timed space. Conceptualizing time as coercive is useful because it highlights how time does not require the consent of those who are timed. Time can be understood as an antagonistic imposition of colonial logics onto those who White hegemonic institutions seek to colonize - Black people. Black people taking their time is a decolonial logic, and it is evidence that Black folks need not to organize their lives within a colonial clock in order to be productive. What it means to be *fast* has its own implications which, ironically, this paper does not offer the time to discuss.

By understanding time as colonial and taking one's time as decolonial, we can rethink how time organizes academia, thus developing practices that center the well-being of Black students. While we understand time as an axis of organization, we must also understand how it functions as an axis of oppression - more specifically, an axis that ties us to coloniality. Time forces us to think of ourselves within a binary of on-time and late. Such a binary is particularly harmful when considering Black students in academia because time itself is a "coercive force" that originates within colonial practices. Historically, Black people have been dehumanized in such a way that they have been deemed to be lagging behind or moving backwards. The University does not operate in a way that is free of this presumption, and Black students are expected to succeed within institutions that

organize themselves alongside their colonial and anti-Black origins.

References

AAUP (American Association of University Professors). (1940). 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure | AAUP. American Association of University Professors.

AAUP (American Association of University Professors). (2014). *Tenure and Teaching-Intensive Appointments*. American Association of University Professors.

Bansinath, B. (2019). She Couldn't Find Dominican Women in Official Archives. So She Started Her Own. *The Cut*, October 31, 2019.

Blackwell, D. M. (2010). Sidelines and Separate Spaces: Making Education Anti-racist for Students of Color. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 13*(4), 473-94.

Booker, K., & Brevard Jr., E. (2017). Why Mentoring Matters: African-American Students and the Transition to College. *The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal, 19.*

Cohen, C. J., & Jackson, S. J. (2016). Ask a Feminist: A Conversation with Cathy Cohen on Black Lives Matter, Feminism, and Contemporary Activism. *Signs Journal, 41*(4).

Dancy II, T. E., Edwards, K. T., & Davis, J. E. (2018). Historically White Universities and Plantation Politics: Anti-Blackness and Higher Education in the Black Lives Matter Era. *Urban Education, 52*(3), 176-195.

Flowers III, A. M., Scott, J. A., Riley, J. R., & Palmer, R. T. (2015). Beyond the Call of Duty: Building on Othermothering for Improving Outcomes at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. *Journal of African American Males in Education, 6*(1), 59-68.

Fuentes, M. J. (2016). *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Galton, F. (1892). *Finger Prints*. Macmillan.

Galton, F. (1883). *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*. Macmillan.

Griffin, K. A., Bennett, J. C., & Harris, J. (2013). Marginalizing Merit?: Gender Differences in Black Faculty Discourses on Tenure, Advancement, and Professional Success. *The Review of Higher Education, 36*(4).

Grollman, E. A. (2017). 'Playing the Game' for Black Grad Students. *Inside Higher Ed*, February 24, 2017.

Hall, P. A. (2010). African American Studies: Discourses and Paradigms. In J. R. Davidson (Ed.), *African American Studies* (pp. 15-34). Edinburgh University Press.

Illing, S. (2019). How elite colleges fail half of the poor students they admit. *Vox*, June 17, 2019.

Kailin, J. (2002). *Antiracist Education: From Theory to Practice*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Kelley, R. D. G. (2016). Black Study, Black Struggle. *Boston Review*, March 7, 2016.

Kezar, A., & Sam, C. (2013). Institutionalizing Equitable Policies and Practices for Contingent Faculty. *The Journal of Higher Education, 84*(1), 56-87.

Moore, P. J., & Toliver, S. D. (2010). Intraracial Dynamics of Black Professors' and Black Students' Communication in Traditionally White Colleges and Universities. *Journal of Black Studies, 40*(5), 932–45.

Muhammad, K. G. (2011). *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*. Harvard University Press.

National Council for Black Studies. (2020). African Studies Graduate Program. National Council for Black Studies.

OED (Oxford English Dictionary). (2020). datum. Oxford University Press.

Rüegg, W. (1991). Epilogue: The Rise of Humanism. In H. Ridder-Symoens (Ed.), *A History of the University in Europe* (pp. 442-468). Cambridge University Press.

Shahjahan, R. A. (2015). Being 'Lazy' and Slowing Down: Toward decolonizing time, our body, and pedagogy. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 47*(5), 488-501.

Sidkey, G. (2017). The Power Game: Power Dynamics between the Teacher and the Students in a Graduate Seminar. *English Language Teaching, 10*(5), 179-188.

Stanley, C. A. (2006). Coloring the Academic Landscape: Faculty of Color Breaking the Silence in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities. *American Educational Research Journal, 43*(4), 701-736.

Tate, S. A., & Bagguley, P. (2016). Building the anti-racist university: next steps. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education, 20*(3), 289-99.

Thomas, J. M. (2020). *Diversity Regimes: Why Talk Is Not Enough to Fix Racial Inequality at Universities*. Rutgers University Press.

Trouillot, M. (2015). *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History.* Beacon Press.

Vasquez Heilig, J., et al. (2019). Considering the Ethnoracial and Gender Diversity of Faculty in United States College and University Intellectual Communities. *STCLH Hispanic Journal of Law & Policy, 2019*, 28-30.

Wilder, C. S. (2013). *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*. Bloomsbury Press.

Yehia, B. R., et al. (2014). Mentorship and Pursuit of Academic Medicine Careers: A Mixed Methods Study of Residents from Diverse Backgrounds. *BMC Medical Education, 14*(1).