



The Core Journal Concept in Black Studies

by Thomas Weissinger

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Black Studies scholars have shown interest in the core journal concept. Indeed, the idea of core journals for the study of the Black experience has changed several times since 1940. While Black Studies scholars are citing Black Studies journals with frequency, they also cite traditional disciplinary journals a great deal of the time. However, although useful, traditional disciplinary journals are not touted as Black Studies journals. This article examines the reasons why traditional disciplinary journals have been excluded from the Black Studies core and argues that some of these journals ought to have a place there.

INTRODUCTION

The identification of the most significant journals in a field has among its advocates faculty of various disciplines. Enthusiasts for the idea regularly attempt to define the boundaries of their disciplines by showing which journals are best, most prestigious, read, or most cited.¹ Librarians and library and information science educators have described various methods and purposes for developing such lists.² Some of these correspond to the need to define a field's boundaries; others correspond to acquisition and retention needs. Black Studies scholars have shown interest in the core journal concept as well.³

For many Black Studies scholars, the core journal concept is anchored to suspicion about the willingness of traditional disciplinary journals to accept manuscripts about the Black experience. At the root of this suspicion is a perception that mainstream journals tend to exclude such manuscripts for cultural, ideological, and political reasons. Several references from Black Studies scholars are illustrative of this point. Black feminist theorist and writer bell hooks has remarked that

...black scholars find it sometimes difficult to write, in whatever manner we choose, about everything we want to write about.... I did a piece recently on teaching women's studies courses to black students. When it was returned to me edited, I noticed that all the critical comments about white women feminists had been deleted.... Often radical writers doing transgressive work are told not that it's too political or too "left," but simply that it will not sell or readers just will not be interested in that perspective.⁴

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The following passage from historian and literary critic Paul Tiyambe Zeleza concurs with hooks' perspective:

It should be clear ... the acceptance or rejection of a publication is filtered by the editors and referees through the prism of their intellectual traditions, ideologies, and networks. The fact that the rates of publication and citation tend to be quite low for Diaspora African and other minority scholars, sometimes being even lower than their percentage in the field, can hardly be surprising.⁵

Well-known public intellectual, philosopher, and social critic Cornel West also agrees, noting that

...literate subcultures are less open to blacks now than they were three or four decades ago.... The point here is not mere finger-pointing at negligent journals (though it would not hurt matters), but rather an attempt to highlight the racially separatist publishing patterns and practices of American intellectual life which are characteristic of the chasm between black and white intellectuals.⁶

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A logical consequence of this view about mainstream publishing is that many scholars believe that Black Studies requires journals of its own.⁷ Thus, scholars such as Talmadge Anderson observe that because “the opportunity is limited in being able to publish in the field of Black Studies, there has always been an unceasing effort on the part of Blacks to create or to start their own journals and periodicals.”⁸ Cornel West thinks similarly but has a more expansive view about what kinds of journals should be included among the Black Studies core. Accordingly, West advocates the following:

The next step is to institutionalize more broadly black intellectual presence, as the Society of Black Philosophers of New York has done, by publishing journals anchored in a discipline (crucial for the careers of prospective professors) yet relevant to other disciplines. It should be noted that such a black infrastructure for intellectual activity should attract persons of whatever hue or color. Black literary critics and especially psychologists are far ahead of other black intellectuals in this regard, with journals such as the *Black American Literature Forum*, the *College Language Association*, and the *Journal of Black Psychology*.⁹

The purpose of this article is to update and build upon the idea that the field of Black Studies requires its own core journals. However, in line with Cornel West's thought that some Black Studies journals should be anchored to traditional disciplines, perhaps some traditional disciplinary journals also have a place among Black Studies core journals.

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DEFINING THE BLACK STUDIES CORE

Historically, there have been periods when either or both journals about Blacks and traditional discipline journals were privileged with respect to study and research about the Black experience. The phrase “core journal” is understood to mean that, within a given discipline, certain journals are privileged more than others. Both the words “core” and “privilege” share a common meaning; namely, to be regarded or treated as fundamental, central, or an enduring part of a thing.¹⁰ However, traditional disciplinary journals which were significant for study of the Black experience throughout the pre-modern Black Studies period (that is, before 1968) have less significance today. Although useful, traditional disciplinary journals are not touted as Black Studies journals. This article offers an explanation for why traditional disciplinary journals have been excluded from the Black Studies core.

The earliest attempt to identify Black Studies core journals was made by Albert P. Marshall when he assembled a list of major African American periodicals for his *Guide to Negro Periodical Literature* (Winston Salem, NC: A.P. Marshall, 1941–1946). Among the journals included in Marshall's *Guide* were the *Atlanta University Bulletin*, *Fort Valley State College Bulletin*, *Journal of Negro Education*, *Journal of Negro History*, *Journal of the National Medical Association*, *Kentucky Negro Education Association Journal*, *Negro College Quarterly*, *Negro Digest*, *Negro History Bulletin*, *North Carolina Teachers Record*, *Opportunity* (National Urban League), *Phylon*, *Progress Record* (Negro Organization Society of Virginia), *Quarterly Journal of Florida A and M College*, *Quarterly Review of Higher Education Among Negroes*, *Southern University Bulletin*, *South Western Journal*, *Virginia Education Bulletin*, *Virginia State College Gazette*, *West Virginia State College Bulletin*, *The Whetstone*, *Wilberforce University Quarterly*, and the *Wiley College Reporter*.¹¹ Marshall's purpose was to provide access to Black-oriented periodicals that were excluded by the contemporary indexing tools of

the time. During Albert P. Marshall's time, and particularly from the 1960s, aspects of the Black experience have been increasingly integrated into mainstream journals.¹²

From the 1940s through the 1970s, both Black-oriented journals and the traditional disciplinary journals of other fields were regarded as core resources for research and study about Blacks. Until the mid-1970s, significant general bibliographies about the Black experience reflected this, referencing both relevant traditional disciplinary journals and those focused solely on Black Studies.¹³ For example, this idea of the Black Studies core journal is clearly evident in general bibliographies such as *Blacks in America: Bibliographical Essays*. The convention of assigning double asterisks to a citation in the aforesaid bibliography meant that a journal article had been elevated to belong to a core of more than 300 outstanding articles included in the *Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series in Black Studies*.¹⁴ Noted scholars August Meier and Elliott Rudwick were the editors for the series from 1966 through 1974. Both Black Studies and traditional disciplinary journals were included in this series. Incidentally, the Bobbs-Merrill company published several other reprint series of outstanding articles. Other reprint series were in anthropology, European history, geography, language and linguistics, philosophy, politics and government, psychology, religion, the social sciences, and sociology and were widely used for teaching college classes.

Early in the 1980s, this began to change as an intense discussion about the appropriate model for Black Studies scholarship arose; namely, whether the model should be Eurocentric or Afrocentric. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines these terms as “a focus on Europe to the exclusion of the rest of the world” and “centering on African or Afro-American culture,” respectively.¹⁵ As the established paradigm of Eurocentric scholarship was critiqued, the newer paradigm of Afrocentricity gained currency. Accordingly, the core journal concept for Black Studies underwent change, excluding traditional disciplinary journals. Notable examples of journal lists employing the new concept include the *Guide to Scholarly Journals in Black Studies*¹⁶; the list of African American titles published in *Magazines for Libraries*¹⁷; and the many guides which librarians have mounted on academic and public library Web sites.

While there have been increasing numbers of journals devoted exclusively to publishing Black Studies content, traditional disciplinary journals are accepting Black Studies articles with increasing frequency. Consequently, Black Studies scholars can go in either direction, publishing their work in Black Studies or traditional discipline journals. Moreover, Black Studies scholars make heavy use of articles from traditional disciplinary journals in their research. Given these conditions, the question arises: Should certain traditional discipline journals be regarded as Black Studies journals?

STUDY PROCEDURE

The phrase “Black Studies” is used throughout the article. It is taken here to be synonymous with “African American Studies,” “Africana Studies,” “Pan African Studies,” and similar phrases. It refers to an academic subject dealing with the history, culture, and literature of Black communities worldwide, with an emphasis on African American culture.

Black Studies is interdisciplinary; its earliest roots are in history, sociology, literature, and the arts. The field's most important concepts, methods, and findings are still centered within these disciplines.¹⁸

This article looks at the social conditions, rule-governed practices, theories, ideas, beliefs, etc., necessary to justify given actions and ways of thinking. The methodological approach used throughout the article is called *analytical philosophy*. This is a central philosophical method whose acceptance has grown throughout the twentieth century in the United States and Europe. P.M.S. Hacker identifies two tasks characteristic of analytical philosophy: to dissolve conceptual

puzzlement and resolve conceptual confusions and to provide clear representations of the use of language within a given domain of discourse.¹⁹ In other words, analytical philosophy aims at clarification, critical analysis, and exegesis of the conceptual meanings of ideas and their relationships, both logical and as regards content. For present purposes, the sources of these ideas are texts by Black Studies scholars and librarians and interpretation of data from the journal citation study described below.

Citation data from the publications of Black Studies scholars have been collected. These present snapshots of activity for two specific years during a 20-year interval. The 20-year intervals begin with the year that the first Black Studies program was introduced on a predominantly White college campus in 1968 at San Francisco State College.²⁰ The *ISI Web of Knowledge* (ISI) database was used to identify the articles and their cited references. In order to determine which journals Black Studies scholars use, citations from the two most important current Black Studies journals, the *Black Scholar* and the *Journal of Black Studies*, were examined for 1988 and 2008. The *Western Journal of Black Studies* is also regarded as one of the field's more important journals. Unfortunately, it is not covered by ISI and not included in the study.

The split years 1988/1989 and 2007/2008 of the *Journal of Black Studies* correspond to volumes 19 and 38 (specifically, volume 19, nos. 1–4; and volume 38, nos. 1–6). For the *Black Scholar*, the years 1988 and 2008 correspond to volumes 19 and 33. A search of the bibliographies from every issue of each volume (altogether 151 articles) yielded a total of 750 articles from 333 different journals. When all journals cited two or more times by either *Black Scholar* or *Journal of Black Studies* authors are considered, the final results are reduced to 533 articles from 114 journals. A list of the 114 journals is included in the Appendix.

“Black Scholar and Journal of Black Studies authors cite interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary Black Studies journals 23% of the time (126 of 533 citations), while they cite journals from other fields 77% of the time (407 of 533).”

STUDY RESULTS

- *Black Scholar* and *Journal of Black Studies* authors cite interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary Black Studies journals 23% of the time (126 of 533 citations), while they cite journals from other fields 77% of the time (407 of 533). Overall, the number of citations to Black Studies journals increased 231% from 1988/1989 to 2008, growing from 38 citations to 88.

- The number of citations to Black Studies journals by the *Black Scholar* (18 of 126 citations) and *Journal of Black Studies* (20 of 126 citations) was nearly the same in 1988, representing 14% and 16% of Black Studies citations, respectively. The number of Black Studies citations in the *Black Scholar* was the same for both 1988 and 2008, but the number of Black Studies citations in the *Journal of Black Studies* rose to 56% (70 of 126 citations). Compared to its 1988 count, Black Studies citations in the *Journal of Black Studies* increased 350% (from 20 to 70 citations) in 2008.
- The level of references to traditional disciplinary journals increased 209% for *Journal of Black Studies* authors from 120 citations in 1988/1989 to 251 in 2007/2008. For the *Black Scholar* references increased 227% from 11 citations to traditional disciplinary journals in 1988 to 25 citations in 2008 (Table 1).

DISCUSSION

Two leading journals in Black Studies are the *Black Scholar* and the *Journal of Black Studies*. Although not included in this study, the *Western Journal of Black Studies* is also important. Both *Magazines for Libraries* and commentary by various scholars attest to the preeminence of these journals within Black Studies. Moreover, while Ivy League Black Studies scholars publish mostly in traditional disciplinary journals, the three journals mentioned above are major publishers of non-Ivy League Black Studies scholars.²¹

The three journals are described as interdisciplinary because they include articles on culture, literature, music, social and political conditions, economics, and so on, across a range of humanities and social science topics. The *Black Scholar*, founded in 1969 by Nathan Hare and Robert Chrisman, has the distinction of being the earliest journal in the field. It has been described as “theoretically critical” because it presents the writings of major African-diasporan and African theorists.²² *Magazines for Libraries* describes it as being “a leading vehicle for the finest expressions of Black cultural and political thought.”²³ The *Journal of Black Studies*, founded in 1970 by Robert Singleton and Molefi Asante, is said to have “captured the spirit of the profession.”²⁴ *Magazines for Libraries* reviews it as “a dynamic source for creative scholarship, covering a broad range of economic, political, sociological, historical, literary, and philosophical issues related to persons of African descent.”²⁵ The *Western Journal of Black Studies* was founded by Talmadge Anderson in 1977 and has been accepted as “a major force in shaping the research interest of the field.”²⁶ *Magazines for Libraries* describes it as a leading scholarly interdisciplinary journal devoted to “research, social and political analyses, literary criticism, and the arts.”²⁷

Another kind of Black Studies journal is the multidisciplinary journal. While on the one hand such journals receive recognition as Black Studies journals, on the other they are considered important by traditional disciplines. As examples, the *Journal of Black Psychology* is also recognized as a psychology journal,²⁸ and the *Journal of Negro Education* is a recognized education journal.²⁹ This class of journal

**Table 1
Citations by Year**

Titles	Cited by Black Scholar (2008)	Cited by Black Scholar (1988)	Cited by Journal of Black Studies (2007/2008)	Cited by Journal of Black Studies (1988/1989)	Total citations
Black Studies journals *	18	18	70	20	126
Traditional disciplinary journals	25	11	251	120	407
Total	43	29	321	140	533

* For a list of the Black Studies titles, consult Appendix A. The titles are preceded by an asterisk and are listed in the first twelve rows. The traditional disciplinary journals are listed in rows 13–114.

represents the intersections between Black Studies and traditional disciplines, giving scholars from traditional disciplines a way to cross disciplinary boundaries without becoming associated with interdisciplinary Black Studies journals.

Similar to the concern addressed earlier about the reluctance of some traditional disciplinary journals to publish on certain Black Studies themes, there also is tension regarding perceived exclusionary practices among multidisciplinary Black Studies journals.³⁰ For example, when the *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* was first published by the Harvard University Department of African and African American Studies, questions were raised about whether its editors could rise above theoretical and ideological considerations to accept worthy scholarship from Afrocentric and Black Nationalist perspectives.³¹

In addition to Black Studies interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary journals, traditional disciplinary journals also contribute literature about the Black experience. Arguably, the introduction of new scholars into the field from recently established doctoral programs was catalytic both to increased levels of publication and referencing of source materials. Twenty years after the start of Black Studies programs on predominantly White campuses, Temple University created the country's first doctoral program in Black Studies. By 2007, at least 11 major universities offered a doctoral degree in Black Studies.³²

Table 2
Journals Related to the *Journal of Black Studies*
(ISI Journal Citation Report)

R_{\max}	Related journal (j)	Relatedness (R)	
		<i>Journal of Black Studies</i> to j	j to <i>Journal of Black Studies</i>
366.89	Black Scholar	366.89	162.34
303.65	Journal of Black Studies	303.65	303.65
253.49	Journal of Black Psychology	253.49	105.48
102.76	American Journal of Sociology	102.76	16.01
95.06	Social Forces	95.06	39.81
86.06	Journal of Marriage & the Family	86.06	9.75
79.21	Review of Educational Research	79.21	13.04
53.93	Journal of Personality & Social Psychology	53.93	4.24
44.58	Ethnic & Racial Studies	24.37	44.58
38.55	Social Science Quarterly	17.36	38.55
38.41	Sociological Quarterly	38.41	18.36
31.39	Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology	28.8	31.39
22.26	Journal of Youth & Adolescence	14.91	22.26
6.89	American Journal of Public Health	6.89	4.92

Two values are given in the R (relatedness) column: [journal]>j Citations from [journal] to related journal; and j>[journal] Citations from related journal to [journal]. The higher of these two values appears in the R_{\max} column. Journals in the table are ranked according to the R_{\max} value. Journals at the top of the table are more likely to have a strong subject connection to the journal identified at the top of the page than journals at the bottom of the table.

Citations for Black Studies journals increased 231% from 1988 to 2008, growing from 38 to 88 citations. Overall, *Journal of Black Studies* authors are responsible for 71% of citations to Black Studies journals (90 of 126 citations) compared to 29% for *Black Scholar* authors (36 of 126 citations). While *Black Scholar* authors cite Black Studies journals 14% of the time, the same for both 1988 and 2008 (18 of 126 citations), *Journal of Black Studies* authors increase references from 16% in 1988 (20 of 126 citations) to 56% in 2008 (70 of 126 citations).

While Black Studies scholars are citing Black Studies journals with great frequency, they are also citing traditional disciplinary journals much of the time. *Journal of Black Studies* authors reference traditional disciplinary journals more often than *Black Scholar* authors. For both 1988 and 2008, *Journal of Black Studies* authors cite traditional disciplinary journals 371 times, whereas *Black Scholar* authors made 36 references. *Journal of Black Studies* authors are responsible for 91% of citations to traditional disciplinary journals (371 of 407 citations), whereas *Black Scholar* authors are only responsible for 9% (36 of 407). *Black Scholar* citations to traditional disciplinary journals increased 227% (from 11 to 25 citations) from 1988 to 2008, while *Journal of Black Studies* citations increased 209% (from 120 to 251 citations).

Journal of Black Studies authors tend to have strong connections to the social sciences. For the 2007/2008 sample period, *Journal of Black Studies* authors cite traditional disciplinary journals 251 times. Twenty-five of the 104 most cited traditional disciplinary journals account for 52% of the references. These include the *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, *American Sociological Review*, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, *Journal of Health and Human Behavior*, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Journal of Politics*, *Journal of Social Psychology*, *Law and Society Review*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Social Forces*, and *Social Science Quarterly*.

Similar evidence is available from ISI journal citation reports. Data for the *Journal of Black Studies* are provided in Table 2. ISI did not include a journal citation report for the *Black Scholar*. Table 2 indicates that the *Journal of Black Studies* is strongly related to two other Black Studies journals; the *Black Scholar* and the *Journal of Black Psychology*. The table also depicts relatively strong relationships between the *Journal of Black Studies* and several traditional disciplinary journals. The more limited citation from the traditional disciplinary journals back to the *Journal of Black Studies* correlate somewhat to a fact mentioned earlier; namely, Ivy League Black Studies scholars tend to publish in traditional disciplinary journals. It so happens that these scholars also cite Black Studies journals considerably less than they cite traditional disciplinary journals.³³

CONCLUSION

This article began by establishing that there have been different criteria for determining Black Studies core journals over time. In particular, the meaning of the concept shifts acutely during the 1980s. Since the 1980s, the Afrocentric paradigm governs what counts as a core journal in Black Studies. The numerous Black Studies core journal lists appearing in print and on library Web sites are heavily influenced by the Afrocentric paradigm. Second, although traditional disciplinary journals are not privileged as Black Studies core journals under this paradigm, some remain vital to Black Studies under alternative paradigms.

A perusal of the journal references taken for the 1988 and 2008 snapshots reveal that two rather different kinds of core journal lists are possible. The first of these only includes Black Studies titles; namely, *African American Research Perspectives*, *Black History Bulletin*, *Black Scholar*, *Black World*, *Callaloo*, *Freedomways*, the *Griot*, *Jamaica Journal*, the *Journal (Society for the Study of Black Philosophy)*, *Journal of African American History*, *Journal of African American Men*, *Journal of Afro-American Issues*, *Journal of Black Psychology*, *Journal of Black Studies*, *Journal of Negro Education*, *Journal of Pan African Studies*,

National Political Science Review, New England Journal of Black Studies, Opportunity, Phylon, Research in African Literatures, Review of Black Political Economy, Umoja, Urban League Review, and the Western Journal of Black Studies. Although useful in terms of documenting journals produced in the field and directing researchers to the proper journal brand, the exclusively Afrocentric core journal list is misleading. Because traditional disciplinary journals are excluded important resources are arbitrarily eliminated from the prospective researcher's purview. And, unfortunately, these lists do not come with a caveat indicating that such a state of affairs obtains.

The second kind of list combines frequently cited Black Studies and traditional disciplinary journals. The usefulness of a bibliometric core list is in its capacity to identify trends in interdisciplinarity.³⁴ A list derived from the 1988 and 2008 snapshots can be found in the Appendix A to this article. The facts are that traditional disciplinary journals are referenced at a great deal in Black Studies literature and the bibliometric list succeeds at capturing the esteem which scholars have for such material. Traditional disciplinary journals, which were privileged prior to the Afrocentric paradigm in Black Studies, somehow have remained valued and privileged within Black Studies as a whole. A covering narrative (that is, a theoretical or explanatory context) making sense of why some traditional disciplinary journals should be regarded as Black Studies core journals is presented below.

“The facts are that traditional disciplinary journals are referenced a great deal in Black Studies literature and the bibliometric list succeeds at capturing the esteem which scholars have for such material.”

Depending with whom one speaks, Black Studies is interdisciplinary in the sense that it is a single discipline which explores aspects of the Black experience from an Afrocentric perspective; or it is a multi-disciplinary composite of several subfields from traditional disciplines.³⁵ Often Black Studies scholars operate on both sides of the divide, teaching within Black Studies programs as well as outside in other disciplines. They also publish in both Black Studies and traditional disciplinary journals.³⁶ It is unclear whether the paradigms (Afrocentric or Eurocentric) are consistently employed or used interchangeably, depending on the circumstances and/or audience. To be sure, the Afrocentric paradigm is not universally adopted.³⁷

A twenty-first century conception of the field takes Black Studies to be central to studies on race, class, and gender; particularly as these pertain to struggles for liberation and equality. Scholars such as John Walter describe this model of Black Studies in the following terms:

The content of African American Studies explains and responds to much in our history and our present-day struggles to realize our democratic aspirations. While examining the cultural, social, economic, and political realities of African American people, it simultaneously analyzes the black/white paradigm, the paradigm in which in the United States the racialization of other groups, domestic and international, is based. Thus it provides a necessary touchstone in scholarship and pedagogy for similar study of all ethnic groups.... In Black Studies' struggle with the interconnections of race, gender, and class, it models the beginnings of the difficult dialogues still needed among Black Studies, other Ethnic Studies, feminists, working class studies, transnational and global studies.³⁸

Accordingly, part and parcel of being central to investigations involving the interconnections of race, gender, and class is that Black Studies scholars are regular readers and contributors to the wide range of Black Studies, disciplinary, and progressive journals (e.g., *boundary 2, New Left Review, Radical History Review, Social Text*, etc.) publishing information on these issues. This is what it means for

scholars to be active in the kind of *scholarly communication infrastructure* or network envisaged by Cornel West earlier in this article. Because such a network is democratic and open, it stands to reason that the journals most frequently used by its members must belong to the Black Studies core.

APPENDIX A. SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at [doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2010.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2010.01.001).

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