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# The Politics of Ethnic Studies, Cultural Centers, and Student Activism: The Voices of Black Women at the Academic Borderlands

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The Politics of Ethnic Studies, Cultural Centers, and Student Activism:

The Voices of Black Women at the Academic Borderlands


by


Frederick Smith


A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education


2018

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are several people I would like to acknowledge. They all played important roles in the development of this dissertation and in my educational journey.

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**DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my ancestors and family – past, present, and future – for unconditional love and support for my academic and personal aspirations. Thanks to my mom (Sandra Smith), dad (Fred Smith), sister (Monica Smith), and the entire village in Detroit, Indianapolis, Chicago, and Los Angeles, who have influenced my life and made me the scholar I am today. I hope to always make you proud.

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# ABSTRACT

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Through employing critical narratives, this qualitative study examined the experiences of Black women who utilized their scholarship and activism to address campus climates at a predominantly Chicanx Latinx institution in Southern California. Six Black women – two faculty, two staff, and two students – participated in the study. All participants were active with Ethnic Studies (Pan-African Studies), the campus Cross Cultural Centers, and Black Student Union student organization in some capacity. Literature on the three areas focuses on the history of and ongoing struggle to exist, significance to campus life, and meaning in the lives of marginalized and minoritized communities. The study used three frameworks: Critical Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminist and Black Womanist Theory to analyze the critical narratives of the women. Findings revealed Black women integrate community issues into their professional and personal lives, experience rare moments of being celebrated, and must contend with intentional efforts to silence their voices and activism. This study, informed by the Ethnic Studies politics of higher education, contributes to this field by identifying how Black women activists contribute to the moral and ethical leadership of campus climate conversations.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*For many smart students from backgrounds that are marginalized by race, class, geography, sexual preference, or some combination, college continues to be a place of disconnection.*

bell hooks (2003, p. 177)

This dissertation is a critical narrative and analysis of a social phenomenon, where neoliberalism and the university, Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, student activism (inspired by Black Lives Matter activism), and the voices of Black women in higher education intersect at the academic borderlands in higher education. Academic borderlands is a concept that adds to what Anzaldúa (1987) called the Borderlands, "referring to an intellectual terrain of struggle where the mixing of cultures, philosophies, theories, and everyday practices of life (that) defy" (Darder, 2016, p. 42) "the transcendent character of the canon because its exclusions – notably of women and people of color – market it as the product of white male imagination" (Aronowitz, 1991, p. 205). Intellectuals at the academic borderlands are those "within the university, whose scholarship seeks to explicitly challenge longstanding structural inequalities and social exclusions" (Darder, 2012, p. 412).

The confluence of these areas affecting Black women faculty, staff, and students in higher education is the impetus for this study. First, higher education in the United States is facing significant challenges from campus and community members around issues of institutional and systemic inequities related to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other

1

identity/affinity markers. Second, community activism initiated by Black millennials and the #BlackLivesMatter movement has influenced a spirit of campus activism and speaking truth to power on college campuses by Black students. Third, neoliberalism and its effect on the university agenda related to Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, student activism, and Black students – specifically Black women at the university – has masked the White supremacist roots of this cunning form of capitalism, which seeks to guide – in the case of this dissertation – Black women university students, staff, and faculty concerned about institutional and systemic inequities away from the politics of resistance.

Finally, Black women university students, staff, and faculty who choose the politics of resistance and work as border intellectuals in the academic borderlands (Darder, 2012) in the quest for more socially just and equitable institutional and systemic policies and practices in-and-out of the classroom, often may find themselves facing the negative impact of neoliberalism by being relegated and confined to the academic margins of the university. These borderland practitioners and "radical scholars can find themselves exiled from meaningful participation in the evolution of university programs and departments by an antidemocratic wave that silences and banishes their contributions to the wasteland of irrelevancy" (Darder, 2012, p. 422). Despite the persistence of this phenomenon over the last three decades, there continues to be a dearth of research examining Black women faculty, staff, or students in higher education who find themselves at the academic borderlands. This study looks at their voices and helps give light to their stories and experiences in higher education in the United States.

Although I am not a Black woman, I am connected to this study as a self-identified border intellectual who sits at numerous intersections within my personal and professional life,

where the needs and conditions faced by Black women have had a significant impact on my life in a variety of ways. I am a working class Black man who grew up in a working-class family in Detroit. I am a first-generation scholar-practitioner who is new to the higher education academy, both as a student and a professional. I earned an undergraduate degree at University of Missouri, where I experienced many of the same racial microaggressions and bias experiences that Black students would confront at Mizzou in Fall 2015.

My undergraduate involvement in the Black Culture Center at University of Missouri led to my enrolling in my first formal Black Studies classes in higher education. I say "first" and "formal" because my K–12 experience in Detroit Public Schools was very Black focused – 90% Black teachers, inclusion of Black narratives and history throughout most classes, and an ethic of care by my Black teachers driven by a post–Civil Rights and Black-empowerment narrative. The dual involvement in the Black Culture Center and Black Studies classes at University of Missouri connected me to Black student organizations (and, soon, to other identity-based and social-justice-focused campus organizations) and leadership opportunities on campus. The academic and personal awakening I experienced – being able to have my personal experiences and identities linked with academic knowledge – opened my eyes to the stories that my parents and grandparents often shared of their experiences with Jim Crow and other formal and informal discrimination, racism, and bias in their personal and professional lives.

This consciousness raising, combined with my eventual enrollment in classes on women, gender, sexuality, and feminism, opened my eyes even more to the multiple oppressions that women of color – specifically Black women – experience in overt and covert ways in their personal and professional lives. Hearing the stories of Black women in my classes reinforced the

stories I often heard my mother – a high school graduate who didn't own her own car until she was in her 30s – and my grandmother – who worked as a housekeeper during the Jim Crow era for a White family in Indiana and who never earned more than $800 a month in her life – share about the struggles and challenges of life at the intersection, as Black, women, and as Black women.

Additionally, as a student affairs professional in Higher Education, I have sat in meetings where no Black women colleagues are present. I have witnessed non-Black faculty and staff exhibit an outright disrespect and disdain for their Black women colleagues, public comments, often negative, disparaging, and by name, about Black women faculty, staff, or students were made based on both so-called "professional" or personal feelings or disagreements with their Black women colleagues. Concurrently, Black women faculty, staff, and students have confided, formally and informally, the ways in which they have experienced race, gendered, and race-gendered microaggressions and hostility from primarily non-Black (though sometimes Black) faculty, staff, and students.

Hence, my personal, professional, and academic interest in, and empathy for, the struggles of Black women in the United States connects to some of the identity intersections I consider salient to my life experience. At the same time, I admire the apparent resilience, coping strategies, and survival skills Black women utilize to resist and make sense of the spaces they occupy. Some of their strategies and survival skills also echo aspects of those that I, too, have had to utilize working in academics and student affairs, and navigating a racialized and homophobic world that does not often deal with intersecting identities well.

A self-proclaimed border intellectual, I am a student affairs practitioner – one who assists "students with learning and growth opportunities outside of the classroom environment" (Ardoin, 2014, p. 5) – who serves as a director of a campus cultural center and who frequently collaborates with faculty in numerous disciplines to facilitate in-and-out-of-class learning opportunities. One of the most reliable and consistent partners I have had are the faculty who specialize in area, ethnic, and women's, gender, and sexuality studies, academic areas that often sit at the academic borderlands in higher education (Darder, 2012, 2016; Fisk, 2005). As a student affairs practitioner working in a department at the academic borderlands, and who works closely with border intellectuals and faculty who sit at the academic borderlands, I situate myself fully as a border intellectual who rejects the position of being an "opportunistic careerists who remain completely untroubled by the burdens of complicated thought and the fight for ethical and political responsibility" (Giroux, 2014, p. 79). Hence, my personal, professional, and academic identification with and participation within the academic borderlands situate my passion and commitment to this research topic and study.

## Statement of the Problem

The writings of bell hooks (2003), Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015), and Michael J. Dumas (2016) provide a critical lens for educational leaders to consider the ways K–12 and institutions of Higher Education (and individuals who practice within these institutions) perpetuate norms, practices, and policies that harm marginalized student populations, specifically Black college students. Historical exclusion of people of color on college campuses has created long-term and present-day practices that affect how students feel, persist, and succeed at higher education institutions (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). These students –

specifically Black women students – may often feel like guests on their college campuses, may not see themselves as full members of the campus community, and may not see their identities or interests reflected in the institution (Turner, 1994). Collins (1986) and Wilder, Jones, and Osborne-Lampkin (2013) posed that Black women faculty and staff in Higher Education, like Black women students, share experiences of isolation on college campuses, often occupying spaces as "outsiders-within" the academy as "marginalized intellectuals" (Collins, 1986, p. S15) who "live on the margins of white society, specifically in higher education" (Wilder et al., p. 28). These conditions have been exacerbated over the last 30 years as neoliberal policies began to shift the political landscape of the university toward a so-called post-race context.

**The Neoliberalism University**

Harvey (2005), Lipman (2011), and Saunders (2010) posed that since the 1970s, neoliberalism has become the dominant hegemony, and "the most dangerous ideology" (Giroux, 2002, p. 428) in the United States, and perhaps the world. The term neoliberalism refers to a set of intertwined economic, government, social, and political ideologies, policies, and practices that play out on individual and institutional levels with a goal of creating capital gain and profits for the corporate and owning classes (Bok, 2003; Jones & Ward, 2002; Plehwe, Walpen, & Neunhoffer, 2006; Saad-Filho & Johnson, 2005). Neoliberalism restricts the role of the state, and promotes, in place of and with "active interaction" by the state (Lipman, 2011, p. 9), the role of corporate, commercial, and business, in privatizing public social programs such as welfare, social security, labor unions and regulations, environmental safeguards, housing, jobs, public space, and education (Harvey, 2003; Lefebvre, 1968/1996; Lipman, 2011; McCarthy & Prudham, 2004; Saunders, 2010).

While neoliberalism actively centers on the union of public and corporate interests, it also markets the notion that the role of the individual is central: as a personal economy (Lemke, 2001; Saunders, 2010); as having personal "freedom," "choice," and "individual rights" (Lipman, 2011, p. 8); as having logic to decide, in economic terms, the cost-benefit analysis and rationality of their choices (Lemke, 2001; Saunders, 2010); as having the ability to take care of themselves (Dumas, 2015); as responsible for their own individual successes, based on their own hard work, merit, and natural abilities (Fitzsimmons, 2002; Saunders, 2010); and as consumers (Giroux, 2005).

The meritocratic centering of the individual as personally responsible for his or her successes is what Giroux (2011) termed "the politics of economic Darwinism . . . a theatre of cruelty" (p. 165), attributed their failures as "sanctioned by God or exists simply as an extension of nature" (p. 165), and "places an emphasis on winning at all costs, a ruthless competitiveness, hedonism, the cult of individualism, and . . . that abstracts economics and markets from ethical considerations" (Giroux, 2010, p. 185). Darder (2012), furthermore, asserted that economic Darwinism, an extension of neoliberal practice and policy, supports "the survival of the fittest" (p. 414) within society and specifically in higher education.

Numerous scholars have explored the connection between neoliberalism and its manifestation in higher education (Bosquet, 2008; Darder, 2012, 2015a, 2016; Dumas, 2013, 2015; Giroux, 2002, 2005, 2010, 2011, 2014; Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Nichol, 2013; Saunders, 2010). The initial growth of neoliberalism, or the need to embrace its ideologies, practices, and policies, in higher education can be attributed to decreases in state budget allocations to public colleges and universities (Giroux, 2010; Levin, 2005). The divestment in higher education by

state legislatures since the 1980s, influenced by the neoliberal tenet that an affordable education at a public college or university was, in fact, no longer a public right, but a private good or product to be purchased by students, that is, customers/consumers (Chaffee, 1998; Darder, 2016; Lohmann, 2004; Saunders, 2010; Wellen, 2005), pushed college administrators to scramble for ways to keep their budgets afloat and campuses funded by seeking private donors and funds from wealthy individuals, corporations, foundations, or, ironically, the government, via military investment, in institutional and faculty research agendas (Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux, 2002, 2014; Giroux & Giroux, 2004).

These factors resulted in higher education shifting from a culture of civic discourse and critical thinking to adopting a corporate culture of economic rule and deceptive post-race notions (Darder, 2016), mimicking business models and hierarchical structures of operation and decision making, in which:

- College presidents are known more for their roles as CEOs, ribbon cutters, and fundraisers, rather than for their intellectual leadership (Giroux, 2002);

- Management and business skills are emphasized over critical leadership and vision for social justice (Darder, 2016; Giroux, 2002);

- Labor costs are controlled by hiring part-time, untenured, instructors to teach undergraduate courses, while reducing the number of full-time, tenure-track faculty positions available, which shifts the balance of university governance from faculty to administrators (Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux, 2002, 2014);

- Universities create new, and formerly nonexisting, administrator titles and positions contributing to "the rise of a bloated managerial class" (Giroux, 2014, p. 16), which

serves to control and "fashion compliant workers" (Giroux, 2002, p. 429) within academia;

- Universities franchise and sell themselves, essentially, to the highest bidder by "brand naming" buildings and endowed chairs in exchange for donations (Giroux, 2002, p. 435);

- University administrators, in essence, become "beholden to big sports" (Giroux, 2014, p. 106) and the fact they "make big money . . . (and) also engage in a number of interlocking campus relationships with private-sector corporations" (Giroux, 2014, p. 111), which, in turn, assures a related campus culture of silence around social injustice related to male privilege, violence, sexual assault, and more within campus athletics (Giroux, 2014);

- Academic affairs divisions emphasize the function of faculty as contributors to the campus economic machine as entrepreneurs, grant writers, and fundraisers, making the duties almost as important as what was once the primary role of faculty as educators and critical thinkers while issues of diversity are marginalized (Darder, 2016; Giroux, 2002, 2010; Saunders, 2010; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Higher education, in its quest to meet the needs of business, corporate, and wealthy, ruling-class donors, as well as its career-seeking students/consumers, has shifted from a culture of civic well-being and the generation of human understanding to a culture that privileges creating the next generation of workers (Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux, 2010; Saunders, 2010). College students, eagerly, and perhaps, blindly and unknowingly, embrace their roles as consumers "who can choose among a variety of products" (Darder, 2016, p. 42), often selecting

a route in higher education, as Brule (2004) and Saunders (2010) asserted, "less focused on learning… and more interested in obtaining the credential" (Saunders, p. 63).

While emphasizing corporate values, business models, and financial profits in higher education, neoliberalism also pushes a shift in curricular focus from liberal arts, critical pedagogy, and democratic education to "a bare pedagogy" (Giroux, 2010), one focused on producing workers for the corporate workplace instead of scholars, through an exclusive emphasis on job and skill training, and compelling students to be careerists instead of critical thinkers (Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux, 2010, 2014). Giroux (2011) argued that the emphasis on training for a job over education for critical thought has ushered in "the age of the disappearing intellectual" (p. 163), influenced by "celebrity culture and the commodification of culture, both of which now create a powerful form of mass illiteracy" (p. 167) that causes "large segments of the population . . . from connecting the dots between their own personal troubles and larger societal problems" (p. 165).

Consequently, neoliberalism, as described by Giroux (2002), is "the most dangerous ideology of the current historical moment" (p. 428), posing a direct threat to the survival of Ethnic Studies in higher education as "those areas of study that don't translate into substantial profits get either marginalized, underfunded, or eliminated . . . because their role in the market will be judged as ornamental" (p. 434). The threat of university action against them, unfortunately, forces "some ethnic studies programs, for example . . . to dodge efforts of university administrators to terminate or undermine their future influence on the campus by compromising the historical vision and integrity of their emancipatory intellectual agenda" (Darder, 2012, p. 420).

Ethnic Studies, which seek, essentially, to connect the dots in multiple areas of students'

academic lives and their lived experiences, "create political links between the classroom,

campus, and community" (Darder, 2012, p. 422), now sit on the academic borderlands in the

neoliberal university, as they provide space to question and challenge, rather than promote and

embrace values, policies, and practices inherent to neoliberalism. Additionally, where

neoliberalism explicitly promotes privatization and profits for some, Ethnic Studies departments,

and borderland scholars who teach in these political and liberating disciplines, seek to challenge

social isolation and longstanding social inequalities.

**Struggles in the Academic Borderlands**

As counter-revolutionary tensions, spurred on in particular by conservative proponents of

neoliberalism within and outside the university escalated, the so-called "cultural wars" (D'Souza,

1991; Steele, 1991, 1992) erupted within the academy. As a consequence, this animosity pushed

the scholarship of various Ethnic Studies scholars, including Black studies scholars to the

borders or academic borderlands. About this phenomenon, Darder (2012) asserted:

> As border intellectuals were transgressing positivist boundaries in a variety of traditional
>
> disciplines, rising neoliberal imperatives were making their way into the university just in
>
> time to conveniently push back, fiercely, against critical interventions initiated by [Ethnic
>
> Studies and Black] intellectuals—whose projects were precisely designed to challenge
>
> the structures of inequality and reinvigorate the democratic potential of higher education.
>
> In many colleges and universities, administrators strategically defused so-called cultural
>
> wars and attempted to whitewash the borderlands by imposing cries of fiscal exigencies

to cut programs, institute hiring freezes, harass tenured radical faculty, reject tenure cases, and move to eliminate entire departments. (p. 419)

Consequently, in addition to ongoing political attacks within higher education, Ethnic Studies and, in particular, Black Studies departments faced external attacks and backlash during the 1980s and 1990s Culture Wars, an ideology that Nichol (2013) connected with neoliberalism and described as "an emerging political force that brought together conservative political philanthropy with corporate money support with the aim of undermining and dismantling any curricula and discourse that challenged 'American culture and values'" (p. 653).

**Culture Wars**. Moreover, Stafancic and Delgado (1996) argued that the roots of the Culture Wars in the 1980s and 1990s were historically connected to the 1960s, a time when, Nichol (2013) asserted, "conservatives with links to American big business quietly created a network of interlocking political organizations" (p. 656). In the 1970s, conservative angst focused on what Edwards (1997) called "a broad attack on the free enterprise system" (p. 17), and prompted Lewis Powell's private memo, aptly titled, "Attack on the Free Enterprise System" (1971) to U.S. business and government leaders urging them to target four areas, including "academics, public media, the courts, and eventually elected office as sites for conservatives to challenge the expansion of liberalism" (Nichol, pp. 656–657).

Nichol (2013) further asserted that Powell's call for conservative activism against liberal thought in society, specifically higher education and Ethnic Studies, was the start of an "economic social order . . . funneling millions of dollars into the nation's colleges and universities to respond to criticism of the free enterprise system" (p. 657). Eventually, conservative think tanks like the National Association of Scholars (NAS), the Madison Center

for Educational Affairs (MCEA), and the Institute for Educational Affairs (IEA) (Nichol, 2013, p. 655), funded by millions of dollars from U.S. businesses (Callahan, 1995) and philanthropies, "most notably the Olin, Bradley, Scaife, Coors and Smith Richardson foundations" (Nichol, p. 662; Schultz, 1993) and the Heritage Foundation (Edwards, 1997), funneled their time and effort into pushing Culture Wars on college campuses. The think tanks, historically and present day, sponsor speakers, newspapers, academic journals, student organizations, and more to challenge Ethnic Studies, and the scholars and practitioners at the academic borderlands who engage the campus in critical thought, liberatory pedagogy, and culturally relevant curricula (Darder, 2012, Giroux, 2002, 2014; Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Nichol, 2013; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Neoliberalism and conservative critiques aligned historically, and align presently, specifically in their targeted attacks on Black Studies and Ethnic Studies as a whole. In the 1960s, initially labeled as "radicalized Black politics" (Schuparra, 2003, p. 100) during the San Francisco State protests for Ethnic Studies, California Governor Ronald Reagan, de facto leader of the California State University Board and Trustees, asserted a determination to "clamp down on radicals at any cost" (McEvoy & Miller, 1969, p. 14), while also sending a message to the public that Black activists' demands for Civil Rights, Voting Rights, and Ethnic Studies were attempts to take control of state's universities through violent means. Reagan's popularity in some circles, for his zero-tolerance policy of student activism and in challenging liberalism in California public higher education, caught the eye of conservatives concerned that Ethnic Studies were a threat to college campuses with claims that "the humanities, and particularly the study of Western civilization, have lost their central place in the undergraduate curriculum" (Bennett, 1984, p. 1).

Furthermore, conservative scholars (Bloom, 1987; D'Souza, 1991; Kimball, 1990; Steele, 1991, 1992) in the 1980s and 1990s took aim not only at Ethnic Studies and Black Studies, "but also to Women's and Gender Studies, Sexuality Studies, Marxism, structuralism, and poststructuralist scholars" (Darder, 2012, p. 416), borderland scholars who were, as Kimball (1990) asserted, "yesterday's student radical is today's tenured professor or academic dean" (p. xiv), and, as such, "our campuses are littered with political agitators" (p. xiv) as the establishment in higher education. Similarly, Bennett posed that 1960s activists were, "threatening a precious American heritage in the name of a more inclusive curriculum" (Schultz, 1993, p. 10).

In the 1990s, conservative backlash to Ethnic Studies, particularly Black Studies, grew more vocal as Black and non-Black academics, with no expertise or academic grounding in the field, such as Bloom (1987), D'Souza (1991), and Steele (1991, 1992), argued that Black Studies did not have a role in higher education. D'Souza (1991) and Steele (1991, 1992), leading Culture Wars spokespersons, and financial beneficiaries of conservative think tanks including Olin, Bradley, and Heritage Foundations, served on Project 51, a Black conservative speaker circuit, in the 1990s. Steele (1991), a Black scholar who reached a professional peak in the 1990s, utilized many of the same arguments against Black Studies that White academics used in the 1970s, asserting that Black Studies, "was a bogus concept from the beginning because it was an idea grounded in politics, not in a particular methodology" (p. 1). D'Souza (1991) argued that Black Studies was an academic area grounded more in politics than intellect and, like Steele (1991), reduced Black Studies to a "feel good" gesture given to Black students in higher education out of liberal White guilt. Today, many so-called good-spirited administrators in higher education, who

"have never lived in poverty, experienced racism, or studied the scholarship in the field"
(McIntosh, 1988), find themselves in alignment with their 1990s conservative counterparts, and
oppose the existence of Ethnic Studies (and Cultural Centers) on their campuses.

**Politics of Resistance**

Despite historical and ongoing internal/academic and external/conservative attacks,
Ethnic Studies and Black Studies departments survived, and continue to survive, partly due to
their ability to navigate and resist tension between becoming coopted by neoliberal, capitalist
agendas (Anderson, 1990; Darder, 2012, 2016; Nichol, 2013**)** and remaining true to their original
purpose of posing "a powerful challenge to dominant paradigms and assumptions of traditional
academic practices – specifically, texts grounded in Eurocentric history and preconceptions"
(Hu-DeHart, 1995, p. 28).

Still, the politics of Black Studies, and all other academic areas and scholars focused on
decolonizing the curriculum, exist and "find themselves today more marginalized at the very
moment when their scholarly and political maturity might serve to more effectively challenge
current inequalities, as well forge a more promising democratic vision" (Darder, 2016, p. 53).
Currently, many so-called good-spirited or well-meaning faculty, staff, and administrators in
higher education find themselves aligned, whether by personal conservative belief or fear of
legal repercussions from the religious and political right, with conservative praxis and neoliberal
thought that substitutes "diversity and inclusion rhetoric for transformative efforts to promote
equity and justice" (Stewart, 2017, p. 3). Darder (2016) argued that the "rhetorical call for the
'diversity of ideas'" used to justify challenges to the liberatory work of Ethnic Studies

departments, "subterfuge pressing concerns over social and material inequities and institutional disregard for establishing a cultural democratic environment" (p. 44).

**Protesting Racism in a Neoliberal World**

Most recently, two major national Black protests that have significance for this study emerged out of the university context, in response to the negative impact of racism tied to neoliberal policies with the university and the society at large. The first was the protests that began at the University of Missouri (#concernedstudent1950) and the second was the Black Lives Matter (#blacklivesmatter).

***#concernedstudent1950***

In Fall 2015, student protests kicked off at University of Missouri – Mizzou. The #ConcernedStudent1950 protests at Mizzou began after numerous incidents of overt and covert racism, bias, and microaggressions aimed at Black students, staff, and faculty (Ampofo, 2016; Brooks, 2016; White, 2016). Jonathan Butler, a graduate student at Mizzou, and an active participant in Black Lives Matter in nearby Ferguson, Missouri, initiated the Mizzou protests. The students' concerns, and the university's response, connect directly with the concepts of neoliberalism, corporate and economic interests guiding the values of higher education, and the university's relationship with students, staff, and faculty who sit at the academic borderlands (Darder, 2016; Giroux, 2014). Initially ignored by campus administrators, the movement on the Mizzou campus got a boost when the school's Black football players decided collectively not to play the sport until university officials met the demands of #ConcernedStudent1950.

Mizzou administrators, fearing the economic threat to campus – as "money from big sports programs has an enormous influence on shaping agendas within the university" (Giroux,

2014, p. 112) – eventually met with and fulfilled some of the students' demands, including the resignation of the campus chancellor and system-wide president. The response from Mizzou administrators has been characterized as "an economic decision rather than a moral or ethical one" (Darder, 2016, p. 43) and reinforced the assertion that, in higher education, "matters of leadership and accountability within neoliberalism and corporate culture in general rarely include broader considerations of ethics, equity, and justice" (Giroux, 2002, p. 440).

Led by Black students with informal and advisory support from Black women faculty and staff, and rooted in the politics of resistance, the campus protests followed the lead of the nationwide and simultaneous Black Lives Matter platform, speaking truth to power, developing collaborative and inclusive campus coalitions, and demanding institutional change for inclusive and equitable campus environments for Black students, staff, and faculty. At least 100 U.S. universities were sites of Black student protests from Fall 2015 to Spring 2016, where Black students issued demands of campus administrators (www.demands.org) to address systemic and structural racism on their campuses. Some of the demands included support for more Black faculty and staff hires, initiatives to recruit and retain Black students on campuses, increased support for Ethnic Studies and Cultural Centers, which had long been "under scrutiny and attack by the reactionary forces of the academic community" (Young, 2005, p. 147), and the resignation of campus officials deemed anti-Black and unresponsive to the needs of Black students, staff, and faculty. The Black student protests mirrored the passion of #BlackLivesMatter protests off campus and on social media.

*#blacklivesmatter*

The event that birthed the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was the *State of Florida v. George Zimmerman* case. It began first as a hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter, that Patrice Cullors wrote on social media (Khan-Cullors & Bandele, 2017; Ross, 2015) just prior to the July 2013 not-guilty verdict, which exonerated George Zimmerman, a White-identified Latino man, legally, for the February 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager. Much of the trial focused on race and the morality of the victim, Trayvon Martin (Botelho & Yan, 2013; Garza, 2013). Following the verdict and subsequent/simultaneous online conversations, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi co-founded the Black Lives Matter movement to address what the BLM website calls "virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society."

Black Lives Matter, which currently has close to 40 chapters across the United States and Canada (BlackLivesMatter.com/find-chapters), prides itself upon being decentralized, leaderless, yet leader-full, meaning that there are several leaders rather than just one (Aron, 2016; Cobb, 2016; Hamilton, 2016). The organizational leadership style is reflective of a Black feminist/Black womanist model of leadership first introduced by Alice Walker (1983). Black womanism emphasizes a flat, horizontal, and nonhierarchical way of operating that sees and develops leadership in each person involved in the organization and is rooted in Black women's ways of being (Abdullah, 2007; Abdullah & Freer, 2007; Collins, 2000; Walker, 1983). The womanist model emphasizes "the 'leader' to see herself as part of a movement, rather than the movement itself; as a result, womanist leaders are community-connected and tend to see their formal positions as extensions of grassroots movements" (Abdullah & Freer, 2007, p. 97). One of the benefits of a leaderless and leader-full organization is that it challenges the "necessity for

that leader to be the one who's the spokesperson and the organizer, who tells the masses where to go, rather than the community" (Cobb, 2016).

**Black Womanist/Feminist Leadership**

Abdullah and Freer (2007) asserted that the Black Womanist/Feminist leadership framework, model, and praxis operate in direct opposition to, and rejection of, traditional establishment and governmental models of leadership, which have emphasized normal, hegemonic functioning of neoliberal leadership – individuality, capitalism, hierarchy, White supremacy, and maintenance of the status quo. In addition to embracing a liberatory and empowering leadership praxis, Brewer (2011) contended that the Black Womanist/Feminist model serves the academic and community needs of Black women, asserting that "fighting back requires not only our scholarship, but movement-building for social change" and that "theory and action cannot be delinked" (p. 152).

In addition to being grounded in Black womanist leadership framework, Black Lives Matter challenges patriarchy, emphasizes intersectionality, includes women, queer, disabled, and transgender identities, embraces confrontation and using the body/taking to the streets, and rejects, unapologetically, the notion of respectability politics that some elders, particularly Black elders and establishment leaders, embrace as a way to make change (Cobb, 2016; Hamilton, 2016; White, 2016).

The leadership characteristics described in aforementioned paragraphs appeal to millennials – especially millennials of color, who, like their fellow Black Lives Matter founders, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, desire collectivity, flexibility, and group consensus in their quest for change from establishment ways of being (Chou, 2012; Emeagwali,

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2011). Millennials of color activists, born between 1980 and 1995, came of age during the great recession of the late 2000s. They have witnessed the policies of neoliberal economics affect their parents and families in terms of fragile employment, unemployment rates double those of their White counterparts, stagnant wages, housing and mortgage foreclosures, and debt associated with assuming student loans in order to pay for the rising costs of postsecondary education (Giroux, 2014).

Millennials are also a generation directly affected by neoliberal policies such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, which emphasized testing, achievement scores, and less focus on critical thinking in education (Dumas, 2014; Giroux, 2014; Goldstein, 2014; Lipman, 2011; White, 2016). Millennials of color came of age in a time when they have seen their local public schools closed and replaced with semi-private charter schools (Lipman, 2011; Oakes & Rogers, 2006), seen an increase in policing, discipline, and surveillance in their schools (Alexander, 2012; Anderson, 2016b; Lipman, 2011; Morris, 2016), and witnessed the mass firings of their teachers – many of whom are Black women (Goldstein, 2014; Lipman, 2011; Rizga, 2016) – under the neoliberal guise of school improvement, achievement, and student success.

As a result of witnessing a cross-section of neoliberal policies affecting their lives and those of their peers, millennial leaders – and those of marginalized and minoritized identities – have embraced a solidarity politics of intersectionality (Hancock, 2011). Hancock posed that millennials' embrace of solidarity politics challenges "oppression Olympics" (i.e., a comparison of whose oppression warrants greater attention, thus rendering invisible those not warranting attention), while also exhibiting a leadership of interdependence that is akin to characteristics of Black Feminist and Black Womanist leadership tenets.

**Ethnic Studies as a Response to Campus Racism**

There are many scholars in higher education and elsewhere whose work helps to justify the academic and social effects and benefits of Ethnic, Gender, and Queer/LGBT Studies, particularly with respect to their capacity to address forthrightly experiences and issues directly related to campus racism.

**Contending with race-gendered challenges**. Within higher education, Black women faculty, staff, and students face numerous challenges, despite being the most educated demographic by race and gender in the United States, compared to women and men of other races and ethnicities in this country (Parker, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). These challenges include Black women being among the lowest paid and more likely to be overrepresented as staff (Bibler, 2015), or in the "ever increasing contingent of part-time faculty" (Giroux, 2014, p. 16) in the university setting. Simultaneously, Black women faculty, staff, and students face race-gendered microaggressions (Carter Andrews, 2015) in higher education.

Scholars (Patton & Catching, 2009; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001) have addressed race-gendered experiences that cause Black women students, staff, and faculty to "engage in daily warfare to enact a counter-hegemonic epistemology of scholarly identity" (Carter Andrews, 2015, p. 86)," and often without "the recognition that the achievements of working-class women of color required from us two or three or four times the amount of work to receive the same respect and recognition" (Darder, 2015) as White/male colleagues in the academy. Scholars (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Browne Huntt, 2013; Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry, & Allen, 2016; Steele, 1999) have theorized, using a microaggressions lens, the difficult experiences

Black women face on college campuses, the subsequent racial battle fatigue they endure, and the coping mechanisms they employ in their efforts to survive and succeed on college campuses.

In particular, Lewis et al. (2012) identified three major coping mechanisms: resistance coping strategies, collective coping strategies, and self-protective coping strategies. To feel safe and welcomed on their campuses, Black women students often turn to counterspaces such as campus Black Studies departments (Sleeter & National Education, 2011) and Black Culture Centers (Patton, 2006, 2010). These spaces promote student success and retention, and offer validation of students' lived experiences as women, people of color, working class, and other marginalized identities (Hurtado, Cuellar, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011; Rendón, 1994; Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Schlossberg, 1989; Toya, 2011; Welch, 2009).

As disciplines and departments at the academic borderlands (Darder, 2012), Ethnic Studies and Cultural Centers play an important role in the success, retention, and sense of community of Black students (Sleeter, 2011), as well as Black faculty and staff (Hord, 2005), whose campus lives fall at the intersection of these key entities. As spaces that embrace liberatory pedagogy, position teachers, staff, and students as co-creators of knowledge, promote an ethics of care, validation, and create the classroom and co-curricular conditions for liberation (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011), it is important to understand institutional environments and their influence on the social and academic experiences and outcomes of marginalized faculty, staff, and students in higher education. As such, this constitutes both a moral, and ethical imperative for social justice leaders. Moreover, engaging how, in particular, Black women faculty, staff, and students feel about their campus experiences within the politics of Cultural Centers, Ethnic Studies, and student activism and the combined impact of these programs upon

their campuses, can guide these institutions toward more just programming for Black women faculty, staff, students and other marginalized student populations.

**Benefits and effects of Ethnic Studies**. The research overwhelmingly has concluded that taking Ethnic, Gender, Queer/LBGT Studies courses has a positive impact on students' critical thinking skills, confidence, self-efficacy, academic achievement, and retention and graduation (Astin, 1993; Boxer, 1998; Denson, 2009; Engberg, 2004; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Sleeter, 2011). Knowledge of self as a historical being and cultural survivor, having their cultural realities and identities reflected in the curriculum, and having their own knowledge and experiences validated in the classroom are identified as factors in the success of students enrolled in Ethnic, Women's, and LGBT/Queer Studies courses (Boxer, 1998; Gurin et al., 2002; Sleeter, 2011). Sleeter presented three overlapping effects of Ethnic Studies courses on students, including academic engagement, academic achievement, and personal empowerment.

The effects of Ethnic, Gender, Queer/LGBT studies on students in higher education align with Freire's philosophy of conscientization—defined as "the development of the awakening of critical awareness" (Freire, 1983, in Darder, 2015, p. 80), and "the development of critical consciousness" (Darder et al, 2009, p. 24)—and transformation in the student experience as observed by bell hooks (2003), who asserted, "Significantly, Black Studies, Women's Studies, Cultural Studies, all disciplines that promoted a more holistic approach to learning, all disciplines that have placed value on the experiential, have been those disciplines that have most transformed teaching and learning in colleges" (p. 182).

## The Research Question

This study sought to better understand the extent to which neoliberalism and the university, Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, student activism, and the voices of Black women in higher education intersect at the academic borderlands in higher education. To this end, the two overarching research questions that guided this investigation include:

- What are the campus life experiences of Black women faculty, staff, and students?

- What do Black women faculty, staff, and students specifically say about being elevated or silenced at the academic borderlands of university life?

## Conceptual Lens

This study was rooted in a conceptual lens that is influenced by three distinct, yet somewhat related, theoretical frameworks– Critical Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminist/Black Womanist Theory.

### Critical Pedagogy

To address social justice, or, rather, social injustice, in institutions such as education, Critical Pedagogy "was founded upon philosophical traditions that critically interrogate the pedagogical interrelationships between culture, economics, ideology and power" (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009, p. 23), and which "seeks to contest mainstream practices of schooling and explore democratic strategies and interventions that can shift relations of power and alter meaning" (Darder et al., 2009, p. 23). The concept of Critical Pedagogy is relatively new within education, having first been used and defined by Giroux (1983) in the book *Theory and Resistance in Education*. Giroux's work built upon previous scholarship related to critical and progressive thought and how transforming educational experiences can lead to liberation for

oppressed and marginalized people (Dewey, 1916; DuBois, 1902; Freire, 1971; Woodson, 1933). Giroux asserted that Critical Pedagogy is a pedagogy of resistance and a political act aimed at ending social injustice in education settings and society at large.

Critical Pedagogy is an umbrella social justice theory, which seeks to raise social and political consciousness among both students and educators, linking the practice of schooling as crucial to democratizing principles of society, liberation, and transformative social action (Blackmore, 2013; Darder, 2015; Darder et al., 2009; Giroux, 2009). A liberatory pedagogy, moreover, Critical Pedagogy positions teachers and students as co-creators of knowledge and promotes an ethic of care, validation, and creates the classroom conditions for liberation (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011). To this end, Darder et al. (2009) asserted that Critical Pedagogy incorporates important philosophical principles that support emancipatory efforts in schools and communities, which include the following:

- *Cultural Politics*, which is "committed to the development and enactment of a culture of schooling that supports the empowerment of culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised students" (p. 9).

- *Political Economy*, which poses that "schools work against the class interests of those students who are most politically and economically vulnerable within society" (p. 10).

- *Historicity of Knowledge*, which "supports the notion that all knowledge is created within a historical context" (p. 10) and values the role and knowledge of students as historical beings and creators of history.

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- *Dialectical Theory*, which "unmasks the connections between objective knowledge and the cultural norms, values, and standards of the society at large" and "stresses the power of human activity and human knowledge as both a product and a force in shaping the world" (p. 11).

- *Ideology and Critique*, known as "a societal lens or framework of thought, used in society to create order and give meaning to the social and political world" (p. 11) and critiques how society mainstreams some knowledge and ostracizes others.

- *Hegemony* "refers to a process of social control" (p. 12) which values and normalizes dominant classes over subordinate classes.

- *Resistance and Counter-Hegemony,* refers to "intellectual and social spaces where power relationships are reconstructed to make central the voices and experiences of those who have historically existed at the margins of public institutions" (p. 12) and calls for educators to resist pressure to conform to the status quo.

- *Praxis* is "an on-going interaction of reflection, dialogue, and action" (p. 13) which calls for educators to engage in question-posing as they connect theory and practice in their liberation work.

- *Dialogue and Conscientization,* considered "one of the most significant aspects of critical pedagogy," in which "dialogue and analysis serve as the foundation for reflection and action" (p. 13) in which students learn from teachers and teachers learn from students.

Critical Pedagogy is an important theoretical framework that applies to this dissertation, given its focus on the liberatory processes engaged by Black women students, staff, and faculty

at the academic borderland in higher education. Darder (2016) noted the importance of Critical Pedagogy in leadership for social justice in higher education by arguing, "if it were not for the work of critical scholars in the academic borderlands, many of us would never have found an opportunity to flourish in the academy" (p. 68).

An essential connection to Critical Pedagogy is the concept of Critical Bicultural Pedagogy, first introduced by Darder (2012) in an effort to engage with greater specificity the conditions faced by racialized student populations. Biculturalism "speaks to the process wherein individuals learn to function in two distinct sociocultural environments: their primary culture, and that of the dominant mainstream culture" (Darder, 2012, p. 45). For Black women scholars, this may mean understanding their own self-identity as Black, women, and Black women, and also navigating the knowledge of those identities with life in academia that is dominated by whiteness, patriarchy, and White male patriarchy. In a world where Black women contend with and move through institutional power which seeks to dominate and subordinate their voices and lives, biculturalism addresses the process in which they may engage and enact survival strategies in subordinate-dominant, oppressed-oppressor dynamics. Critical biculturalism engages structural questions of culture and power, which acknowledges that people who negotiate subordinate-dominant culture dynamics are forced to develop survival skills in dominant mainstream settings "from necessity rather than choice" (Darder, 2012, p. 45). For Black women who embrace borderland scholarship and praxis, developing survival strategies and negotiating multiple cultures – their own and others' identities – within the campus setting is a reality posed and supported by Critical Bicultural Theory.

Within the discussion of critical biculturalism, it is important to note that scholars of color have pondered the question of self-identity as marginalized and minoritized people and navigating life within dominant mainstream ideology and praxis. DuBois (1902) defined the concept of *double consciousness* as Black people being forced to view themselves through the lens of White people and whiteness, while also maintaining their own sense of self and identity. The internal mental process of double consciousness poses, "an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence" (Gates & West, 1996, p. 86). Fanon (1967) built upon the work of DuBois and double consciousness, by analyzing liberation work, a colonized mindset and one's indigenous perspective, in which, "overnight, the Negro has been given two frames within which he has to place himself… (h)is customs… were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him" (p. 110). Audre Lorde (1984) introduced the idea of the "watcher," a sense of double consciousness in Black women in which they "become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection" (p. 114). Gwaltney (1980) explored the idea of two-ness, duality, and survival skills in the critical narratives of Black domestic workers, a process in which one worker described

> We have always been the best actors in the world . . . I think that we are much more
>
> clever than they because we know that we have to play the game. We've always had to
>
> live two lives – one for them and one for ourselves. (p. 238, 240)

It is noteworthy that Critical Bicultural Theory, double consciousness, and an analysis of colonialized and indigenous ways of being, among others that reference the idea of duality and awareness of self and others, have been explored primarily by scholars of color who, perhaps,

even struggle with their place within the academy around said issues. Their ideas will connect closely with the additional theoretical frameworks guiding the research of this project.

**Critical Race Theory**

In addressing racial, gender, and race-gendered microaggressions that Black women students, staff, and faculty who sit at the academic borderlands experience, the Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework connects with this dissertation. Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1995) asserted, "The task of Critical Race Theory is to remind its readers how deeply issues of racial ideology and power continue to matter in American life" (p. xxxii).

CRT emerged as legal scholarship (Bell, 1987) to "question basic assumptions of the law's treatment of people of color" (Crenshaw et al, 1995, p. xi). Critical Legal Studies evolved into CRT, and many of the legal scholars' initial writings are chronicled in the groundbreaking text, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement* (Crenshaw et al, 1995). Scholars in education found merit in connecting the initial legal scholarship of CRT to education (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), women's studies (Wing, 1996), and sociology (Aguirre, 2000). Solorzano (1998) asserted, "A critical race theory in education challenges dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups" (p. 122).

To that end, the five themes of CRT in education were integrated in the theoretical framework applied to the analysis of the literature and data collected in this dissertation. The themes that scholars (Ladson, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, 1998) identify as central to CRT are as follows:

1. *The permanence, centrality and intersectionality of race and racism in the United States.* Crenshaw (1989, 1993) expanded the narrative on the centrality of race by introducing an intersectional approach, which looks at the race-gendered subordination of Black women and other women of color.

2. *The challenge to dominant ideology,* which "challenges the traditional claims of the educational system and its institutions to objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Solorzano, 1998, p. 122).

3. *The commitment to social justice,* which calls on educators to

   "take up your cross daily" . . . important for CRT scholars in that it reminds them that serious race work is always already activist in nature; that they must commit and recommit to it daily, fully cognizant of the possible costs to their relationships with peers and, indeed, their professional trajectories. (Chapman, Dixson, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2013, pp. 1019–1026)

4. *The importance of experiential knowledge of women and men of color.* CRT recognizes that what people of color bring to the educational setting is "legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education" (Solorzano, 1998, p. 122). Storytelling is crucial to CRT, and Delgado (1989), a critical legal scholar, was an early advocate for the need to name one's own reality in educational settings.

5. *The interdisciplinary approach and perspective, which places race and racism in historical and contemporary contexts.* Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) asserted

that "transdisciplinary knowledge and the methodological base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, and the law" (p. 63) are pertinent in helping to understand and connect the stories of oppression and marginalization within education.

Critical Race Theory serves an important framework that connects Critical Pedagogy with a Black Feminist/Black Womanist framework, which comprised the third theoretical framework that informed the analysis of this study.

**Black Feminist/Black Womanist Theory**

The voices of Black women are central to this study and dissertation. As such, integrating Black Feminist and Black Womanist Theoretical Frameworks is significant and relevant to the unique perspectives and self-defined ways of being for Black women in the U.S. Scholars specializing in Black women's empowerment use multiple names to refer to the theoretical framework  (Abdullah, 2003, 2007; Abdullah & Freer, 2007; Collins, 1998, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989, 1993; hooks, 1981; King, 1988; Walker, 1983). Collins (2000) asserted,

rather than developing definitions and arguing over naming practices – for example, whether this thought should be called Black feminism, womanism, Afrocentric feminism, Africana womanism, and the like – a more useful approach lies in revisiting the reasons why Black feminist thought exists at all. (p. 25)

For this study and dissertation, I used the terms interchangeably, based on the voices and definitions of the Black women scholars who participated in this study.

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Collins (1989) defined Black feminist theory as "a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize human vision of community" (p. 30). There are four major themes significant to Black Feminist thought (Collins 1989, 2000):

1. Black women are able to empower themselves and repel negative stereotypes of Black womanhood through self-definition and self-valuation.

2. Black women do not allow themselves to become oppressed by race, glass, or gender dominance.

3. Black women are able to merge their intelligence and political ambition.

4. Black women have the skills necessary to resist daily discrimination.

Abdullah (2003, 2007, 2017) posed four tenets of Black Womanist Leadership, which include:

1. Leadership as theory and practice.

2. Being proactive and setting one's agenda, rather than being reactive.

3. Group-centered focus, rather than focus on one individual.

4. Use of traditional (within the system) and nontraditional (outside or subversive of the system) methods to prompt social change.

Storytelling, as a methodology and a process between individuals, is a critical component of Black feminism (Collins, 1989). For Black women, the process of storytelling allows exploration of "private, hidden spaces of Black women's consciousness, the 'inside' ideas that allow Black women to cope with and, in many cases, transcend the confines of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality" (Collins, 1989, p. 108). Storytelling is an act of self-definition, and King (1988) posited, "Black feminism asserts self-determination as essential"

(p. 72). Storytelling for Black women serves as an act of resistance, challenges dominant narratives, and promotes "self-definition as part of the journey from victimization to a free mind" (Collins, 1989, p. 123). In conclusion, Collins (2013) argued, "When it comes to helping people who are on the bottom empower themselves, oral truth-telling, or telling the truth of their own experiences, constitutes an important part of intellectual activism" (p. 127).

Additionally, scholars assert that a race-gendered, multiple jeopardy, and intersectional approach to understanding the experiences of Black women in the United States is important (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993; King, 1988), not just as an additive approach to Black women's oppression, but, as King asserted, formulating that racism, multiplied by sexism, multiplied by classism shape Black women's lives in the United States. As such, applying a Black Feminist and Black Womanist lens is significant to hearing, recording, analyzing, and telling the stories of Black women at the academic borderlands in higher education.

## Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study has been to explore experiences of Black women faculty, staff, and student activists whose work and voices sit at the academic borderlands of the university. This research sought to support Higher Education institutions in their efforts to promote and illuminate the voices of Black women faculty, staff, and students, their sense of belonging and success, and add to existing research that focuses on the role of neoliberalism in the politics of Ethnic Studies, Cultural Centers, and student activism. The study, moreover, has sought to add to the existing knowledge on higher education, Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, and Black women faculty, students, and staff, given that the research will be conducted with Black college women faculty, staff, and students on an urban campus with a very diverse student

body, majority women, predominantly working class, and first-generation college student population in Southern California.

It is also significant to note that much of the previous literature related to the politics of Ethnic Studies and Cultural Centers has focused on students and practices at predominantly White university campuses (PWIs). The critical narratives of Black women collected for this study were intended to inform the further development and evolution of an emancipatory Ethnic Studies theory and practice for higher education campuses with a majority, or plurality, of students of color. This variable represents a significant aspect of the study, in that it echoes a student demographic that constitutes the reality in California and will soon be replicated in most large urban centers of the United States in coming years.

**Method**

The research was undertaken through qualitative study. The study consisted of six critical narratives, which constitute unstructured storytelling with themes emerging from the conversation linked to participants efforts to share their understanding of the phenomenon being studied—in this instance, their experience as Black women within the context of Ethnic Studies, Cultural Centers, or student activism. Narratives, more specifically, are short topical stories, extended stories, or life histories (Chase, 2005). Researchers employing the narrative approach consider this methodology a distinct form of academic discourse, within the context of qualitative research. The use of critical narratives connects to the concept of counter-storytelling and counter-narratives, defined as "writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 171). Hence, the method emphasizes stories of people – in their own voices – whose identities are

marginalized and minoritized. Further, as a methodology, critical narratives and counter-narratives connect with essential elements of Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000), Black Womanism (Abdullah, 2003, 2007, 2017; Abdullah & Greer, 2007), and Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), which emphasize self-definition, voice, the importance of countering mainstream narratives, setting the record straight, speaking for oneself, and speaking truth to power.

The research centered the participants' stories around a social phenomenon – in this instance, their involvement with campus activism and demands for racial/ethnic justice at one campus. In addition, a case study dimension was integrated into this study, in that the study focused on an individual, event, or phenomenon selected for its particularity. For this case study, the particularity comprises one public institution of higher education campus in Los Angeles, California. A case study is generally explanatory, outward thinking, and, in this instance, leads to a critical theory that invites future investigation (Flick, 2014; Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993). The lack of generalizability is one limitation generally associated with the case study method (Flick, 2014; Hamel et al., 1993), however, this study also references additional similar cases of recent campus activism and demands with respect to women of color  (i.e., Mizzou 2015), in order to make connections across Ethnic Studies research investigating similar concerns.

### Limitations, Delimitations, Assumptions

This study focused on a limited number of participants – six. Though traditional research methods often challenge studies with a few participants, I am unapologetic about the contributions of the six women who provided their critical narratives in this study. Often, a culture ensconced in measurement and evaluation devalues the significance of rich data collected

in narrative studies with what is considered a small number of participants; data which may provide deeper and more nuanced understandings of the phenomenon being examined.

The participants are Black women in higher education setting – two faculty, two staff, and two students. The critical narratives and interviews focused on participants involved directly with campus activism and demands on their campus administration, and whose work in academic affairs and student affairs intersected. As a case study focusing on participants involved directly with campus activism and demands on their campus administration, one limit was the problem of generalization because the method does not fall within traditional quantitative approaches (Flick, 2014; Hamel et al., 1993). The pool of available participants who were involved in campus activism and demands on their campus administration were limited, especially because the number of faculty, staff, student, activists collaborative alliances around campus were tenuous and not always public. The identities of the participants remain anonymous. This is especially important because of the political nature of campus activism and the narratives of those involved directly or indirectly.

Moreover, as a student affairs professional who often sits at the intersection of administration, faculty, staff, and students involved with Ethnic Studies, Cultural Centers, and campus activism, I carry biases around the importance and benefits of these areas. Additionally, as a student affairs professional who leads a campus Cultural Center, I consider myself one who sits at the academic borderlands. Finally, as a self-identified Black and man, I understand that my attempts to capture the voices and stories of Black women faculty, staff, and student activists at the academic borderlands may be viewed as coming from a space of privilege and perhaps not completely able to do justice to women's voices as they could do themselves. I am aware of the

privilege, and subsequent critiques, of attempting to speak for a community that often gets silenced in spaces where men's leadership and presence is elevated. It was my intention to work and speak *with*, not for, the Black women who participated in this study.

## Definitions of Key Terms

This dissertation utilized many terms throughout. Some of the key terms and definitions include:

*Academic Borderlands:*

- "Disregard for those who do not keep step with the dehumanizing accountability system that neoliberalism demands" (Darder, 2012, p. 413).

- "Those higher education professionals who become targets of academic punishments, if they refuse to acquiesce or reform to neoliberal expectations –irrespective of the quantity, quality, or intellectual reach of their scholarship" (Darder, 2012, p. 415).

- Those higher education professionals "marginalized by class, race, ethnicity, or immigration status . . . viewed as excess populations to be removed from the body politic, relegated to sites of terminal containment or exclusion" (Giroux, 2014, p. 15).

*Black Womanist /Feminist Leadership:*

- "Womanism, first introduced by Alice Walker, is a concept that has been fleshed out largely in terms of theory, with applications generally limited to literary analysis, personal and collective ideology, and pedagogy" (Abdullah & Freer, 2007, p. 95).

- "Womanism stands not only as theory, but also as a movement, or praxis, which requires that those who define themselves as womanists not only ascribe to theory, but engage in actions that work to dismantle oppression in all its forms"

(Adbullah & Freer, 2007, p. 95).

- "Womanist theory . . . is inherently progressive in that it requires its adherents to commit themselves to a position of resistance" (Abdullah & Freer, 2007, p. 95).

- "Womanist leadership praxis stands in contrast to more traditional approaches" (Adbullah & Freer, 2007, p. 95).

- "Leadership that emerges from this Black feminist conceptualization carries with it four core tenets: 1) it seeks to bridge theory with practice, with each constantly informing the other, 2) it is proactive and not simply reactive, 3) it adopts a group-centered approach in which all members share the responsibility of leadership and collectively 'own' the movement, and 4) it utilizes both traditional and nontraditional forms of activism" (Abdullah, 2007, p. 329).

- "The centering of the "leader" becomes less important" (Abdullah, 2007, p. 333).

*Border Intellectuals:*

- Those "whose scholarship seeks to explicitly challenge longstanding structural inequalities and social exclusions" (Darder, 2012, p. 412).

- Those "border intellectuals from cultural, racialized, economic, gendered, and sexual borderlands," whose entry into the academy with their "politically distinct voices and dissonant perspectives" face backlash and consequences in higher education" (Darder, 2012, p. 416).

*Cultural Centers:*

- Through the dissertation, and in many of the sources referenced, the terms "Culture Center" and "Cultural Center" may be used interchangeably. Dr. Lori Patton Davis, who

wrote the first dissertation on Black Culture Centers in higher education and has
completed subsequent research on additional campus Cultural Centers explained: "Cross
Cultural Centers . . . are primarily West Coast, and AHANA (African, Hispanic, Asian,
and Native American) and Intercultural Centers are on the East Coast. When centers use
'culture,' there's a sense that the center focuses solely or primarily on a certain group's
culture (e.g. 'Black Culture' center). With 'cultural,' there's a sense of flexibility where
cultural is used like an adjective to describe the center (e.g. Black 'cultural center')."

- "Safe and welcoming spaces for Black students at predominantly White institutions
  (PWIs)" (Patton, 2006, p. 628).

- "Black Culture Centers have become institutional mainstays that provide services and
  programs to the entire campus community" (Patton, 2006, p. 628).

- "Counterspaces, a home away from home, and a haven in a hostile territory" (Patton,
  2010, p. xiv).

- These centers, which have served as magnet, refuge, academic unit, social and
  networking focus, intellectual development nexus, and so much more, have been
  described by many students as an "oasis" in a sea of campus hostility" -- Julianne
  Malveaux in (Hord, 2005, p. vii).

*Ethnic Studies*

- "Black Studies was founded formally as the result of petition, protest and demand
  by informed Black intellectuals and students for social, cultural, political, and
  economic relevance in their education" (Patton, 2005, in Hord, 2005, p. 156).

- Establishing Ethnic, Gender, and LGBT/Queer Studies academic departments accomplished many goals of on and off campus activists, including: forcing institutions to respond to changing student demographics and demands of students, challenging institutional and structural perpetuations of inequalities, and challenging Eurocentric, male-centered, and hetero-normative curricula of colleges and universities (Collins & Solomos, 2010; Hu-DeHart, 1993; Sleeter, 2011).

*Neoliberalism:*

- "Neoliberalism is a particular, historically-generated state strategy to manage the structural crisis of capitalism and provide new opportunities for capital accumulation" (Lipman, 2011, p. 6).

- "Neoliberalism is an ensemble of economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies that promote individual self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor, and sharp retrenchment from the public sphere" (Lipman, 2011, p. 6).

- Neoliberalism in higher education puts "in place modes of governance that mimics corporate structures by increasing the power of administrators at the expense of faculty, reducing faculty to a mostly temporary and low-wage workforce, and reducing students to consumers – ripe for being trained for low-skilled jobs and at-risk for incurring large student loans" (Giroux, 2014, p. 6).

**Organization of Dissertation**

This dissertation chapter lays out the foundation for this critical narrative, case study, and analysis of where neoliberalism and the university, Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, student

activism (inspired by Black Lives Matter activism), and the voices of Black women in higher education intersect at the academic borderlands in higher education.

Chapter 2 provides an examination and review of the existing literature on the formation of Ethnic Studies with respect to Black Studies and the conditions of Black women students and faculty within the contested terrain of the academic borderlands. This chapter also identifies where literature is lacking and where further research in this area of study is needed.

Chapter 3 describes the critical narrative methodology and design of the study, including strengths and challenges related to the methods selected for this study. For this dissertation, critical narratives centered on a case study is the qualitative method employed.

Chapter 4 presents the stories of the participants, as gleaned from the critical narrative collected, as well as comparison of similarities and differences in the major themes and issues raised by the participants.

Finally, Chapter 5 analyzes the critical narratives gathered for this study and relates the findings to the literature presented in Chapter 2, which engages questions of the university, Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, Black women and activism (inspired by Black Lives Matter activism), and the voices of Black women within the academic borderlands in higher education. This final chapter concludes with a discussion of implications and recommendations for higher education Ethnic Studies departments, cultural centers, student activism, and the potential and possibilities for Black women.

# CHAPTER 2

## BLACK WOMEN IN THE ACADEMIC BORDERLANDS:

## A LITERATURE REVIEW

*Where are the Black women? How do we render visible the history of lived experiences of Black women?*

Johnella Butler & John Walker (1991)

This literature review summarizes and addresses the gaps in past and current scholarship related to where Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, student activism (inspired by recent/current Black Lives Matter activism), neoliberalism, and the voices of Black women in higher education intersect at the academic borderlands. The chapter builds upon the introduction and definitions outlined earlier for this study. It provides further scholarly explanation for the reader to understand and make meaning of the literature, in order to address the problems and questions posited in this study. The literature review also explores existing studies and narratives about the history and founding, including social justice rationale, of Ethnic Studies programs in higher education in the United States. It highlights literature exploring the current state of Ethnic Studies on college campuses. Finally, the chapter concludes with an analysis of gaps in the literature on Ethnic Studies in higher education.

The focus of this study, as noted earlier, is Black women's voices at the academic borderlands of Black Studies, Black Culture Centers, and campus activism led or supported by Black women students, staff, and faculty. Hence, this literature review, though summarizing the history of Ethnic, Gender, and LGBT/Queer Studies in U.S. higher education, provides a specific focus on the development of Black Studies departments. It is useful, however, to note that the

following discussion is divided into two major parts. The first section focuses on Black politics within the university, which examines issues tied to Ethnic Studies, Black Studies, and the work of cultural centers on the campus. The second section examines more specifically the issues of Black women within these contexts.

<p style="text-align:center"><strong>Ethnic Studies, Black Studies, and Cultural Centers</strong></p>

The following discussion examines some of the important issues and institutional questions related to understanding the landscape of Ethnic Studies, Black Studies, and cultural centers within the university, which constitutes the historical and contemporary contexts in which many Black woman labor within higher education.

**Black Intellectual Roots of Ethnic Studies**

It is hard to imagine a time when there were no Ethnic Studies departments or courses on college campuses. Though there had been a number of scholarly works on Black people and their experiences in the United States, "the need and the demand for African American Studies emanated from the virtual systematic exclusion of the history, culture, and experience of Black people from the most academic and educational curricula" (Anderson, 1990, p. 2). The groundwork for the founding of formal and recognized Black Studies departments, an important focus of this dissertation, started in the early 20th century. W. E. B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson first advocated for teaching Black history in U.S. schools in the early 1900s as a means of challenging the idea of Black inferiority and noncontributions to U.S. society (DuBois, 1902; DuBois, 1965; DuBois & Lewis, 2007; Woodson, 1933).

Later, Freedom Schools, established by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) during 1950s and 1960s civil rights activism, advocated and promoted school curricula,

known as a guide to Negro history, highlighting the histories and achievements of Black people, (Hale, 2016; Payne, 2003; Perlstein, 1990). The curricula proposed were grounded upon the lived experiences of Black students, with an objective "to work with the identity problem by introducing Negro History" (Perlstein, 1990, p. 304). Some community advocates of the Freedom School Movement also came in contact with Myles Horton and the Highlander Center, where educational opportunities where created for Black activists to prepared for community interventions tied to emancipatory possibilities (Darder et al., 2009).

The ideological and philosophical roots of Black Studies departments are varied. Bennett (1968) asserted that Black Studies departments needed to go beyond the White gaze or the inferior view of Black people held by mainstream Whites. Of this, Bennett contended, "We must abandon the partial frame of reference of our oppressors and create new concepts which will release our reality" (Bennett, 1968, cited in Anderson, 1990, p. 4). Hare (1973) asserted that Black Studies departments and the Black scholars who contribute to these departments "must develop new norms and values grounded in a new (African) ideology and from such an ideology new methodologies might evolve" (Anderson, 1990, p. 5) compared with the dominant ideologies and methodologies within the academy at the time. Asante (1980, 1987) introduced the concept of *Afrocentricity*, an African ethos and way of interpreting history, experiences, and culture from a Black perspective (Coughlin, 1987). This to say, Black history and experience were made central to both epistemological and ontological concerns.

There is no question that the political formation and establishment of Ethnic Studies begins with Black students. Student activism, in tandem with community activism, cross-community alliances and support cannot be underscored enough in the development of Ethnic

Studies departments in higher education. The role of these formative scholars has been explored in works by multiple authors (Anderson, 1970; Anderson, 1990; Hu-DeHart, 1993; Karenga, 1984; O'Leary, Romero, Cabrera, & Rascon, 2012; Sleeter & National Education, 2011; Thompson, 2004). Allen (1974) connected the influence of Black Civil Rights activism with the "rise of the militant black student movement in the 1960s" (p. 2) and asserts the role of Black student activism in the development of Black Studies departments,

> for the first time masses of black students became involved in the struggle for educational change, and…, it was widely recognized that not only were black students and teachers largely excluded from American higher education but the totality of the black experience was not to be found in the curricula of the vast majority of colleges and universities. (p. 3)

Anderson (1990) also supported the notion that "demands for the initiation of Black Studies in American education was buttressed and aided by the Civil Rights Movement" (p. 1) and that Black community struggles by on-and-off campus activists were significant forces that compelled universities to establish Black Studies departments.

**Establishment of Ethnic Studies Departments**

Ethnic studies as stand-alone departments have been in existence since the late 1960s, when formally established at San Francisco State College (now University), as a result of the well-documented Third World student protests in 1968 and 1969 (Anderson, 1970; Anderson, 1990; Hu-DeHart, 1993; Sleeter, 2011; Thompson, 2004; Umemoto, 1989). Black student and community activism in San Francisco, in coalition with other groups who join as supportive allies, led to conversations about the importance and establishment of Ethnic Studies

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departments, with an emphasis on "an anti-racist, multicultural curricular reform… guided by a strong sense of decolonization and self-determination" (Tintiangco-Cubales, Kohli, Sacramento, Henning, Agarwal-Rangnath, & Sleeter, 2014, p. 106).

Hence, as a direct result of student uprising, advocacy, and demands in addition to community protests, petitions, and pressure, San Francisco State established, recognized, and formalized the first autonomous Ethnic Studies department in the country. The department brought together American Indian Studies, Asian American Studies, Black Studies, and La Raza Studies under one academic umbrella (The College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University), with the common effort to address the cultural and historical pedagogical absences that existed in the education of underrepresented students and to support the development of academic curriculum to meets their needs. Also central to the work were efforts to increase the admission of students of color and the hiring of faculty of color.

Within the San Francisco State College Ethnic Studies department, a Black Studies program was formally established and led by Nathan Hare (Anderson, 1990; Karenga, 1984), one of a group of "informed Black intellectuals" in the United States advocating for social, cultural, political, and economic relevance in education at the college and university level (Anderson, 1990; Hare, 1976; Karenga, 1984). However, prior to San Francisco State State's founding of the first autonomous Black Studies department at a predominantly White institution, Howard University (a historically Black university) offered African Studies courses, a Black-focused pedagogy in many departments, and a collective of faculty focusing on Black Studies since the early 1950s (Anderson, 1990; Rigsby, 1970).

Howard University would later establish an Afro-American Studies department, focusing on Black people in the United States, in 1969 (Rigsby, 1970). Also prior to the formal establishment of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State, a number of small campuses had attempted to offer Black/Negro history and literature courses (Anderson, 1990; Hare, 1976), but without a formally recognized department. Cal State LA followed suit with the second Black-focused department in California, founded as Pan-African Studies, shortly after San Francisco State, in 1969.

The establishment of Ethnic Studies and, in particular, Black Studies departments led to positing similar questions related to equity and the inclusion of women and queer identities in higher education. Influenced by the accomplishments of the Black Studies advocates, local and national student and faculty activism connected to the national feminist movement challenged the administration of San Diego State University (SDSU) to establish the first Women's Studies academic department in the United States during the 1970–1971 academic year. Across the country, student and faculty activism at Cornell University contributed to the formation and establishment of a Women's Studies department a few months after SDSU (Boxer, 1998).

However, when exactly the first LGBT/Queer Studies academic departments were founded depends on the source. The City College of San Francisco claims to have established the first LGBT/Queer Studies curriculum in higher education in 1972 (San Francisco State University Website, 2016), while others credit the City University of New York as having established the first university-level LGBT/Queer Studies department in 1986 (Steinberg, 2009). Whichever came first, the establishment of Ethnic, Gender, and LGBT/Queer Studies academic departments accomplished many diversity goals through on-and-off campus activists—goals that

were influenced be the demands of student, staff, faculty, and community activists within Black Studies. Among the goals were forcing institutions to respond to changing student demographics and demands of students, challenging institutional and structural perpetuations of inequalities, and challenging Eurocentric, male-centered, and hetero-normative curricula of colleges and universities (Hu-DeHart, 1993; Collins & Solomos, 2010; Sleeter, 2011).

**The Politics of Black Studies**

The politics of Black Studies have often been contentious, often necessitating resistance to assimilative norms of the White canon and blatant attacks within the university. The academic and political efforts of Ethnic, Gender, and Queer/LGBT Studies have endured for decades, despite ongoing attacks from those critical of one or more of these areas of study on college campuses (Allen, 1974; Anderson, 1990; Hu-DeHart, 1993; Sleeter, 2011). From the inception of Black Studies departments, they faced critiques from fellow academics that "questioned the 'profundity' and 'legitimacy' of courses treating solely the Black experience" (Anderson, 1990, p. 1). The same questions about the rigors of Black Studies continued early in the establishment of the departments "until in 1969 when Harvard University created an Afro-American Studies Department," which spurred other universities and colleges to establish such departments because "Harvard is the archetypical institutional of higher education in the United States" (Anderson, 1990, p. 2).

Allen (1974) asserted that actual, or attempted, cutbacks or attacks on these departments in higher education lie in three areas: that they are seen as "political, not academic" (p. 6), "intellectually bankrupt" (p. 6), or initiating "reverse racism" (p. 6). Hu-DeHart (1993) argued that within higher education,

the relationship between Ethnic Studies programs and traditional academic departments becomes unmanageable because it raises issues of turf protection, competition for scarce resources, and racism on the part of traditional scholars . . . [and that] traditional scholars find it difficult to shake off their preconceptions about the illegitimacy and inferiority of ethnic studies programs and, by extension, ethnic studies scholars. (p. 53)

It goes without saying that this assessment includes the conditions experienced within Black Studies.

Additionally, as neoliberalism, and subsequent concerns with fundraising, economics, and profits, crept into the higher education landscape (Bok, 2013; Darder, 2012; Giroux, 2002, 2014; Nichol, 2013; Schultz, 1993), "those areas of study in the university that don't translate into substantial profits either get marginalized, underfunded, or eliminated" (Giroux, 2002, p. 434). The persistent institutional belief in higher education that Ethnic Studies and Black Studies are somehow academically deficient drives attacks that, to the present day, seek to eliminate these programs, whether they be in Arizona (M. Anderson, 2016a; O'Leary et al., 2012), in Los Angeles (Flaherty, 2014), or at San Francisco State University (Flaherty, 2016)—the academic home and foundation of Ethnic Studies—have accelerated within the context of the neoliberal university.

**Black Cultural Centers**

Black Culture Centers were the first of all identity-based centers in higher education. Hefner (2002) asserted that these centers are the direct result and fruit of civil rights and Black Nationalist Movements. Influenced by SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and community civil rights movement activism (Levy, 1998), student activists involved with campus

Black Student Unions (BSU) across the United States issued demands to campus administrators in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Anthony, 1971). Patton (2004) asserted, "In understanding the establishment of Black Culture Centers, one must recognize the role that students played in forcing the administration to answer their demands" (p. 24). At the time, BSUs served as umbrella organizations for Black students and their multiple student organizations. Among their demands: (a) establishment of Black Studies programs, (b) increased enrollment of Black students at PWIs (Predominantly White Institutions), (c) increased hiring of Black faculty and staff, and (d) establishment of Black Culture Centers or offices where Black students felt their issues would be addressed and dealt with (Anthony, 1971).

Ironically, demands issued by Black students in the late 1960s and early 1970s are similar to demands issued by Black student activists from Black Student Unions in 2016 (www.demands.org), including support for more Black faculty and staff hires, initiatives to recruit and retain Black students on campuses, and increased support for Ethnic Studies and Cultural Centers. Initial response to Black student demands was lukewarm, at best, but campuses eventually acquiesced due to administrators' fear of violence by students that could grow into civil unrest (i.e., riots) on campus (Lombardi, 1971). Once established, Young (1986) asserted, the centers "were viewed as by students and staff as safe havens in an alien environment . . . Minority centers were viewed as a necessary and just alternative to this environment" (p. 18). Stewart (1985) added, "The Center was a home away from home, a place where you could just listen to music, play bid whist, shuck and jive – just be Black!" (p. 76).

It is important to note that the first comprehensive, scholarly work on the formation, history, purpose, professional practices, and impact of Black Culture Centers was written by a

Black woman, Lori Patton in 2004 as her dissertation: *From Protest to Progress? An Examination of the Relevance, Relationships, and Roles of Black Culture Centers in the Undergraduate Experiences of Black Students at Predominantly White Institutions*. This is the case, despite the fact that Black Culture Centers and other identity-based centers have existed since the late 1960 and continued to be developed on campuses in the 1980s and 1990s. Patton's contribution to the literature is significant to the academy, and to this dissertation, because the voice of Black women students, staff, or faculty, whether as actors, activists, or scholars remains absent. This work highlights a significant void in the literature that this study has attempted to fill.

Building upon the work of Patton (2004), additional scholars and texts emerged on ethnicity-based centers in higher education, including Black Culture Centers (Hord, 2005), Asian Pacific Islander Culture Centers (Liu, Cuyjet, & Lee, 2010), Chicanx/Latinx Culture Centers (Lozano, 2010), and Native American Culture Centers (Shotton, Yellowfish, & Cintron, 2010). Additionally, literature on women's centers (Calkins, 1993; Cleavenger, 1988) highlighted their development in higher education. As well, the story of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) and Queer Resource Centers in higher education is documented in the academy (Marine, 2011; Sanlo, 2000). Finally, scholarship has emerged about cultural centers in Southern California (Conerly, 2017; Toya, 2011; Welch, 2009), the context and setting of this critical narrative study of Black women activists and leaders within the university.

Patton (interchangeably known and self-identified in her scholarly works as Davis or Patton-Davis) (2006, 2010) expanded on her initial scholarship on the role of Black Culture Centers in the experiences of Black students in higher education. Patton and Hannon (2008)

further expanded Patton-Davis's initial scholarship and delved into the professional roles, practices, and politics of culture centers and the scholars and professionals who carried out the work within the higher education context.

Additional literature on campus culture centers as multicultural student services offices (Shuford, 2011a,b), as counterspaces (Yosso & Benavides Lopez, 2010), as shaping campus climates in higher education (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012), and as career options for professionals pursuing culture center careers in Student Affairs (Ardoin, 2014; Tull & Kuk, 2012) have emerged. Though scholarship on campus identity-based centers is relatively new and recent, 2004–present day, academic work on the formation, history, purpose, professional practices, and impact of culture centers continues to emerge.

**Timeline for Establishment of Cultural Centers**

Though the focus this section of the dissertation centers on Black Cultural Centers and their connections to Black Studies, Black women, and the academic borderlands, it is essential to explore the timeline and establishment of cultural centers as a whole in higher education. Many of the same elements that led to the establishment of Ethnic Studies academic departments—activism, struggle, resistance—are present in the story of cultural centers on college and university campuses.

Almost simultaneously, Ethnic, Gender, and LGBT/Queer Studies departments were being developed to meet the in-class learning outcomes of students and advocacy and support programs were being established to meet the out-of-class learning experiences of college students in higher education. Some were founded in the form of administrative Multicultural Affairs offices (Shuford, 2011a, 2011b), while others were established as transformative identity

resource centers such as campus Ethnic, Gender, and LGBT/Queer Identity Centers (Patton, 2006). The locations where initial Ethnic, Gender, and LGBT/Queer Identity Centers were founded, however, did not necessarily correspond with the locations where initial Ethnic, Gender, and LGBT/Queer Studies were founded. (See Table 1).

As noted earlier, the politics of cultural centers in higher education began with the efforts of students. Student activism, in tandem with community efforts, cannot be ignored in the development of cultural centers in higher education. The role of student activism, as well as subsequent demands for supportive spaces for Asian Pacific Islander, Black, and Chicanx Latinx student populations on campuses, has been explored by numerous scholars (Anthony, 1971; Fairclough, 2001; Hefner, 2002; Hord, 2005; Jones et al., 2002; Levine, 1996; Patton, 2004, 2005, 2010). In contrast, women's/gender centers were founded as a result, and extension, of the women's movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, with women faculty and student alliances. Whereas Ethnic, Gender, and LGBT/Queer Studies were founded quietly claiming spaces for women's empowerment, which eventually got recognized by institutions of higher education (Clevenger, 1988). LGBT/Queer Centers, however, have their early founding stories based in campus task forces and recommendations that arose due to anti-LGBT/Queer hate and bias incidents at, on, or near the campus community (Marine, 2011; Ritchie & Banning, 2001; Sanlo, 2000).

Table 1

*Establishment of Ethnic, Women, and LGBTQ Centers*

| Subject | Academic Department | Co-curricular Resource Center |
|---|---|---|
| **Asian American/Pacific Islander** | San Francisco State University, 1968 – 1969 (Thompson, 2004) | Asian American Studies Center UCLA Los Angeles, CA, 1969 (Liu et al., 2010) |
| **Black/African American** | San Francisco State University, 1968 – 1969 (Thompson, 2004) | Paul Robeson Cultural Center Rutgers University New Brunswick, NJ, 1967 (Patton, 2010) |
| **Chicana/o Latina/o** | San Francisco State University, 1968 -1969 (Thompson, 2004) | El Centro Northeastern University Chicago, IL, 1969 (Lozano, 2010) |
| **Women** | San Diego State University, 1970 (Boxer, 1998) | Women's Center Brooklyn College Brooklyn, NY, 1970 (Boxer, 1998) |
| **LGBT/Queer** | City College of San Francisco, 1972 (https://www.ccsf.edu/en/educational-programs/school-and-departments/school-of-behavioral-and-social-sciences/LGBT.html) | Office of LGBT Affairs University of Michigan Ann Arbor, MI, 1971 (Sanlo, 2000) |

Qualitative research on identity-based culture centers indicate these centers create a home away from home and provide academic and social support for students during their undergraduate experiences (Jones et al., 2002; Liu et al., 2010; Lozano, A., 2010; Patton, 2004, 2010; Shotton et al., 2010). In a qualitative study of Black Cultural Centers on college campuses

(Patton, 2006), students shared experiencing a sense of love and connection, identity and personal validation, and encouragement from staff. This sense of community and belonging described in Patton's work aligns with Freire, who "believed deeply – from the personal to the pedagogical to the political – in the transformative and emancipatory power of love (Darder, 2015, p. 47). The role of identity-based Ethnic, Women's, and LGBT/Queer Centers and the pedagogy of love can be seen as a powerful and "purposeful educational practice (Darder, 2015, p. 63).

**Marginality and Mattering**

Challenges to cultural centers in higher education mirror many of the same marginalizing arguments used to challenge the validity of Ethnic Studies academic departments. Additional challenges to centers, from academia and society, that pose threats to their successes, challenges, and survival, include: (a) maintaining a sense of autonomy and self-governance within the campus community (Stewart, 2015), (b) navigating the politics of separate identity-based culture centers and calls to consolidate under the umbrella of multicultural centers (Patton, 2006), and (c) cross-campus collaboration with other student affairs/student life offices and connecting their services and programs with the academic mission of their campuses by collaborating with faculty (Kodama & Takesue, 2011; Patton & Hannon, 2008).

Useful to the analysis of the marginalization of cultural centers and the faculty, staff and students involved in these contexts is Nancy Schlossberg's (1989) study on marginality and mattering related to the student experience in higher education, which built upon the student involvement research of Alexander Astin (1984). Schlossberg's qualitative work on the dialectical, yet interrelated, constructs of marginality and mattering, explores how and why some

students find connections and develop a sense of community on campus (i.e., having a feeling of mattering), while others seem unable to do so (having a feeling of marginality). In summary, the marginality and mattering construct refers to where students feel like they matter on campus, where students feel like they do not matter on campus, and how higher education professionals can develop more "purposefully designed programs and activities that more effectively promote the quality of community" for students (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 6).

Building upon Schlossberg's qualitative work around the construct of marginality and mattering, Rendón (1994) introduced the first quantitative research, resulting in what has been referred to as *validation theory*, referring to proactive and intentional actions by faculty and staff, in and out of the class, to validate students' identities, learning, and personal development. The study (Rendón, 1994) found that validation in class and outside of class was a factor in students' success and involvement on campus, but cautioned that campus faculty and staff take the initiative in promoting validation and involvement, because "nontraditional students do not perceive involvement as them taking the initiative. They perceive it when someone takes an active role in assisting them" (p. 44).

Additional qualitative (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011) and quantitative (Hurtado et al., 2011) research suggests that in-class validation for students of color promotes a sense of empowerment in students that leads to their subsequent involvement in out-of-class settings. Examples of validating behaviors by faculty and staff include learning and referring to students by name, developing curricula and campus events that reflect students' identities, listening and providing encouraging words, and serving as mentors and meeting outside of the office or classroom setting (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Campus spaces such as Ethnic Studies

departments, cultural centers, and student organizations focused on identity and gender markers provide students, staff, and faculty with validation and mattering on college campuses where they can feel marginalized.

## Black Women in the Academic Borderlands

Black women faculty, staff, and students face numerous challenges in higher education. This, despite a lengthy history of participation in its institutions (Gregory, 2001), with Mary Jane Patterson being the first Black woman to earn a Bachelor's degree at Oberlin College, in 1862 (Davis, 1998), and Anna Julia Cooper being the first Black woman to earn a PhD, in 1925 (Gutierrez y Muhs, Flores Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012). Building upon the educational legacy of Patterson and Cooper, Black women continue to face challenges in the academy, despite being the most educated demographic, proportionally, by race and gender in the United States, compared to women and men of other races and ethnicities in this country (Parker, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). While Black women may earn degrees at rates slightly higher than those of other demographics in the United States, they are underrepresented within faculty ranks in higher education (Croom & Patton, 2011 & 2012; U.S. Department of Education/National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013).

### Demographics

In 2013, the U.S. Department of Education and National Center for Educational Statistics published its updated figures related to multiple demographics in K–12 and higher education. The following bullet points summarize numbers relevant to this dissertation study.

- At present, 73% (575,491) of the 791,391 professionals working as instructors or faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions are White and non-Hispanic.

- Instructors or faculty of color represent just 21.5% of classroom professionals at degree-granting institutions –

  004% (3,538) American Indian or Alaskan Native,

  9.1% (72,246) Asian/Pacific Islander,

  4.1% (33,217) Latinx/Hispanic, and

  5.5% (43,188) Black/African American.

- Of the 43,188 Black/African American professionals working as higher education instructors or faculty in the United States, 24,283 are Black women.

- Black women comprise 3% of the 791,391 higher education classroom professionals, instructors up to full professors.

- Of the 336,625 tenured faculty (associate professor and above in rank) in the United States, Black faculty members constitute a mere 4.5% (15,477).

- Of the 15,477 Black tenured faculty, 7,183 are Black women.

- Tenured Black women faculty comprise 2.1% of all tenured track faculty in the United States.

In summary, the numbers for Black women faculty are alarming, despite their higher proportion of degree earning status, compared with other demographics, in higher education. There are 24,283 Black women at all levels of faculty and instructor ranks working in higher education in the United States. They comprise 3% of all (791,391) faculty and instructors in the U.S. Of this number of Black women working as faculty or instructors:

- 2,647 are full professors (1.4% of full-time, full professors in the United States)

- 4,491 are associate professors (these 7,138 tenured faculty—associate professor and full professor—represent 2% of all 336,625 tenured faculty in the United States)

- 6,373 are assistant professors

- 5,702 are adjunct instructors or lecturers

- 5,070 are "other faculty"—primarily research assistants or public service instructors without any official faculty ranks.

As students, Black women are enrolled in higher education at numbers proportionately higher than other demographics in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013; Parker, 2016), comprising just over 1.8 million of 20.3 million students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions. Of this number, 1.62 million Black women are enrolled as undergraduate students, and 258,000 are enrolled as graduate students and above. Currently, there is a dearth of literature or data on the numbers of Black women staff working in higher education, though a review and search for this information continues.

**Experiences of Black Women Faculty**

Anna Julia Cooper (1892), the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D., and a feminist, scholar, and activist who might have been considered a borderland scholar in her time, published a book of essays highlighting her experience as a Black woman scholar in the United States and abroad, and challenged racism in White academia and sexism in the Black community—academic and nonacademic alike. From then, although a few studies on Black women in the academy were published in the 1980s and 1990s (Benjamin, 1997; Moses, 1989), academic interest and publishing about this population of scholars increased significantly in the 2000s.

Scholars have examined the experiences of Black women faculty in higher education, whether Black women faculty in general (Aguirre, 2000; Edwards, Beverly, & Alexander-Snow, 2011; Gregory, 2001; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Turner, 2002); Black women as full professors (Carter Andrews, 2015; Croom & Patton, 2011/2012); queer-identified Black women faculty (Stewart, 2015); Black women who are lower-paid employees within the academy (Guillory, 2001); Black feminists-and-womanist-identified academics (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; Harris, 2007; Phillips & McCaskill, 1995); and free-thinking intellectuals within the academy (Waters & Conaway, 2007; Zamani, 2004). This examination of Black women faculty and their voices in higher education continues, despite the relative low numbers within the academy. Currently, there appears to be a dearth of literature focusing on Black women faculty in Ethnic Studies as a discipline within higher education.

Patton and Catching (2009) captured the narratives and experiences of Black faculty (women and men) who teach higher education and student affairs, a discipline that bridges faculty/staff experiences and prepares professionals for nonacademic administration and practitioner positions in postsecondary education. Patitu and Hinton (2003) explored the experiences of Black women faculty and administrators affiliated with student affairs and the co-curricular departments in higher education. Additionally, Cole (2000) asserted the value and experiences of Black women campus presidents and administrators as central to leadership for social change in higher education, despite low representation in these roles.

Although Patton (2004, 2006, 2010) initiated much of the initial scholarship on the development of campus cultural centers, specifically Black Cultural Centers, there does not appear to be a specific exploration of the role of Black women professional staff and leaders

within these spaces of safety, education, and activism in higher education. As a consequence,

there is a need to engage specifically with the impact of the politics of cultural centers, Ethnic

Studies, and Black Studies on the survival of Black women (student and faculty) in the academic

borderlands.

**Community Activism and Leadership**

Abdullah (2003) posed that early literature on Black leaders and leadership often centered

Black men and ignored the role of Black women as traditional or nontraditional leaders. Collins

(2000) and Walker (1983) concurred that the intellectual and community activism of Black

women is often "thrown away" (Collins, 2000, p. 5) by the academy and others telling the

narrative, despite a lengthy, but often undocumented, record of Black women on the front lines

or serving leaders in non-front lines roles of social justice and intellectual thought. Often faced

with the double burden of racism and sexism, many of the Black women whose activism was

documented or thrown away found themselves as outsiders within (Collins, 1986) the realm of

leadership (Barnett, 1993; Jordan-Zachery, 2007; Vickery, 2017).

Despite being largely ignored in academic or mainstream media writing, Collins (2000)

posited that the work of Black women activists has been essential in their roles in racial uplift (p.

225), as educators (p. 227), in the church (p. 228), as sister-friends (p. 229), mothers (p. 216,

217), within Black nationalist movements (p. 231), and as formal and informal agitators in

institutional and public settings (p. 232, 233). Collins posed that the "task of reclaiming Black

women's subjugated knowledge" is important to the narratives of Black women activists (p. 16).

One of the first Black women who centered a Black feminist ideology in scholarship was

Maria W. Stewart who, in 1831, challenged Black women "to reject the negative images of

Black womanhood so prominent in her times," and who pointed out that "race, gender, and class oppression were the fundamental causes of Black women's poverty" (Collins, 2000, p. 3). Further, Stewart was one of the first to use language of self-definition, self-reliance, and independence that would become foundational tenets of Black feminist and Black womanist thought (Richardson, 1987). Scholars have documented Black women's role in the anti-enslavement abolitionists (Yee, 1992), as civil rights era activists (Atwater, 1996; Barnett, 1993; Nance, 1996), and as nontraditional activists (Shakur, 1987).

The activist work of Ella Baker, a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), is often cited academically and anecdotally in discussions of Black women and activism. Baker's work embraces tenets of Black womanism, through the use of participatory democracy, an essential element of the work of Black women activists. Participatory democracy emphasizes three themes (Mueller, 2004; Ransby, 2003): (a) grassroots involvement of people to make decisions essential to their lives, (b) minimizing hierarchy and embracing the knowledge that people bring to the table, and (c) a call for direct action in addressing injustice. Abdullah (2003, 2007), in her development of a Black womanist leadership model, emphasizes nonhierarchical, leader-less and leader-full grassroots movements, and direct action as essential in the activist work of Black women. Black Lives Matter, which currently has close to 40 chapters across the United States and Canada (BlackLivesMatter.com/find-chapters), prides itself upon being decentralized, leaderless, yet leader-full, meaning that there are several leaders rather than just one (Aron, 2016; Cobb, 2016; Hamilton, 2016). The movement, founded by Black women along the spectrum of genders and sexualities, embraces tenets essential to Black womanist leadership.

Nance (1996) identified three roles that have historically characterized Black women's roles in activism. The first, "Mama," is one of support to primarily Black men activists by feeding and housing them. The second, "Activists," are women who emphasize grassroots and community-based organizing to enact social change. With an emphasis on grassroots and community, Nance (1996) argued, Black women activists lead from a space of not wanting to "catapult their names or words into print" like Black men leaders (p. 548). The third, "Friend," is a role where Black women provide support to each other and movements in general.

Collins (2000) highlighted the connection between Black women, higher education, activism in the academy and in the community, posing that, "African American women's intellectual work has aimed to foster Black women's activism" (p. 6) and "maintaining the fiction that activism lies outside the university is naïve" (p. 147). Additionally, Collins (2013) asserted, "Academia is activist politics, where struggles over the meaning of ideas constitute the primary terrain of action" (p. 146), where "the politics of academia resemble those of white privilege, where white privilege operates everywhere, but somehow we lack an effective language to talk about it" (p. 147). For Collins, the concept of intellectual activism calls on those concerned about social justice and equity "to be knowledgeable, critical, passionate, and caring, all at the same time" (p. 147). It is these qualities, plus the connection between community and higher education that this study seeks to examine.

An analysis of the literature shows that while Black women activists are full members of the wider class of women and Black people, their contributions have been ignored by scholars examining Black leadership or women's leadership. For example, bell hooks (1981, 1990, 1994, 2000 a,b) offered a critique of literature that speaks to how Black women's contributions have

been rendered invisible and signaled that a Black Feminist or Black Womanist lens on their work would highlight more their significance. Further, Abdullah (2003) emphasized that "a Black feminist framework is more appropriate in addressing the totality of experiences of Black women" (p. 15) and their work as activists.

**Survival in the Borderlands**

Black women in the Academy sit in a perilous space, despite a documented record of educational attainment and professional achievement. For Black women in the academy, whether faculty, staff, or students, thriving is not a simple endeavor, and balancing personal and professional success with a social justice responsibility to students and to community, navigating written and unwritten rules of their institutions, and enduring race-gendered microaggressions and White privilege are daily and pervasive (Bell & Nkomo, 1999; Darder, 2016; Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009; Lomax, 2015; Pittman, 2010).

Collins (1986) first wrote of the space Black women sit at as an "outsider within status" (p. S14), and described it as one of marginality, where being Black and a woman, one is "privy to some of the most intimate secrets of white society" (p. S14), and yet, where one must make "their place in a white male worldview" (p. S27). Collins (1986) argued that this space of marginality gives Black women in the academic world a specific and unique worldview, which, if valued by their institutions, produces scholarship and policies that address long-term institutional struggles with respect to racism, sexism, and classism. Building upon the "outsider insider" work of Collins (1986) and the "borderlands" work of Anzaldua (1987), Bell and Nkomo (1999) posited that Black women in the Academy "have come to understand that our

careers have not been built from the center," and "to be successful in our careers, we had to learn to straddle between the demands of a white and/or male dominated academy and the emancipatory goals for our scholarship rooted in our social and cultural identities" (p. 70).

Further, since Black women academics have a "long traditional role as education – as agency, administrator, teacher – in empowering themselves and others [this] offers a liberating compass for navigating through the 'isms' in higher education" (Benjamin, 1997, p. 6), and often take on roles as "marginalized women studying marginalized women in a marginalized area of study" (Bell et al., 1999, p. 70). This space and place of marginality for Black women and other women of color in the academy, moreover, exists within the academic borderlands of higher education. It is within this space at the margins that Black women in the academy may find themselves, as Darder (2012) noted, "dubbed as activist scholars . . . [and] exiled from meaningful participation in the evolution of university programs and departments by an antidemocratic wave that silences and banishes their contributions to the wasteland of irrelevancy" (p. 422).

Despite the negative perceptions of them and deliberate acts of sabotage against their success, Black women have persisted in their personal and professional calling and goals in higher education leadership (Cole, 2000). As Jean-Marie et al. (2009) asserted that the call for Black women in the academy to serve students and community, despite the challenges they face within their institutions, is often rooted in a purpose beyond their individual professional gain, including close ties "to the struggle for equality during the Civil Rights Movement" (p. 568), having a long-term respect for the role of Black teachers (p. 569), family and community expectations – "I felt like I was carrying the weight of my race on my back" (p. 570), and

playing a role as someone who will "cultivate, mold, comfort, and (build) confidence . . . in designated roles as (Black) teachers and administrators, but are also nurturers to the 'children' [the (Black) students]" in their higher education institutions (p. 575).

The personal and professional calling to serve beyond their personal or professional aspirations can come with a price for Black women in higher education, as they watch less-qualified, less-just, and less-committed non-Black peers get rewarded, recognized, and revered within their institutions. Giroux (2014) asserted, "All too frequently positions of academic authority have been awarded to opportunistic careerists who remain completely untroubled by the burdens of complicated thought and the fight for ethical and political responsibility" (p. 79). The calling of Black women to serve beyond their personal or professional aspirations may be taken advantage of by their institutions, especially as "the phrase 'and service to the University and to the community' is so muted and subtle, that is it accepted without question or much discussion" (Canton, 2013).

### *Cultural Taxation*

Amado Padilla (1994) first coined the term "cultural taxation" as a way to describe the "unique burden placed on ethnic minority faculty in carrying out their responsibility to service the university" (Canton, 2012, p. 10). The term "cultural taxation" can be described as work on top of work, jobs beyond the job description, duties above and beyond prescribed work hours (Padilla, 1994), in which popular faculty of color, staff from marginalized groups, and student activists who speak up for their communities, are sought after by administration to serve on committees (often as tokenized members), by students of historically marginalized communities for club advising, letters of recommendation, or personal and academic counsel, and by new

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faculty and staff peers from historically marginalized groups for mentoring and advice on navigating the institution.

Often this phenomenon of cultural taxation or work on top of work goes unrecognized and unrewarded by peers, supervisors, and university administrators (Canton, 2012; Padilla, 1994). Brayboy (2003) contended that the hidden service agendas of universities place an extra burden of work and obligation on faculty, staff, and student leaders of color. Within this context, according to Lomax (2015),

> Black women within academic institutions are expected to bend over backwards in order to keep the institution running, departments performing, classes full, programs functioning, administration efficient, food flowing, and grounds kept. They are expected to labor fully and in silence – for less. And they are punished, banished and re-contextualized as problemed, problematic, narcissistic, angry, bitchy, and aggressive for naming or refusing to accept the terms of subordination, exploitation, or abuse as normative. (p. 5)

Collins (2013) made an essential connection between cultural taxation and neoliberalism in higher education, asserting,

> This is all part of an audit culture, where we are required to measure ourselves by corporate criteria so we can rank people and fit them in appropriate boxes. The endless surveys about virtually all aspects of our consumer experience . . . seem to have the same purpose as the endless evaluative requests within academia. How is this vast amount of data actually used? Who really benefits from this perpetual audit? (p. 147)

Connected to the concept and process of cultural taxation is tokenism, when the weight of campus service, discussions about racism and discrimination, and working with marginalized and minoritized students falls to on the few people of color employed in a campus department, office, or an entire institution (Flores Niemann, 2012; Shavers, Butler, & Moore III, 2015). Tokenism, as it relates to cultural taxation, places tasks that are important, but perhaps not urgent to the career and scholarly aspirations of people of color, on the backs of Black women and scholars of color and undermines their professional workloads and interests. For women of color, they can feel "duty bound to respond to students who felt marginalized in the institution, especially ethnic/racial minorities" (Flores Niemann, 2012, p. 345).

Additionally, "the hidden service agendas occur when African American faculty serve as the token voice of color for addressing problems related to race and ethnicity and are the identified individuals to mentor minority students" (Shavers et al., 2015, p. 42). Further, tokenism is tied directly to covert racism, overt racism, and aversive racists, whom Dovidio and Gaertner, (1996) in Flores Niemann (2012, p. 343) termed, "people who outwardly proclaim egalitarian values but express racism in subtle, easily rationalized ways."

### *Microaggressions*

Also central to understanding the survival of Black women in the borderlands are the multitude of microaggressions that manifest as part of the everyday conditions they face daily. Microaggressions are the commonplace daily verbal, nonverbal, and behavioral racial slights and insults aimed at people of color and other marginalized groups (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Though Sue et al. updated and introduced the term microaggressions to mainstream academic audiences, Pierce (1974) was the first to assert and define it in Black psychology, posing that "these

offenses are microaggressions. Almost all black-white racial interactions are characterized by white put-downs, done in automatic, preconscious, or unconscious fashion" (Pierce, 1974, p. 515), and cautioning that "one must not look for the gross and obvious. The subtle, cumulative miniassault is the substance of today's racism" (Pierce, 1974, p. 516). A few years later, Pierce and a team of researchers further defined racial microaggressions as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs' of blacks by offenders" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1978, p. 66).

Initial scholarship on microaggressions focused on Black-White racial interactions and experiences in general psychological settings (DeGruy, 2005; Pierce, 1970; Pierce et al., 1978; Sue et al., 2007). Additional scholars have built upon early microaggressions work with applications to higher education in the classroom (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009), and the experiences of Chicana and Chicano scholars (Solorzano, 1998), queer/LGBT students (Sue, 2010), African American college students (Smith et al., 2016; Solorzano et al., 2000), Black women college students (Lewis et al., 2012), and Black women faculty in higher education (Carter Andrews, 2015).

### *Themes of the Survival*

As Black women in higher education aspire to move up from student to faculty/staff, from faculty/staff to administrator, or administrator to senior administrator or the presidency, though, they encounter overt and covert race-gendered microaggressions rooted in White privilege from White and male faculty/staff peers (Darder, 2016; Holder et al, 2015; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; McIntosh, 1988) and from White and male students in the classroom (Pittman,

2010), including having their authority and leadership challenged, their teaching competency questioned, and their scholarly expertise reduced to mere opinion.

Multiple scholars have examined the experiences of Black women students in higher education. Patton and Croom (2017), Porter (2016), Porter and Dean (2015), and Howard-Hamilton (2003) explored identity development and related frameworks in the lives of Black undergraduate students. The effects of race-gendered microaggressions, a theme within literature focused on Black women faculty, are also examined in literature on Black women undergraduate students (Lewis et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2016). Finally, Patton (2009) asserted the importance of peer and faculty mentors in the development and success of Black women graduate, doctoral, and professional students in higher education.

The student literature on Black women focuses primarily on academic achievement, support circles, and challenges they face on predominantly White campuses in the United States. There is little to no research on the role of Black women students as student activists on campus. In the extant literature, however, there are themes that appear consistent in the challenging experiences of Black women faculty, staff, and students in higher education (Croom & Patton, 2011/2012; Lewis et al., 2012; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001), including:

- Campus institutional climates that are not supportive or inclusive of the experiences of Black women

- Campus institutional climates that attempt to silence the voices of Black women and punish them when they do speak out about their experiences on or off campus

- Lack of personal and professional respect from professional colleagues and students

- A variety of unwritten rules that Black women are not aware of, or made aware of, until they are deemed to have violated them

- Lack of professional mentoring from professional colleagues who are willing to support the development and promotion of Black women as faculty, student affairs professionals, or student leaders

As a result of facing campus climates that do not support their personal or professional lives, Black women in Higher Education may resort to a number of coping mechanisms that help them to endure and survive personally and professionally (Lewis et al., 2013), including resistance; using one's voice as a primary weapon against institutional violence; finding support or lending support to other Black women on campus, regardless of title or level of responsibility; attempting to do everything on one's plate and in one's job description at an overachieving level; desensitizing and seeking escape in food, substances, or withdrawal from the world outside of the workplace; making conscious choices about which battles to fight and which ones to ignore or internalize. It is worth noting that the challenges and coping mechanisms discussed above will help drive the analysis of the critical narratives and data collected in this study, and connect with the Black feminist tenets of self-definition and self-valuation (Collins, 1986, 1989, 2000).

**A Nexus of Possibilities**

Transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) is a paradigm rooted in critical pedagogy, and promotes educators to acknowledge power and privilege, to focus on collective good, to deconstruct frameworks that promote inequity, and to work toward liberatory practices of democracy, equity, and excellence. Ultimately, the paradigm calls for educators to be rooted in

moral and ethical practice geared toward deep and equitable change, and not just transactional tasks and smooth operations.

The guiding principles of transformative leadership are connected to foundational scholarly work on collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs divisions in higher education.

Kuh (1996) introduced theoretical guiding principles for student affairs professionals and faculty to promote seamless learning environments – intentional acts through cross-divisional collaborations that promote learning opportunities in and out of the classroom for students. Kuh (1996) posed the following as guiding principles for creating seamless learning environments:

1. Enthusiasm for institutional renewal (p. 137)

2. Create a common vision of learning (p. 138)

3. Develop a common language (p. 139)

4. Foster collaboration and cross-functional dialogue (p. 140)

5. Examine the influence of student cultures on student learning (p. 141)

6. Focus on systemic change (p. 141)

Building upon the work of Kuh (1996), Schroeder (1999) introduced best practices for partnerships between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs to advance student learning, seamless learning, institutional effectiveness, and the undergraduate experience, including developing common reference points, cross-functional teams, thinking and acting systemically, and commitment by senior administrators to developing and sustaining partnerships. Similarly, Schuh (1999) introduced guiding principles that demonstrate effective partnerships between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs professionals in higher educations. The principles include:

(a) centering student learning in campus mission and practice, (b) seamless learning processes; (c) crediting students' out-of-class and off-campus activities and involvement, (d) student affairs staff co-teaching University 101 courses with faculty, (e) faculty interacting with students outside the class and staff interacting with students in academic and co-curricular activities, (f) developing committees comprised of faculty and student affairs professionals, and (g) supporting the development of learning communities.

Finally, Patton and Hannon (2008) introduced the importance of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs collaborations with campus Cultural Centers in order to advance student learning on social justice and equity issues, including collaborating on summer orientation, student leadership development, programming and event planning, dialogues on diversity, and overall campus engagement. Hence, collaboration between university Academic Affairs and Student Affairs divisions has been forwarded as a best practice for student learning. It is at this nexus, where the possibilities of collaboration and the politics of Ethnic Studies, Cultural Centers, and student activism sit, and provide the impetus of this dissertation to explore the voices of Black women faculty, staff, and students who sit at this intersection.

# CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY

*The fool speaks. The wise (person) listens.*

African proverb

There is an absence of Black women's voices in the Ethnic Studies literature and less that engages a variety of important questions related to the impact of Ethnic Studies and black studies, in particular, on their lives. In response, this research sought to serve an analysis of intersections that exist between Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, and student activism (inspired by Black Lives Matter activism), through the voices of Black women at the academic borderlands. More specifically, this study attempted to further our understanding related to the impact of Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, and student activism on the experiences of Black women—faculty, staff, and students—in higher education. With this purpose in mind, this chapter describes the qualitative research methodology and methods employed for this study. Finally, because the participants are connected to one institution and by subject matter (Ethnic Studies/Black Studies), the data reflect a case, which represented the institutional connection of experiences of the participants. In concert, this chapter discusses the research design for this study, including information on the site for the study, sample population, data collection methods, data analysis processes, and timeline for this work.

### Research Questions

Two overarching research questions guided the design and implementation of this qualitative investigation:

1. What are the campus life experiences of Black women faculty, staff, and students?

2. What do Black women faculty, staff, and students specifically say about being elevated or silenced at the academic borderlands of university life?

## Qualitative Research

Scholars have a long history of using qualitative methods in educational research and studies conducted for dissertations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Flick, 2014). To answer the questions posed in this study, I used qualitative research methods. Clark and Creswell (2010) defined qualitative research as

> a type of research in which the researcher studies a problem that calls for an explanation; relies on the views of participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants; describes and analyzes these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective and reflexive manner. (p. 66)

Additionally, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) defined qualitative research as that which "involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case studies, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (p. 2).

A variety of qualitative methods help researchers gather data, make meaning, and interpret the phenomenon connected with their research questions. In working toward answering research questions using qualitative methods, "the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views to informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) associated the qualitative research process to answering their research questions, as "a bricolage, and the researcher as bricoleur" (p. 2). As such, the researcher uses any and all tools and methods available to answer the questions posed.

As such, research questions influence the type of methodologies used for studies. According to Flick (2014), "the main reason for using qualitative research should be that a research question requires the use of this sort of approach and not another one" (p. 12). Additionally, Clark and Creswell (2010) identified three criteria that help determine when a qualitative approach should be used: (a) when the topic has not been explored much, (b) when the research questions need participants to produce knowledge and answers, and (c) when the research setting influences the knowledge and answers. With research questions related to higher education, Manning (1992) asserted, "The object of qualitative research is to understand the meaning that respondents interviewed and observed (e.g., students, staff members, faculty, college presidents) made of their experiences" (p. 133).

Moreover, the definitions of and rationales for qualitative research methods provide the background for its use. Qualitative methods are important for exploring and understanding people, places, and events related to the researcher's questions. These methods, finally, can be useful in developing policy, theory, and knowledge for higher education and student affairs faculty and practitioners.

## Critical Narratives

This qualitative study was predominantly undertaken through the collection of critical narratives. Narratology, an umbrella term encompassing the research methodology of collecting and analyzing critical narratives, is a field of study used in numerous social sciences, including, increasingly, in educational research (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Connelly and Clandinin described narrative as "a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience," and made a subtle distinction between the story the subject tells and the researcher's inquiry that turns the

story into narrative. Numerous philosophers, psychotherapists, and anthropologists have influenced narrative inquiry as a valid research method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2001; Connelly & Clandinin, 2000).

Narratives are short topical stories, extended stories, or life histories (Chase, 2005), and researchers who work with the narrative approach view it as a distinct form of academic discourse. Narratives are a way of collecting an individual's point of view, and the role of the researcher is to "get closer to the actor's perspective through detailed interviewing and observation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5). The process, therefore, is not about finding one universal truth, but to "sign up many truths, narratives" (Byrne-Armstrong, 2001, p. 112) that can lead to a greater understanding of a phenomenon in a field.

Rice and Ezzy (1999) asserted that the theoretical foundation for narrative inquiry and research centers on the belief that "telling a story about oneself involves telling a story about choice and action, which have moral and ethical dimensions" (p. 126). A consideration of the moral and ethical dimensions of people's stories/counter-stories connects with the theoretical frameworks of this dissertation, Critical Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminist/Womanist Theory. Each of these frameworks centers the narrative methodology, and storytelling, as valid in the research process and engages with issues of structural inequalities.

Each of the theoretical frameworks utilized in this dissertation emphasize storytelling and narrative inquiry as a valid research method. Additionally, these assert that storytelling and narrative inquiry are central processes in the struggle for liberation of marginalized and oppressed groups. Critical Pedagogy (Darder et al., 2009) acknowledges the historicity of knowledge and the role people play in creating their own stories and histories. Similarly, Critical

Race Theory asserts the stories of women of color and men of color are "legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education" (Solorzano, 1998, p. 122). Finally, Black Feminist Theory emphasizes an "overarching theme of finding a voice to express a collective, self-defined Black women's standpoint" (Collins, 2000, p. 110), while Black Womanist Theory asserts the importance of Black women's words and writings "as a method of social and political empowerment for Black people generally and Black women specifically" (Abdullah, 2007, p. 333).

**Case Study**

The research centered the participants' critical narratives around a case study—in this instance, their involvement with campus activism and demands for racial/ethnic justice at one campus. A case study focuses on an individual, event, or phenomenon selected for its particularity. It is explanatory, outward thinking, and leads to a descriptive theory that invites future investigation (Flick, 2014; Hamel et al., 1993). The lack of generalizability is one limit of the case study method (Flick, 2014; Hamel et al., 1993), however, this study will reference, but not analyze, additional similar cases of recent campus activism and demands (i.e., Mizzou 2015).

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**Research Design**

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The following information describes the research design employed for this study. This discussion includes description of participants, research site, narrative protocol, and other information pertinent to conducting this research.

**Research Site**

California University East Los Angeles (CUELA) is a pseudonym for the campus site in this study. CUELA sits geographically at the intersection of Los Angeles and several small

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municipalities in the eastern region of the city. The campus sits in proximity to East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights, with predominantly poor-to-working-class and predominantly Chicanx Latinx community members; and in proximity to the San Gabriel Valley, with predominantly poor-to-working-class and predominantly Asian Pacific Islander community members. Gentrification, and an increase in White residents moving into this portion of the city, is a current theme of conversation both in the neighboring communities and the campus community. The campus was founded in 1947 in the state university system. Originally in central Los Angeles, near Hollywood, before it moved to its current site in the 1950s. Now, the campus is comprised of its main campus and a downtown Los Angeles campus. The research site is one of convenience to the researcher, professionally and personally

At the time of this study, the student population of CUELA was 28,000, with ethnicity demographics reflecting 57% Chicanx/Latinx, 15% Asian American, 9% White, 4% Black, and smaller percentages for other identities, including 8% "Non-resident Alien" or "Undocumented," as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

*CUELA Student Ethnicity*

| Ethnicity | % |
|---|---|
| Chicanx/Latinx | 57 |
| Asian American | 15 |
| White | 9 |
| Black | 4 |
| Unknown or not identified | 4 |
| Multiracial (ethnicities not identified) | 2 |
| "Nonresident Alien" or "Undocumented" (could be of any ethnicity; not specified or disaggregated) | 8 |
| Pacific Islander | 0.3 |
| American Indian | 0.1 |

The campus boasted an almost 80% student of color population, with women who identified as

Chicanx Latinx being the largest plurality among the student body. Along with Asian Pacific

Islander and Black women, women of color comprised the largest student population.

There were 463 full-time, tenure track faculty members as CUELA (compared with 774

part-time lecturers). The current full-time faculty demographics reflected that 50% were White,

25% Asian, 15% Chicanx/Latinx, and only 5% identified as Black, as shown in the comparison

data in Table 3 below:

Table 3

*CUELA Faculty Ethnicity*

| Ethnicity | % |
|---|---|
| White | 50 |
| Asian | 25 |
| Chicanx/Latinx (campus data use the term "Hispanic" | 15 |
| Black/Pan-African/African American | 5 |
| Unknown | 4 |

The campus had the designation of "Hispanic" Serving Institution (HSI). Being an HSI

means that the institution is part of a federal program designed to assist colleges or universities in

the United States that attempt to assist first-generation, majority low-income "Hispanic"

students. The designation is tied to money and populations served. The designation does not

correlate with leadership, praxis, or values affiliated with the populations served. The campus

had a Black President from 1979 to 2013. It also had a Black Vice President for Student Affairs

from 2000 to 2015. Both were popular figures on the campus and served as role models for

Black students, staff, and faculty. During their leadership at CUELA, there were no demands

issued to campus administration or major activism by Black students regarding the campus climate for Black students.

At the time of this study, CUELA is a campus known for its connection to activism and social movements in Southern California. The communities surrounding the campus were home to activism that promoted discussions that prompted discussions leading to the founding of Area, Ethnic, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies on the campus. The 1968 LA school walkouts, where students left nearby high schools in protest of an unresponsive and unrepresentative school curriculum, led to the founding of CUELA programs such as the Educational Opportunity Program, Student Support Services, and the development of campus Area, Ethnic, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies departments. CUELA boasts the first stand-alone Chicano Studies department in the California University system. Additionally, the campus boasts the second stand-alone Pan-African Studies department in the United States and in the California University system.

In addition to its rich history of Area, Ethnic, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, the campus was home to the Cross Cultural Centers, a co-curricular student life office which provided space and resources, campus programming, and professional and student staff focused on social, racial, and economic justice, student development, and liberatory praxis. An umbrella department to four identity-based student resource centers—Asian Pacific Islander, Chicanx Latinx, Pan African, and Gender and Sexuality—the Cross Cultural Centers are a high profile co-curricular department that partners regularly, and on equal professional ground, with faculty in multiple disciplines at CUELA, in the academic, social, and professional development of the campus community. The CCC (as it is often referred to on campus and in the narratives for

this research project) collaborates on a regular basis with faculty in Asian/Asian American Studies, Chicana/o Latina/o Studies, Latin American Studies, Pan-African Studies, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, plus other academic departments, on academic, co-curricular, and campus climate issues that affect marginalized and minoritized groups at CUELA. The Vice Provost for Diversity and Engaged Learning for Academic Affairs and Student Life was another campus partner with the academic and co-curricular departments engaged in justice work and liberatory praxis on campus.

**Narrative Sessions**

One two-hour narrative session took place with each of the six participants of this study. Critical narratives emerged as unstructured storytelling processes, with themes that emerged, between a subject and a researcher. However, at times, prompts were necessary to initiate the storytelling process. Beyond the collection of background information (see Appendix A), whenever necessary, open-ended questions (see Appendix B) were used to assist participants. Narrative prompts included, among others: "Tell me what it means to be a Black woman in higher education today," "Tell me about your experience as a campus activist," and "Tell me where you feel you matter on campus (and where you're silenced on campus)."

**Additional Collection of Data**

The researcher analyzed any existing public documents related to student activism and students' demands made to campus administrators and existing program evaluation/audience feedback data from events at the campus Cultural Center to supplement the critical narratives of the participants, with respect to their experiences on this campus.

**Analysis of Data**

All data collected from the narrative sessions were analyzed and coded for the major themes, issues, and concerns raised by participants. The coding and analysis of the data was driven by the conceptual frameworks that informed the study; namely, critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and Black feminist/womanist thought.

## Limitations, Delimitations, Assumptions

This study focused on a small number of participants. The participants were Black women in a higher education setting—one faculty, one staff, and one student. Some may critique the study as not being generalizable due to the small sample and demographic of participants. The critical narratives and interviews focused on participants involved directly with campus activism and demands on their campus administration, and whose work in academic affairs and student affairs intersected. As a case study focusing on participants involved directly with campus activism and demands on their campus administration, one limit might be a problem of generalization because the method does not fall within traditional scientific methods of research (Flick, 2014, p.123; Hamel et al., 1993). The pool of participants involved directly or in a supportive role with student activism can be tenuous, political, and not always public. Lastly, within the academy, there is resistance to qualitative research methods, which are often equated with those of journalists, soft scientists, or unscientific (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Additionally, Flick (2014) asserted that qualitative research challenges include generalizability, validity, and researcher bias or misinterpretation that may skew the analysis, conclusions, applicability, and recommendations of a research project.

**Researcher Positionality**

Critical Race Theory asserts that researchers must conduct their studies in a way that reveals their own positionality, identities, biases, and connections to the research (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Reflection on these areas develops the "multiple consciousness" perspective necessary to see links among the personal, professional, and the academic. Despite critiques that researchers cannot have a personal, professional, or academic connection to their studies or research participants, Ladson-Billings (2000) asserted that, "the point of multiple consciousness perspective… is that scholars of color who have experienced racism and ethnic discrimination have a perspective advantage" (p. 271).

Upon reflection, many aspects of my multiple consciousness perspective drew me to this research topic. I have experienced Ethnic Studies, Cultural Centers, and student activism as a student and a professional. Although these areas have benefitted my growth and development, and provided safe spaces for affirmation, counter-stories, and validation, they, like all areas in higher education, have their benefits and challenges. I have attended PWIs for all my formal higher education (University of Missouri/Mizzou, Loyola University Chicago, and Loyola Marymount University). My experience as a Black student and working professional has given me reason to be concerned for the experiences, retention, and success of Black students on college campuses. I reflect regularly on my identity markers, privileges, and oppressions, and how they reflect (or do not reflect) in my praxis as a higher education professional in student affairs.

As a student affairs/higher education professional who often sits at the intersection of administration, faculty, and students involved with Ethnic Studies, Cultural Centers, and campus

activism, I carry professional and personal knowledge around the importance and benefits of these areas. Additionally, as a professional who leads a campus Cultural Center, I consider myself one who sits at the academic borderlands of the university and student affairs due to the department's mission of education about institutional and systemic oppression; at times, the very nature of my professional and department role sheds light on issues at play in my own institution and higher education in general.

Finally, as a self-identified Black man, I observed the ways in which Black women were simultaneously celebrated and silenced within and outside of the Black community, academia, and life in general. I understand that my attempts to capture the voices and stories of Black women faculty, staff, and student activists at the academic borderlands may be viewed as coming from a space of privilege and perhaps not completely able to do justice to women's voices as they could do themselves. I am aware of the privilege, and subsequent critiques, of attempting to document the narratives of a community that often gets silenced in spaces where men's leadership and presence is elevated. Given my positionality, I sought to offer a critical counternarrative, which can only be accomplished through a critical praxis of dialogue grounded in a careful process of listening to Black women. It has been my intention to work and speak with, not for, the Black women participants of this study, all of whom I have a personal and professional relationship with, and to do justice, to the best of my ability, in engaging their stories and critical narratives. In essence, my hope is that this dissertation constitutes a living praxis of what we must do in academic and co-curricular life in higher education if we are to engage in emancipatory ways across our human differences.

**CHAPTER 4**

**DEFINING THEMSELVES:**

**BLACK WOMEN ACTIVISTS SPEAK**

*If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.*

Audre Lorde (1984, p. 138)

As presented in Chapters 1 and 2, there is a dearth of literature focusing on the voices of Black women in higher education. This study was designed to highlight the critical narratives of Black women who sit at the academic borderlands of university life and find themselves navigating the politics of Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, and campus activism. Specifically, this study sought to elevate the voices of Black women who identified in some ways as being campus activists working toward social justice, social change, and transformative and emancipatory practices on their college campus. The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings that emerged after conducting narrative interview sessions with six Black women: two higher education faculty, two staff, and two students, who had been, or were currently, involved as campus activists. Within these critical narratives, participants' stories related to their marginalized and minoritized identities were centered. In this case, the experiences and voices of Black women who identified as campus activists in higher education were highlighted, validated, and viewed as essential in understanding the race-gendered experiences they faced in higher education.

This study was comprised of six self-identified Black women—two students, two staff, and two faculty members—in higher education who were all affiliated with the research site

identified earlier in this chapter. Participants (see Table 4) ranged in age from mid-20s to early

40s. Their time spent at the university ranged between five and 15 years.

Table: 4

*Participants*

| Name | University Affiliation | Age/Age Range | Years at Institution | Department or Field of Study | Geographic Area Where Raised |
|------|------------------------|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| **Solange** | Undergraduate Student | 24 | 6 years | Public Health and Pan-African Studies | Arizona, Nevada, and California |
| **Aaliyah** | Undergraduate Student | 27 | 6 years | Nutritional Science, Pan-African Studies, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Alabama, Oregon, and California |
| **Ororo** | Staff | Late 30s | 15+ years (was an undergraduate and graduate student before starting work there as a full-time professional) | Student Affairs; Marriage and Family Therapy | Compton, California |
| **Core** | Staff | 30s | 5 years | Student Affairs; Rehabilitation Counseling | Inglewood, California |
| **Ava** | Faculty | 40 | 11 years | Pan-African Studies and Filmmaking | South Central Los Angeles |
| **Assata** | Faculty | Born in the 1970s; "holding on to 29" | 15 years | Pan-African Studies and Political Science | Oakland, California |

Their personal lives varied and intersected in many ways. All were raised, or came of age, in California, even if they were originally born in different states or locations. Three of the six (Core/staff, Ava/faculty, and Assata/faculty) had children. One participant was married or partnered (Core/staff). All six participants considered themselves to be activists—on-campus and off-campus—in some sense, yet each came to activism in a different manner. All six participants self-identified as proud, strong Black women who were passionate about how higher education could address their needs as Black women activists. What follows are the critical narratives of the six participants.

## In Their Own Name: Six Critical Narratives

### Solange

*that's when I had the reflection moment like, oh, me, and Aaliyah are here at the*

*forefront. And we as Black women have a very unique way of leadership.*

Solange was 24-years-old and in her sixth year as an undergraduate student at CUELA. She graduated in May 2017, and was completing her final classes with a plan to be finished in December 2017. She was the first in her family to complete college at a 4-year campus. Solange was a self-identified Black woman who embraced and initiated the use of gender pronouns when introducing herself—in this case, she, her, hers pronouns.

Solange described herself as the family caregiver. The daughter of a single mother, Solange shared that she never met her father and had never had a father figure. Solange was the youngest of three siblings—the eldest, a brother, was 35-or-36-years-old and had been incarcerated since Solange was an infant; her middle sibling, a sister, was diagnosed with bipolar schizophrenia when Solange was a teenager.

Two conditions stand out most to Solange about her growing-up years. One was moving around a lot. Prior to her six years at CUELA, Solange mentioned Las Vegas, Nevada, Arizona, Long Beach, and Moreno Valley as places she, her sister, and mother lived. The second was being on/receiving government assistance most of her life.

Solange described herself as being "definitely into self-development, self-exploration beyond the physical sense (spiritual or metaphysical); into birthing justice; and working on my certification to become a certified doula… I'm interested in going into midwifery."

Solange started the process of getting the Black Student Union (BSU) organization re-recognized as a student organization when she transferred to CUELA. Once that process was complete, Solange served as president and vice president of the student organization and was an active participant on the board during the BSU demands process with the campus president and administration. It should be noted that Solange decided, based on her observation of her strengths and that of the BSU Vice President, Aaliyah (also a participant in this study), that they should swap leadership positions.

At the time of the narrative conversation, Solange worked on campus as a student event coordinator and community builder for the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, where she was able to incorporate much of her interest in birthing justice. Shortly after the interview, she started a full-time job at a local women's center community organization in downtown Los Angeles.

A first-generation college student, Solange shared that she did not grow up with a social justice orientation:

I lacked a lot of that growing up. Like when I hear of my peers, they always have

someone in their family that ignited it, immersing them in it, telling them about

their true history. I lacked that. But I knew I was passionate about – or I guess on

a simple level, knew about bad things happening to people. It would cause some

sort of frustration in me.

Solange's first educational encounter with social justice issues and/or related departments

or organizations was at CUELA, when she enrolled in classes in the Pan-African Studies to

fulfill diversity requirements for general education.

It was Diaspora of Pan-African Studies or the Diaspora of Black Identity. It gave me an

introduction into it. It was with Dr. H., and after taking that class it heightened something

in me. . . . It was in that class that someone from the Cross Cultural Centers did a

presentation, which led me to follow that person to The CCC . . . and that led me to

Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) . . . and to Black Student Union, which

I didn't know anything about – I didn't even know it was a national thing.

Initially, Solange painted a generally positive view of life for Black women on her

campus:

With the examples I have now, I would say I see them as empowering, I see Black

women with voices, I see them as strong, I see them as nurturing. They have both that

feminine and masculine energy that I appreciate and I see them in very high positions. I

can name a lot of [Black] women in high positions on campus, whether it's in admissions

or department chairs or . . . yeah, I see them in very high positions and I see them, as least

from my experience, these Black women are highly respected. It could be that I am

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sheltered in these walls of The CCC, PAS, and BSU, and what I've been exposed to. I just see them being very supported in the spaces here at CUELA.

Within minutes, however, Solange reflected on her first student assistant job on campus in the admissions office, and she shared a more nuanced and expansive view of life for, or as, Black women on campus:

In admissions, I would bring in a lot of who I am as a Black woman and that made them uncomfortable. I would bring in conversations about race or gender and it was like it wasn't supposed to be brought into those spaces. That wasn't a space where I could talk about issues that pertain to me as a Black woman.

Solange shared that in that space she was made to feel alone and isolated, and that affected the perception her non-Black co-workers and supervisors had of her.

No one else ever brought up social justice issues in that space so . . . you have this sense of double consciousness where you're wondering if as a Black woman you're making the workspace uncomfortable because we think about race more than anyone else . . . or if they think, "she's too depressed in this workspace," or "she's too emotional."

Despite the ways in which she experienced life as a Black woman at CUELA, Solange shared that she was able to survive and thrive because she knew what, and who, she was all about.

I know how society or I know how other people may perceive us as Black women on campus, but I know how I perceive them because I'm one of them. So for example, if we're not walking around smiling, we just don't feel like smiling, but I don't see Black women as unfriendly. I'm just like, "she has somewhere to be," but I know as soon as I get her attention later and say hello and they hit me with a big smiling, "hey girl," we

catch up, keep going, versus someone who's not Black they may see us as angry Black women.

I have an idea of how other people see Black women, but because I'm a Black woman I can only speak from how I see other Black women. Like I see us as strong. I see us as, like I said, very friendly, very nurturing, we check-in with one another beyond the physical, and we have – we're very good at seeing a 360 view, that double consciousness. But how others see us on this campus, I'm not even—I guess I'm not even concerned with that.

Though Solange was clear about being a Black woman, she left her identification with feminism, Black Feminism, and Black Womanism open and undefined. She explained this in the following way:

It's a floating signifier to some extent, like it's always changing depending on, like the era we're in or whatever the case may be. I don't label myself as either or any – I need to explore really why I think – with labels it just honestly makes me uncomfortable because it's this sense of boxing and you're only this and you can't be anything else, but . . . if I was to gravitate toward anything it would be womanist 'cause it tailors more toward my community and a Black woman did coin it.

Despite not necessarily embracing a specific feminist or womanist identifier, Solange presented an appreciation for Black women as leaders and their ways of being.

We are able to operate in a way where we know what's true to ourselves. As far as like the 360 view, it's whether I'm speaking about mentors in my life or friendtors in my life, because of this all encompassing masculine and feminine energy that I see women

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possess, as least in this higher ed space, we don't see everything as one-sided . . . When we present things, it's more like, "This is what I'm hearing . . . this is what it looks like . . ." I see it like as Black women being, in a sense, prodigies of Ella Baker and that's kind of what I think of in regards to sitting back, seeing everything, seeing the big picture, and then speaking up when it's time. And it's like, "So this is what you're saying and this is what I'm getting."

Solange was quick, clear, and animated when she talked about where she mattered at the CUELA campus. On the co-curricular side of campus, Solange mentioned the Cross Cultural Centers. "That's what made me come here, stay here, and want to eventually seek employment here." Additionally, the Black Student Union— "because it was women-led"—was a space of mattering for Solange, along with the Counseling Center, "but when I say there, I'm speaking of one counselor specifically there who identifies as Black in that space."

Solange shared that interactions with Black faculty and staff at CUELA added to her sense of mattering on campus. "It's little things, whether it's eye contact, or checking in with my breath, or checking in not only with academics, but how are you." Solange continued the conversation about mattering when she spoke of CUELA academic spaces that were affirming and why she identified them as such:

In my Pan-African Studies classes . . . I know it's the Black Womanism class. In those classes, I definitely feel like my voice is always at the forefront. My experiences are at the forefront . . . my Black women's experiences are always at the forefront, and that's like versus other classes—if this makes sense—you start—how can I put this. . . . You start from [your identity] and then we move out. As opposed to starting outward   and

then you move in. Does that make sense? It's like we're getting to the point or it's my reality so it's—we speak from that. We speak from our realities versus. So in PAS and WGSS, they're speaking from a reality very similar to mine, and so automatically I feel heard, I feel represented, and I feel stimulated, and intellectually stimulated, emotionally satisfied.

Solange was equally forthcoming about where she felt marginalized at CUELA—in her academic major, Public Health. "I definitely don't feel like I have a voice. It's just the lens that they look at the populations they're studying or bringing into the conversation."

Solange again mentioned her student assistant job in admissions as a space of marginalization, a job she held when Trayvon Martin and a number of other unarmed, young Black men were being murdered around the United States. This was significant to Solange. "No one as far as like supervisors never checked in with me, and when I was like—when—I'm so, like, annoyed thinking about it—when I was wearing my emotions on my sleeve, I was really just down about it."

Solange still carried memories of how a supervisor asked another Black student assistant, Aaliyah, to intervene whenever it appeared that Solange was emotional, moody, in her feelings, and so forth while on the job.

They told her, "you need to check—not check in, but check her because she's making the workplace uncomfortable." The tone was definitely check her, not check in. Race issues weren't brought up, and I'm like it's so interconnected to who I am and what I bring to the table, and we're not even discussing what's happening outside with protests like Black Lives Matter—whatever may have been happening at the moment.

Solange served as President and Vice President of the Black Student Union at CUELA during 2015–2016 academic year, when the BSU decided to address the needs of Black students via issuing demands to the campus president and administration and by initiating public protests and demonstrations to make campus aware of their message. Reflecting on the year, Solange shared the following.

So yeah, a lot of emotion, whether it was passion—it was almost like a crash, like a—like after taking a drug but not really, but as far as like emotion and being on this, like, rollercoaster of . . . I don't know how to put it. Just like adrenaline. I just remember a lot of adrenaline pumping even when we weren't on the scene of protesting or weren't up working on the demands—it was just adrenaline keeping up at night, waking me up in the morning, which may be, I guess, an exchange of what stress is made of —symptoms of stress at the time, but because we weren't running the organization like a student-led organization, we were running it like some, like, Black Panther stuff. But as far as emotions it was, like, adrenaline and then a crash of like, depression and resentment . . . Yeah, it was overwhelming, but that overwhelming feeling didn't triumph the idea of, like, what's gonna happen next in a positive way for students. Like, I was really scared—not scared like scared—but like how they'll retaliate against us.

When the Concerned Students 1950 issued their list of demands on behalf of Black students at Mizzou in Fall 2015, Solange and the BSU board, led by Black women, decided to stand in solidarity at CUELA. The group organized a campus-wide walkout.

It just got bigger and bigger, and I think that was the largest protest I'd ever seen. It got

really large and we migrated over to the University Student Union Plaza and everyone's

amped up, hyped up, and I remember someone saying to take advantage of that energy.

For Solange, that was a moment of stepping up in a way that she had not expected, when a year

earlier her only intention was to get the BSU up, running, and recognized again by the university

as a student organization.

In that moment, my voice was shaky; but at some point, I remember, like, raising my

voice and I said, "Okay, but what's next? Like what are we gonna do after today? What's

our next action step or action plan?"

Once Solange and BSU President Aaliyah drafted and issued their list of demands to the

CUELA President, there were weeks of negotiations, meetings, and public and private gatherings

of the BSU board to assess the progress. CUELA President and campus administrators responded

to the group's list in December 2015. Both sides felt there was some progress in the campus's

commitment to BSU and to Black students, staff, and faculty in general. However, following the

winter break, students and faculty returned in late January 2016 to the news that a right-wing,

conservative speaker with anti-Black opinions and views had been invited to CUELA by a

student-led organization. The speaker's topic: "When Campus Diversity Goes Wrong."

BSU asked CUELA president to not allow the speaker to come to campus. There were

multiple and mixed interpretations related to the CUELA president rescinding, or disallowing,

the speaker from coming to campus, which BSU, initially, saw as a move of good faith; then

followed by a decision to allow the speaker to speak at CUELA with certain conditions and

restrictions. Solange and BSU saw this move by CUELA president as one that spoke volumes to

the campus commitment to diversity, and specifically to Black students. In response, the Student

Board under the leadership of Solange and BSU's President Aaliyah called for another meeting

with CUELA President.

> I remember us all—most of the student board sitting at the table in the Pan African
>
> Student Resource Center. I remember us being really strategic about who would sit
>
> where, and where we would allow CUELA President to sit. We wouldn't allow anyone
>
> from his team stepping into the space. We monitored the door. I remember one of his—I
>
> don't know what to call it—like cabinet members, I don't know what to call them, but
>
> one of his representatives tried to step in the door. I remember interjecting, saying, "No…
>
> only President Kane is allowed in this space," and she said okay, she stepped out, and it
>
> was nothing but students, literally.

Solange further described, with some detail, the tenor and tone of the meeting with the CUELA

president.

> It was the most powerful thing I've ever seen. But it was students just surrounding
>
> President Kane, Aaliyah staring him down, DeJuan on one end, I believe, and Nettie and
>
> Umar on the other end. I was guarding the door and monitoring who was trying to come
>
> in and out. My adrenaline was pumping. The President told us he could not prevent BS
>
> from coming to campus to speak . . . So BS came. And that day was the largest protest,
>
> again, that I've ever seen and we ended up marching to President Kane's office to push
>
> forth more demands. I remember seeing students blocking the way for BS to enter into
>
> the Student Union, and then we found out Campus Police and administrators made a
>
> separate entrance for BS and his followers to enter the building. I remember seeing

students and faculty and staff use their bodies like human shields to help us create a

blockade. And I was like, "wow, like they're here for us, so that was cool."

Solange continued by noting,

After BS event ended, we moved from the Student Union space and we ended up

marching toward President Kane's office. Yeah, we marched all the way from the

Student Union to Kane's office and at some point Aaliyah yells on the bullhorn, "We

demand your resignation," and I was like, 'What?' I was like, 'We can do that?' And we

went with it . . . and the momentum built and we marched up to the second floor —to the

sixth. Some of us took the stairs, heaving and trying to catch our breaths. We camped out

for 12 hours. Administrators donated food, which I was kind of conflicted about because

it was kind of a mind-fuck for administrators to be giving us sleeping bags and donating

food.

About their approach to leadership, Solange explained,

What I can say is that we operated from an Ella Baker perspective, where we were like

let's do this group-led. Like, we're not doing this for recognition or we're not doing this

for this, that, or the other. We're doing this for the students on campus.

Solange shared reflections on the connections between her own and the group's activism

for Black students at CUELA, and other social justice movements happening across the country

at the same time.

Then in our PAS class discussions it came up about did we notice that Black women are

leading our movements, whether it's behind-the-scenes or at the forefront, and it's very

open and obvious. And then that's when Black Lives Matter was brought up and then

that's when I had the reflection moment like, oh, me, and Aaliyah are here at the forefront. And we as Black women have a very unique way of leadership. Because Aaliyah singlehandedly chose us, 'cause she was like maybe this feminine energy should be at the table. It's almost unreal to believe that we were a part of that.

For Solange, mental and physical wellness connected with social justice work in her life. She spoke of how she was able to cope and care for herself during the activism of 2015–2016 at CUELA.

And then we had Core and Assata checking in on us and meeting with us one-on-one, because they were realizing we were dealing with a lot of stuff, just a lot of —like we were down, we were so depressed, like I mean no one talked about it with one another 'cause I think we didn't even have the—like we knew what depression was to some extent, but we didn't know we were showing symptoms of it. It was just this emotional and mental fatigue.

Solange, at this point, also spoke about the issue of guilt associated with the work.

I didn't know what it looked like to step away because it was this sense of guilt if I stepped away from it. So trying to find out what that balance looks like, because I also felt guilty when people would say, "No, activism or social justice is my self-care." And I was like what does that mean for me? Does that mean, like, I'm not doing my part or does this mean like—it was just a lot that I was dealing with too, but . . .Yeah, not dealing with all of that . . . I had to look at boundaries and what do boundaries look like and self-care and what self-care looks like.

Solange was clear about what college administrators can do to address the needs of Black women on college campuses who consider themselves committed to activism or social justice work.

> Don't just meet with us when the S-H-I-T has hit the fan, and then be like, "Oh, I didn't even know you were feeling this way or that this is what is going on on campus." Check in with us.

Moreover, collectivity and transparency were important issues to Solange.

> Meet in public spaces with Black women—it's more beneficial because we'll all see we're not alone in this, and we might inspire someone else. We don't want to come to your office or meet with you individually. It's almost like you're trying to keep this sense of division. Public only.

**Aaliyah**

*You don't have to be at Howard to make a difference…*

Aaliyah was a 27-year old senior at CUELA. She identified as an African American woman. Though she graduated in June 2017, she was completing a final semester of classes before her degree was conferred in December 2017. She was a nutritional science major and had a minor in Pan-African Studies. At the time of her narrative session, Aaliyah was working as a student assistant in an office addressing food insecurity and homelessness among CUELA students. While at CUELA, Aaliyah served initially as Vice President of the Black Student Union, then, moved into the role of BSU President.

Aaliyah transferred to CUELA in her junior year, after attending a community college, which she described as "a very white environment." She wanted to attend Howard University, a

historically Black university in Washington, DC, because of its Black-focused student body and environment. Due to concerns about financial aid, however, Aaliyah chose to stay in California and pursue the community college and CUELA transfer route to higher education.

She was born in Huntsville, Alabama, lived in various places on the East Coast during her infant years, then Oregon, before moving to California where her parents were originally from—Compton and Altadena in the Los Angeles area. Aaliyah described her growing up years as very religious—her biological father was a minister; attending church was an expectation by her mother, father, and grandparents. She described her family as one where domestic violence was present (no disclosure of incidents or types of incidents). She described school and eventually moving away to community college and CUELA as her avenue of escape, a way to define and shape her future through her own experiences. Aaliyah shared that she came to understand social justice and her identity, influenced primarily by her mother's lessons at home first, and then by listening to her grandmother's stories about experiences growing up in Texas during the Jim Crow era.

> My mom was like, "You're doing to know where you come from," she was like, "You're going to understand like—we're going to talk about slavery, you're going to sit down, you're going to watch *Roots*, you're going to like . . ." So every time I talk about this, like, I always go back to *Roots*, and every time anybody that comes into my life, I'm like, "Have you seen *Roots*? Have you seen it from the beginning to the end?"

Aaliyah's grandmother, now almost 90, and her mother, who was born in the 1960s, often joked that, "Oh, Aaliyah's the new Angela Davis," and that they felt they did Aaliyah and her siblings a disservice because the siblings "have turned out too militant—but I would argue that

did not do us a disservice." Instead, Aaliyah said that her upbringing helped her understand her Blackness to a certain extent, until she encountered Pan-African Studies at CUELA.

> I thought I had this like understanding of "being woke," and then this professor and I had this conversation like, "Well, you sound like you like Black stuff. So what did you think about *Fruitvale Station*?" And I was like, "Fruitvale what?" And he was like, "I thought you said you watched Black films." And I was like, "I don't think I've seen that one. No." And he was like, "Well, have you thought about minoring in Pan-African Studies?" I said, "What is Pan-African Studies? I don't understand." He explained more to me. And I was like, "I've got to think on this. Like I'm a transfer student, I'm getting older, I can't take on extra . . ." You know.

Shortly after that conversation, Trayvon Martin was murdered, which furthered Aaliyah's social justice commitment, and connected to the film *Fruitvale Station* recommended by her Pan-African Studies professor.

> I was devastated by that because I have a younger brother, I have nephews, I have, you know, so I was in this place of not understanding, and so I talked with my supervisor at the Cross Cultural Centers—who was the first Black supervisor I ever had in my life—and I started seeing the environment on campus and in the world and I was like, "Oh, this is what working for social justice means. I get it." Like this was the first time I was like, "I'm going to make it." It was like a light switch went off, like, "Aaliyah, you don't have to be at Howard to make a difference."

Aaliyah settled into life as a transfer student at CUELA, determined to complete her degree in 2 years. But this was not as easy as originally planned.

Endurance. Struggle. A struggle for a lot of things. I think a struggle to be heard, recognized—I think I go back to strength, though, and endurance, because no matter what's thrown at you . . . in order to succeed and excel in Higher Education as a Black woman, you have to have the strength to endure. And I think that would pretty much encompass everything.

As an undergraduate student at CUELA, Aaliyah shared that her plate is full with numerous commitments.

Having to work and having a personal life outside of that and then having to balance things as a student as well . . . Black women in general, I think we are taught to bear everything and to handle it with a big ass "S" on our chest—excuse my cussing—but we're taught to do that. And like there's no way around that. You have things thrown at you: you figure out how to balance it.

Aaliyah reflected on the concepts of feminism and womanism with a bit of hesitation:

When I think of feminism, I think of white women. I don't think of Black women. So I don't see myself in that equation the majority of the time. Okay, when I hear the word feminism, I feel like I've been trained to avoid it. And so it's hard for me to say, "Oh yeah, I'm down. I don't see Harriet Tubman or Fannie Lou Hamer or Ella Baker."

Though she agreed with concepts such as equal pay and where women should have opportunities to share their skills, talents, and intelligence beyond the home, Aaliyah shared that she also has empathy for Black men and their experiences with oppression in society.

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A lot of times our Black men are left out of the equation, and so I feel like Black men in general have it hard already. I don't want to say they have it harder than Black women, because I don't want to argue struggles, but I feel sometimes they're left out of the narrative.

An issue through much of our conversation was balance. While attempting to balance a full and complex life, Aaliyah shared that she also looked for meaning and connection at CUELA early after transferring to campus. For her, there were two places at CUELA where she felt like she mattered—the Department of Pan-African Studies and the Cross Cultural Centers.

Pan-African Studies—the department—and I feel like there's individuals within that department that make it—make me a priority to some extent where I feel like I matter within that. I feel like I matter in the Black spaces that I've been in—so I like the Pan African Student Resource Center, like when NSBE (a Black Engineering student group) or BSU or other Black folks from sororities or fraternities or whatever come in here and mingle where we would have those conversations about anything and everything and people don't feel—there's not a feeling of like sensitivity necessarily because we understand where each other's coming from and we understand that it comes from a place of love.

For Aaliyah, her major, nutritional science, was a place on campus where she felt like she did not matter or belong as a student. In addition to there being a small number of Black students in her classes and program, Aayilah felt that none of the classroom conversations spoke to issues relevant to her, Black women, or the Black community in general, even when she asked questions or raised points she had hoped her professors would pick up and elaborate on.

"There, it's like you always have to have a front, you know?" She shared that in order to survive within her major, as well as on campus, she code switched, which she shared, "I pride myself on not being a fake person, but . . . being able to switch it up in different environments, you don't always feel 100 percent yourself."

Aaliyah spoke of her current campus workplace as a place where she felt she needed to escape from at times to the places where she feels she mattered.

> In the work space, I feel that what it is . . . is a sense of disingenuous and so it's like—a pretend to care, but not really care, and that comes across, and you kind of like fall in line and just go with it, and that's draining.

Aaliyah brought up the campus demographics—close to 60% of CUELA students were identified at Chicanx Latinx—and the challenges that posed for the small number of Black women on campus.

> I don't think being a Black woman is celebrated at CUELA. Okay, we have like the Black Community Honors dinner or the Pan African Forum event but that's through Pan-African Studies and not put on by CUELA, so no, I don't feel like we're celebrated on this campus. I don't feel like Black women specifically are one of those identities that are celebrated. No. I feel like our Latinx folks—which makes sense since we're majority Latinx at CUELA—and the LGBTQ-plus population is celebrated to some extent. I feel like they take a very special interest in those two populations because that's what is the bigger population on campus and so they make sure to funnel all their resources into that and I feel like what's left out is everybody else—specifically Black women or specifically the entire

Black population. Like this campus is like an HBCU (Historically Black College and University) for Spanish-speaking people.

Aaliyah remembered an early interaction with a Latina coworker in the admissions department at CUELA that remained in her memory bank of microaggressions that she had experienced on the campus.

She said "Nigger" like so easily—not Black—and I'm the only Black person there with Solange—and I—like I questioned whether I should respond or not because you pick your battles. And so, she continues to talk and like not a minute later she said, "Nigger" again and I was like, "Okay, excuse me, sorry." . . . First of all, I'm at work and in my mind I'm already struggling within the Black community that says you don't say it, who's using it, who's not using it—nobody should ever say it, period. So, I felt very disrespected and was like, "Excuse me. Did you just say what I think you said?" and the response was, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I say it all the time. Me and my brother always say it." And it was like she knew she shouldn't have said it, but didn't expect to be checked because—and I don't know if that's because maybe she was around other Black people who went ahead and let that happen, which I don't understand. But experiencing things like that, when they're not understanding the severity of that word. So I was like, "So you're not understanding the full weight of what you just said in front of me. I wouldn't call you something derogatory," which is even—any of the derogatory words I could have called her don't come close to the word "Nigger," and I was like, "so why would you disrespect me in that way?"

Though Aaliyah grew up with an understanding the history of Civil Rights–era activism, identified as pro-Black, and was instrumental in resurrecting and sustaining BSU as the organization president, activism was not part of her plan. "Like, people threw that on me and I was like, 'Whoa, pump your breaks.'"

Then, as the number of shootings of unarmed Black people came to the public's attention, followed by Black student activism and protests at Mizzou at the beginning of Fall 2015, Aaliyah felt an awakening in her spirit, but also shared:

> I still didn't think we should do anything. I thought we should do something but I didn't know what—I'll put it that way. And I didn't think that what we should do was necessarily protest. Like it wasn't that I didn't think we shouldn't do it, it just wasn't a thought. But I was just like, "Yeah. We need solidarity." Like, you know?

Aaliyah recalled receiving a phone call from a representative of the statewide Afrikan Black Coalition, an umbrella organization that provides leadership development, conference opportunities, and guidance to the state's Black Student Union chapters. The caller urged Aaliyah to take immediate action—to provide leadership in solidarity with Mizzou, and to open a platform for Black students at CUELA to reflect their campus experiences—as many other BSU chapters in California and across the country had already signed on to take action on their campuses. She spoke at length of her response.

> And so I went home and I literally fell to my knees and I was like, "I don't know what to expect tomorrow—I don't even know—I don't know." Like I've never led a protest. I've never led a walkout or whatever—like I've never done anything relatively close to any of this, so I don't even know what to expect. And I couldn't sleep the entire night.

And I woke up the next morning and I was like, "Oh that's right. I've got to wear all

black," and I'm picking my hair out to get in the groove of everything. And I remember

walking into the space and people were doing the different signs and stuff and I was like,

"Yeah, I'm calling out to work," and I told them like, "Yeah, I'm not going to make it

in," and I just—like all these little simple, normal routine type of things were just kind of

like being dismissed, like I didn't understand the impact of what—or the significance and

impact of what was about to happen.

Aaliyah continued,

And then we started walking through campus and I remember seeing like all the

people who were joining in and I just—like it was an indescribable feeling like what I felt

—but I knew that—I remember watching *Malcolm X* as a younger person and I

remember the scene where they had gone to the hospital to see Brother Johnson—I think

his name was—and Malcolm—Denzel—who embodied that role—he turned, and he

looked at the crowd, he put up his hand, and then he signaled for them to start moving

and just the power in that scene. So then seeing all of the people join in our campus

walkout, and getting that feeling of just like—I can't even explain it. It was more than—it

wasn't even so much gratitude—and it wasn't even like recognition. It was just a moment

of unity—and I still can't explain what that meant—like that feeling of just like believing

in humanity to an extent, like, "Whoa, we could really come together for something that

means something and stand up for something that's right and then conclude it with

everybody talking about what it meant to be Black on campus."

Aaliyah also noted the impact that this moment had on her personally.

And I think in that moment I was just like, "Oh yeah, we've got some issues here." And I knew—now I'm like not the only person—I've been sitting in my class as the only person—I'm not the only person. And that very next day we got called into a meeting—I didn't know what that meant either—like all these little— I'm getting pulled in directions that I don't know, but I was just told to show up at a certain place at a certain time, and what was said to us was, "All these other schools are drafting demands while it's hot. This is something we need to think about," and I was like, "All right. I'm on it. Let's do it." And from there, just like the demands and then talking with administration—and it all happened so fast, but like I did not realize the impact—like what it really meant.

As the BSU president, Aaliyah was the main student leading conversations with CUELA president. After a series of missed, or misinterpreted, meeting times and places, Aaliyah said she issued an ultimatum to the campus president as to where and when to meet with her and the BSU board to discuss demands.

I was nervous because I'm like, "This is it. I can't believe that this might be happening." And I had people telling me beforehand, "You've got this. Just remember to stick with . . . " you know like trying to reassure me that, "We're not there and we can't tell you what to say, but just know you've got this." And I took it to God, like, "You're in control." I remember relaxing and started taking deep breaths and trying to get my heart rate down—and then I remember walking—I really didn't think he was going to show up— and I walked in the room and he was there. And then at that moment I didn't think of

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anything else. At that moment I was like, "I have a specific task and it has to be accomplished and now we're about to accomplish that. And I'm going to stand firm in what I believe in and that's that."

In considering the impact of her actions at the time, Aaliyah provided the following insight:

I didn't understand the impact that that would have on, one, my future—I didn't understand the impact that that would have on various aspects of campus life. I didn't understand what I was doing. I didn't understand what I was putting myself into. Did not have a clue at all. And then that led to our second meeting where we had the tables and he came in and—again, I didn't think about it. I just like—if I think about it, then I'm going to psych myself out and I think that's what was going through my head like, "You can't—like don't think, Aaliyah, don't think: just do." And yeah. But literally talking to God the entire time, like, "You've got to take control of this."

Aaliyah shared that it was a series of internal conversations and self-talk that was instrumental in her conversations and negotiations with the CUELA president.

Like I had Malcolm X in my head and then I remember thinking—there were several times where I was like, "This is what it must have felt like when Malcolm and Martin had that conversation. This is what it must have felt like . . ." . . . I was like, "Man, like we don't ever think about—we always see the strength of Martin. We always see the strength of Malcolm. We always see the strength of Rosa and Harriet and we never really think about those moments of when they questioned things because they did so much for us,' you know? And that's where—I found strength in that—is that it wasn't easy for them either, but just because the portrayals of these individuals is strength and so

much—they fought, fought, fought, fought—I'm sure that they questioned things. You know what I mean?

In the midst of Aaliyah's activism on behalf of BSU and Black students at CUELA, it was, again, her mother who provided moments of humorous reflection. On the prospect of possibly being arrested for occupying the campus president's office, Aaliyah shared the following.

> And I had to reevaluate like if that means, "Hey, you could end up in prison. And if that means that you are in jail are you okay with that?" "Yep, I'm okay with it." I had to say that to myself, like, "Yep, you're okay with it." And then think about what my mom was going to say. Like fast-forward when we're up in the president's—on the president's floor occupying space —my mom called me, "Aaliyah, girl, please don't get arrested. I don't have bail money." I was like, "Girl, I might just have to sleep it off in jail then." I was like, "Well, you don't have bail money to bail me out, but I've got people—I've got a lawyer on my side," like I know at the end of the day if something happens to me, somebody's going to help me. But having these conversations like, "This is what's about to happen. Are you sure – like you're challenging them—are you sure that this is okay?" And being okay with it. Someone said, "The police are downstairs, they're getting those little zip ties together," and I remember hearing that and like, "All right. Here we go." Here it goes. And yeah. I didn't feel scared or afraid of it or anything as long as what I believed in what I was doing—as long as it made sense to me, I was like, "Okay, we're good."

Fortunately, Aaliyah was never arrested.

Aaliyah's year leading BSU, demands, and protest had given her several points of reflection on her own growth.

Now looking back on it, I'm very grateful for multiple reasons, but I'm eternally grateful for it because it took out of me—I think I know I'm a leader and I think I knew I was a leader, but I was—I keep trying to run away from like—bring God into it—but you try to run away from what God has set for you and you like try and push it in the back, push it in the back, push it in the back, and God's like, "Girl, if you don't get your life together and realize that this is a part of who you are as a person."

The experience also gave Aaliyah moments of reflection on campus life for Black women.

Spaces like the Pan African Student Resource Center and Pan-African Studies . . . these spaces are important for academic success—because all through campus, other students feel supported in some way, right? When you have people who are believing in you and constantly instilling positive energy and positive thoughts and things into you, you're going to do better—you're going to excel. I think it's important for campuses to provide a space for Black women where it's like, "It's okay to just go and be."

Aaliyah shared that the exterior of Black women on campus hides what may be going on for them and that caring staff interventions are important.

People don't see the internal things that are going on. For me specifically, I go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go, do, do, do, do. When people see you, they see strong, like leader, boss, whatever you want to say. We need people who just check in with us.

**Ororo**

> *... sometimes I have to do a script and I have to be like, 'Okay, this is how the script has to go, because if you get off-script this person is not gonna hear you. They're just gonna start saying, 'Oh, she has an attitude or whatever.' I think that part is challenging.*

Ororo and I met at her office at CUELA on a Saturday evening in September 2017. Ororo was a doctoral student in educational leadership, and she frequently completed her homework assignments and readings in her office on weekends. Participating in this narrative session with me was part of her to-do list of assignments for the day. Ororo was a full-time, professional staff member at CUELA. She was an assistant director for a department working with students who identify as having special needs and needing accommodations. Ororo attended CUELA for her undergraduate degree—criminal justice—and master's degree—counseling with a concentration in rehabilitation services. She considered herself a Certified Rehab Counselor. At the time of this study, she was enrolled in a doctoral program for educational leadership at a university in the Los Angeles area. She completed her doctorate in May 2018.

Ororo was in her late 30s, and considered herself African American or Black—she used both interchangeably. For part of her childhood, she and her family lived in Mississippi, but she came of age and finished high school while living in the predominantly Black Baldwin Hills area of Los Angeles. As a teenager, Ororo used to frequent The Good Life Café, a space formerly on Crenshaw Boulevard in South LA, where Black youth would gather to create and perform conscious hip-hop and spoken word pieces. Ororo considered herself artsy, and would like to get back into writing poetry and raps, performing, and dancing.

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Though she considered herself a strong, Black woman, Ororo did not necessarily embrace a feminist identity.

I didn't really get what feminism was probably until I finished graduate school, because honestly, I attach feminism with white women . . . It wasn't until people started talking about bell hooks, then I was like, 'Wait a minute, we got something here."

Having spent most of her life at CUELA, Ororo considered herself well-versed and knowledgeable of the campus story and student experience. In addition to her professional role working with students with disabilities, Ororo served—or, rather, had been asked, and agreed to be—advisor for one Black fraternity, one Black sorority, and the Black Student Union student organizations.

Ororo's initial introduction to social justice and inequality issues came during the 1992 Los Angeles rebellion, when she was still in middle school.

My stepdad was very active at that time in social justice things, so when that rebellion happened, we actually were out there in it. It just opened my eyes to a whole other world, because it wasn't just what was happening, it was the why. I got the why.

Ororo's social justice advocacy continued through high school when she and other Black students walked out of school in solidarity with Chicanx Latinx students who were protesting California Prop 187, which sought to cut off all state-funded services to people considered to be undocumented immigrants. Ororo was admitted to CUELA through the campus Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), a special admissions program for first-generation college students who need extra academic assistance in math and science, and general transition support from high school to college. While in the EOP Summer Bridge program, Ororo and other students

found themselves subject of gossip and unnecessary judgment by professional staff leading the summer experience.

> I decided, well, let's make a way where you can have a voice, so you can say what's going on. No one should be speaking for you. In fact, they shouldn't be speaking for anyone. We all should be able to have a voice. We all should be able to say how we feel. I started to realize how important people's voices were. So we created a community day, where students were able to speak to the department and community. So from that day on, for like the next ten or twelve years, there was a community day in Summer Bridge.

Through EOP's collaboration with campus Ethnic Studies departments, Ororo was able to take several Pan-African Studies classes, as well as Women's Studies, Latin American Studies and Chicano Studies to fulfill GE (General Education) requirements during the Summer Bridge experience, an experience she shared helped her connect her life to academia. Early into her undergraduate student life at CUELA, the campus Cross Cultural Centers department was founded, and Ororo got involved by volunteering and attending events related to social justice, identity, and community.

As noted earlier, Ororo had spent more than half her life at CUELA, transitioning from undergraduate and graduate student to full-time professional. This time had given her plenty of time to reflect on what it meant to be a Black woman at CUELA.

> I see a lot of effort put forth by Black women in general in the institution, whether they're staff or administrators . . . committed, helpful, respected to a certain degree, especially in particular by students. But limited keeps sticking out, meaning there's not very many high-level positions. I don't see a lot of Black women in faculty. There are some as staff,

but a lot of the Black women who are staff have been on campus for a really long time . . . Sometimes I think it can be very challenging at times to be a Black woman, especially in an institution, and especially the higher up you move in your position. I'm just straightforward. I think that's one of the things that my staff appreciates is that I'm very straightforward, but I think outside of my office, yeah, it's just challenging. It's like I can't be assertive. I can't be loud. I can't have an opinion.

Negotiating the process of having a voice and opinion, while trying to be conscious of how others may perceive her, was a theme of Ororo's professional life at CUELA. She shared this is challenging for her as a Black woman professional.

I literally have to pre-plan how I want to say something before I talk to certain people. I have to make myself a script, like, "Say this like this, so this person doesn't get offended." And it gets really tiring trying to do a script, because you don't want someone else to not hear you because they're too busy labeling you. So I don't want people to not hear me, so sometimes I have to do a script and I have to be like, "Okay, this is how the script has to go, because if you get off-script this person is not gonna hear you. They're just gonna start saying, 'Oh, she has an attitude or whatever.'" I think that part is challenging.

Though Ororo often rehearsed what she wanted to say to high-level administrators or faculty colleagues, it was with the students she worked with at CUELA that she said she felt she mattered most and had the greatest sense of comfort and connection. "I'm here because of them. So my priority is to them first. So I feel like I matter the most to students."

When Ororo was promoted to assistant director of her department, she felt for the first time that her opinions and recommendations mattered, and that her expertise began to have value on campus.

I feel like my voice as a Black woman is elevated on campus in certain meetings and I really have to advocate for students with disabilities, because this is a unique population of students who have not been advocated for in the last fifteen years the way that they should have been advocated for. We're still living under that ablest umbrella. I feel like my voice is elevated, because people don't have that information, which is good.

Outside of speaking with students or about students with disabilities, Ororo shared that she felt marginalized in her interactions with campus administrators.

The reason I say that is because there are administrators who I engage with pretty regularly, and what happens is that a lot of the engagement is driven on the title. So I'm not an upper-level administrator, so I feel like other administrators who are upper-level, they don't consider my feedback or the experience that I have or have had on this campus for certain matters that pertain to students directly.

Although women of color made up the majority of the campus population, Ororo shared that she did not see an effort to support women in general on campus. As for Black women, "I don't think that they've done anything to celebrate Black women. It is just not even talked about. I would like to see them do that." Ororo was also quick to point out, with a sense of pride, the Black women who led the BSU and its campus activism in 2015–2016.

Most of the demands were constructed, planned, thought out by Black women. They were all Black women who kind of were spearheading that, not just involved, but spearheading

it. In fact, when the BSU president, who was a Black woman, met with the campus

president, she led that meeting. She led that meeting.

Reflecting on the role of Black women assuming leadership, Ororo shared,

I think it's so common. It's common for me. It's like every time something happens it's

like—yeah, a lot of times where there's periods and times of activism, you see a lot of

Black women standing on the frontline to certain causes. They're not the only one's

obviously, but they're often present.

As a staff advisor to the BSU, Ororo's role was to support the student leaders—

emotional, knowledge, whom to talk to, and general advice.

When they had on-campus protests and things like that, they would tell me, "We're

gonna be outside from this time till this time. Are you gonna be out there?" And when I

would go out there, they just wanted to see me there.

When Ororo thought about the 2015–2016 academic year, she reflected back even further

to the late 2000s during the California state budget crisis when CUELA supported student

protesters by sending "busloads and busloads of this campus to the then governor's office" to

advocate on behalf of the university, "whereas, just a couple years ago when these issues were

happening in the Black community, there weren't busloads and busloads of people that were

going anywhere."

For Ororo, the murder of Trayvon Martin affected her personally and was a catalyst for

many conversations she facilitated as advisor with the leaders of BSU.

After Trayvon Martin got killed, Black people in the community were like,

"enough is enough." A lot of Black women were like, "they're killing our Black

men." I mean these students on this campus who are part of BSU come from those communities. It seemed like only BSU, CCC, and PAS was talking about it. . . . Some things that come to mind during that time period is that I feel like the institution as a whole, I think there is a fear in regards to Black people. I think that when the Black Lives Matter movement was happening in society, out socially in communities and things like that, I feel like the institution was kind of like, "Please don't come in the institution," kind of like that. "That's happening out there," or, "That happened over there," type of feeling, like, "We're all good here." I think in general people don't want to have that discussion, the discussion about privilege, white privilege in particular, systemic discrimination or racism. I feel like people don't want to have that conversation because they're difficult conversations. So, I feel like the institution at that time didn't want to have those conversations. So as a result of not wanting to have those conversations, that's when the students got active.

About the activism of that time, Ororo noted, "I liked the activism because I liked that awareness that was being brought to things that were happening in the Black community that had been happening for a long time."

For campuses to support Black women, specifically those working on behalf of social justice, Ororo shared, administrators need to develop ongoing relationships with them.

There were no high-level administrators around. There were no administrators. I think they weren't there because I think that the students did not trust them, because they did not see them at anything or they didn't feel the support from them.

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Ororo echoed similar ideas on how she would like to see campus administrators see and treat her, as a Black woman professional on campus.

> My recommendation would be to allow us to have our voice. Include us in things that we should be included in, and then allow us to have our voice when we are in that space, as opposed to having some kind of strange fear. It's like we're at work. We're professional. We know how to be professional. I'm not gonna throw a piece of paper at you because I don't like something that you're saying.

Ororo mentioned that she would have benefitted (and would benefit today) from a professional mentoring program and support groups on campus that include students, staff, and faculty in the creation process and as mentors/mentees. "I think there's a wealth of experience there, plus support and community that's not being tapped into, something similar to the Black Faculty and Staff Caucus."

Much like her undergraduate experience in EOP Summer Bridge, Ororo believed that enrolling in Ethnic Studies classes and involvement with the Cross Cultural Centers should be mandatory. "I think that leads to a reduction of prejudice and bias against other groups, and especially against Black women. I think that's important for students, and can be extremely important for Black women on this particular campus."

**Core**

> *At the end of the day, the reality is this. People are scared of Black. Now, here's the thing. Black ain't never did nothing to people for them to be scared of Black. But people are scared and intimidated by Black. And they've bought into this idea of Black dominance.*

Core and I met at her office at CUELA on a random mid-week workday, when a number of her meetings and/or clients had cancelled appointments. Core was eager to participate in the study and narrative session.

Core was a licensed therapist and counselor at CUELA. She was in her 30s and identified as a Black woman, about which she clarified,

In my family, what that means is African American and also Afro-Latino. My father's Black Panamanian and West Indian, so—West Indian being what they call in Panama Antillean African. So "Black" is just the summation of all these parts, 'cause we know what that looks like in terms of the Diaspora. I strongly identify as a Black woman.

Core was a Los Angeles native, specifically from Inglewood. She had two siblings and said that most of her growing up life was middle-middle class, with two parents until they separated, and she was enrolled in and bussed to parochial schools in the South Bay area of Los Angeles. Core started and stopped numerous undergrad college experiences, and eventually earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in her late 20s and early 30s.

Core was relatively new to the higher education profession, and it was not a field that she had initially envisioned as part of her life path. Prior to working at CUELA, Core worked at several South L.A.- and Inglewood-based social work and counseling organizations. Much of her work in those settings focused on Black clients and Black community issues. Before her life as a therapist, Core was (and still is) a nationally known spoken word artist, poet, and performer, and was a frequent guest on the HBO series *Def Poetry Jam*.

For years, she had been contracted by several departments at CUELA to perform, lead and direct theatre pieces, and participate on scholarly panels. Eventually, Core was hired as a

full-time, professional Coordinator for the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, part of the Cross Cultural Centers department. Her position in the campus Counseling Center came as a result of the BSU demands for more culturally competent and Black counselors at CUELA.

Core was married and had two teen/almost teen daughters from a previous relationship; and one step-daughter whom she was raising with her husband. Core's journey to embracing a socially conscious mindset came during her pregnancies with her two daughters, "because I didn't go to a normal, traditional college experience where for many that's their introduction to a lotta social justice stuff." About this, she explained further:

I was pregnant with her when we went into Iraq. And that was the first time I protested. Because I was pregnant, like, "Please don't go to war. I'm about to have a baby." I don't—I don't—I don't know what that means to have a baby at a time of war. And so I was—that was my first time becoming socially active. The second child was—I was pregnant with her during Katrina. And watching the treatment and the gentrification and the dismissal and the dehumanizing response to people in the Ninth Ward in particular was devastating. I had a friend out here at that time from South Africa who— we were watching the coverage together and she said, "Why are we God's stepchildren all over the world?" And it just broke my heart. And so I think at that point, I began to examine these things on a deeper level.

Core shared that when she was hired at the Cross Cultural Centers, her best friend who used to work there joked, "You think you Black, but you about to be real Black once you done with this experience." The professional experience, she said, provided her an academic

experience that she did not get in her undergraduate or graduate programs—taking Ethnic Studies or Gender Studies classes were not options she was aware of at the time.

I can personally speak from, oh, my God, if I would've had that knowledge of social justice, or Ethnic Studies, or even a Cross Cultural Centers, how differently that would've shaped my 20s, that knowledge of self, that exploration of self, that unlearning, to relearn the truth of who we are . . . I'm in the decolonization process now, maybe 15 years after I would've been. So I think that is a—that is essential to the decolonization process, to the—to the unlearning, deprogramming that is done all through our middle school, high school, elementary age, and sending us into American white supremacist societies with a sense of power. Without it—and this is the—this is the—this is the thing about when people can't go to college. They don't have that experience of coming to a social justice lens.

Part of Core's decolonization process included exploring and embracing Black womanism via a concept developed by scholar Layli Phillips, "ecowomanism," which views the spirit world, living and nonliving environment, compassion, nonviolence, and humans as interconnected. Regarding the term "feminism," Core shared,

Everything else was just such a political feeling. And ecowomanism doesn't feel like a political term to me. And so that's the—really, the only term that I've found that I feel comfortable going under, and mainly because I feel like the other terms—again, part of the requirement, almost, of being a part of them is that you have to not claim a part of yourself in some way or not leave room for additional or contrary thoughts or ideas.

As a relative newcomer to the higher education field, who formerly worked in community agencies, Core found that her personal values conflicted with what she saw on campus, specifically in the ways she had experienced CUELA as a Black woman staff professional.

> I think the irony of that is that we would ideally think that in a more educated space, that the words would change, the feelings would change, the experiences would change. But in many ways, they are very similar to outside of here, if not at times worse. When you work in Higher Education, these are the people you work with. And they think they're experts. They think their learning has stopped. And they're in a space where saying that they're wrong about something is a—they feel a surrendering of a certain type of power. So at times, it can be very dismissive. It can be the—a similar type of over-justifying, over-explaining, over-proving your expertise. Even if it's from your dynamic—even if they're asking a specific question about Black women and you answer it and they gaslight you, "I don't know if that's it." How is that possible that you're questioning me on what a Black woman would think?

One of the professional and scholarly areas Core focused on at CUELA was teaching about the ways in which anti-Blackness plays out on campus and in the world. She believed she had an obligation to help her Black student clients understand the ways of the world, and connecting how many of their anxieties stem from living in an anti-Black world. She felt that her expertise in this area challenged the thoughts and belief of campus administrators. Core believed that this quality had kept her from being appointed to campus committees where her expertise on

racial battle fatigue and community trauma/tragedy could benefit the campus climate in relation to institutional oppression.

> With administrators, I may not get the call to come to the table. You see what I'm saying? They respect it, but they know it well enough to be like, "Not for this meeting." You know what I mean? I don't feel like I've been barred from any spaces. But I know that—say on campus climate. That would be a committee that I would think you would want the one Black counselor on campus to be a part of, right? And, so nothing there. I don't know. I just think spaces where they don't want actual changes or to be accountable for certain changes. I probably wouldn't be invited to those tables.

Here, Core also addressed the disconnection that seems to exist between having voice and having control:

> I think the thing is . . . you're allowed to say it, but it's—your voice is not allowed to have, at times, an actual impact. So you can say it. You can vent. You could talk about it. You could have a meeting about it. You could bring it up. But again, the actionable parts are sometimes outside of our direct control. And so I think sometimes there's a balance between—you can say it, but that doesn't mean it's going to happen or move any mountains.

In addition to feeling like her voice could add to the campus conversation on racism and anti-Blackness, Core felt there was another force at play when it came to diminishing the voices of Black women at CUELA—the campus demographics, where the majority of the campus community identified as Chicanx Latinx.

At the end of the day, the reality is this. People are scared of Black. Now, here's

the thing. Black ain't never did nothing to people for them to be scared of Black.

But people are scared and intimidated by Black. And they've bought into this idea

of Black dominance. It's crazy, literally, considering the history and who should

be afraid of who's done and doing what. And so we talk about anti-Blackness is in

every culture and every group. And so we've seen this campus, where we've been

working with another ethnic group—and they are sabotaging our efforts. They are going

behind our back to the CUELA President about our efforts. They are refusing to give up

any space, even if they occupy 60 percent of it. And so what does that look like when you

are the majority in this space? How do you show up and callout? How do we get people

in those spaces to call out anti-Blackness in their own spaces?

Core expressed her concerns about re-marginalization:

When you are a marginalized group and then you have a space where you are the

numerically majority group—you do have the fear of being re-marginalized. And so you

can take on the characteristics of the dominant group that exists outside this campus in an

effort to prevent losing power—in this regard, power being space through the number of

people who occupy the space. It's interesting to watch the dynamic play out, the fear for

the group on this campus that may be the majority group is still rooted in the oppression

they face when they're off campus. It's a fear of losing space because we're taught the

law of scarcity—in this white supremacist construct. All minoritized groups have to split

what's leftover—the law of scarcity. But off campus, the numbers they have on campus

don't matter because the power dynamic of white supremacy is still what it is. And so I think that's something we haven't conquered on this campus.

There were four spaces at CUELA where Core felt she mattered or felt valued: the Counseling Center, Housing and Residence Life, Cross Cultural Centers, and Pan-African Studies. "I'm fortunate to be in spaces where I've had supervisors who were friends and allies and very supportive and would let me be outspoken and let me say what's what," she said.

They do a good job of pulling me in when they see something like, "oh, that's Core's gift. Core could do—we need Core for this." They know my strengths. So I feel like I get tapped when it's time to use those strengths. And I appreciate that.

Core said that the work she did with students was where she felt she mattered the most on campus.

I'm the only Black counselor where I am. And the interesting thing about being Black is that you don't just attract Black people. Everybody wants to have something to do with something Black, whether it's the music, the hair, the style, the—and there's something about being at the end of that spectrum that makes everybody else feel like you'll understand. Because they know you will be the most comfortable, understanding, empathetic place for them to go . . . I can tell you what the students tell me. The students, they view me as, I think, an auntie. I think I'm like an auntie to a lotta students. Some of 'em, I'm maybe more like momma, but some of 'em, I'm more like auntie. I think they know we're family. I think of them as family.

Outside of those four spaces, or her work with students, Core attempted to avoid meetings, committees, and involvement on campus where she felt where she had to expend

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energy to matter or fit in with group think. She said she would prefer to be in the company of her student clients or with her staff colleagues who are part of the campus Black Faculty and Staff Caucus.

> You know, we have to throw our own parties for each other on this campus. We celebrate each other. And we have our Black Faculty and Staff Caucus and I think —in those spaces we matter. But I don't think this campus knows the relevance of celebrating Black women and Black womanhood, especially 'cause where we're situated in East L.A. as well. So other groups get priority over us. I think those women are celebrated more, unless you're talking about the two famous Black women—the science fiction author and the Congresswoman—who went to school here. I don't think this campus knows the—I don't think it knows the value we bring. I don't think we as a society really—either it's so known that it's intentionally silenced so that—and this is what I'm coming to understand, that our power is so great that it—they almost feel like they have to keep it under wraps. Or is so underestimated that it's dismissed. Either way, it has an effect of making it extremely taxing to just exist here.

Core described herself as nonconfrontational and nonpolitical when it came to being a professional in Student Affairs and Higher Education.

> I have no desire to be caught up in the politics of campus life. So where I'm out, I probably would prefer not to be in because I can't play the game. It's just—I don't even know how. I'd have to learn how to do the "Higher Ed face," where you don't blink and you don't react. I have a very expressive face. I react. So it's really hard for me in those spaces.

Core was in her second year working at CUELA when BSU issued its demands and initiated campus protests to raise awareness of the state of Black students. Core shared her thoughts and frustrations about CUELA at the time of BSU's actions.

Unprepared. Painful. Traumatic. Shit show. Explosion. Pride in the students. Game changing. There was a lack of Black representation, decrease in numbers, lack of efforts to outreach, and really feeling very silenced and unheard in ways. Campus was like, "Okay. You have a Pan-African Studies department. You're good." But there was no scaffolding, no support system, no Black counselors, no this, no that, to really ensure Black students would stay on campus. They were dropping like flies. Their numbers were dropping every year. And we—the Black staff and faculty, were so spread apart that it was too—there was not enough scaffolding to support them.

Core played the role of supporter and mental health advocate for BSU's board and general members. "Students make more change than anybody else," she shared.

But I find they're—the students, they do the advocating for us as Black faculty and staff, you know what I'm saying? My role was definitely support, but in the form of ensuring they weren't sacrificing parts of themselves that they would have difficulty regaining, and ensuring that—helping them to get clear on their intentions— "What do you want? Why do you want that? How would that work? How would you respond if they said this?' kind of role-playing scenarios and support."

As an informal advisor for BSU's board and general members, Core shared that she had a huge sense of pride seeing the efforts being led by Black women. She shared the following.

I think we get shit done. We get shit done. I think one of the things that—

we're definitely doers. And we don't give up. And we ain't got time. That's one

of our catchphrases. But it's true. We don't have time to go back and forth about

some shit that we know is real. So we gotta do something about it or we not, but

we ain't got time. We gotta do 50 million other things. I think sometimes it comes

down to that simple, like, "What we—we can't sit around no more. We gotta get

something done." And so, I think that's what we do. That's how we move through

the world.

For Core, the camaraderie with other Black faculty and staff during 2015–2016 was what
stood out to her most in supporting the students and each other.

We all had relationship, so we all knew what we're all good at or what we could help

with or where we could come in—which allowed us all to have different lanes and all

collaborate without even having to sit down and have a strategic plan about it. We knew

based on knowing each other's strengths.

Core did not hold much hope for what campuses can do to support Black women in

higher education. "Honestly, I grapple with encouraging my kids, my daughters, to go to college

unless we're talking about a HBCU or out of the country," she said. "I grapple with it because I

watch students every day beat themselves up over not fitting into this system. And I know

universities are perpetuating that system and participating in this slow shedding of cultural self."

Core continued without pause or hesitation about higher education and how it, as an

institution, could meet the needs of Black women—especially those who are socially conscious

and active.

That question is almost like the "if you had a magic wand and you could . . . " it's almost so fantastical you can't answer it. You know what I mean? It's so far outside of what we believe will happen—here's what's happened, though. Black women aren't looking for that to come. We're just creating our own shit. I—and maybe that's what I'm struggling with in answering this, is that I don't even know that I even—I've lost the desire to want something from them.

Core linked her loss of desire to participate to the impact that the election of Donald Trump in November 2016 had on her—especially when it came to engaging Whiteness.

They killed that last November with the election. I've lost the desire to want something from them. It just comes with too much. It just—it always has strings attached of some sort or expires or will only give them a pass to think, in the next wave of things that I need, that, "I should be fine. Look at what I got." . . . And I just— I'm not even really interested in participating in that way anymore. I think it would be interesting to see – see, 'cause even when you get Black women to go into those spaces, to get to those levels in these spaces, you have to play a certain game. So it's not like they can just be themselves in those spaces, either. They're trying to wedge as much as they can, too. And they're giving up something to be that wedge. They're not as big a wedge as they would like to be. They just do what they can to nudge the door a little bit. . . . And ain't nobody got time for that shit. I think we're just kind of over that game. I think we're over it. We're in the age of Ava DuVernay, Serena Williams, Beyoncé, Viola Davis, Shonda Rhimes. We're on the verge of creative Black excellence. Why should we waste our genius?

You don't want it, you ain't got to have it. We will go build our own school. We will go build our own university. And guess what? It'll be a lot better than this shit. Why do we have to put—I think we're just there. I don't even think we're—and see, this is the point of a relationship—if we were talking about a heteronormative relationship, if I was a counselor, I would be like, "She is not coming back to him. She's not going back to that relationship." I don't think—I don't think many of us are going back to that relationship.

Yeah. How? How? It's just—that—lemme tell you. That—those numbers that— those polling numbers that came out last November were—we've had a ton of hard evidence. We've—we have—we have decades and centuries of evidence, hard evidence, that they have— "Oh, that's not this. That's not this." But not even they could open their mouths to defend those numbers last November. And there was something about seeing them numbers hit that screen over and over again on MSNBC, on CNN, that was like, "Well, then, this shit is over. This relationship is over." It's over. It's over. I like—I don't even think we have the desire to be in a relationship with any form of dominant culture type thinking of any short. I—we just ain't got time.

Core believed that there is a need to rethink higher education with respect to the decolonization of Black participation and the needs of Black students. On this she asserted,

I just think we need to rethink Higher Education. We need to rethink that specifically as Black people from a decolonized standpoint. We need to think, what does that mean? What side are we trying to fit into? What—do we wanna do this this way? So is that something we wanna keep putting our kids through so that they can survive in a capitalism society? Are we gonna—could we—what could we—what else could we

create? What would that look like? And so I think my mind is there now, after seeing that it's becoming less and less healthy for them. Because we know what's gonna happen. We know the student loans. We know that—we know. The anxiety never stops. It's—and even when they do all the right things, all the right things, it never feels like enough here. So I think that's the next question.

**Ava**

*I bang Muslima. I bang Balali. And I bang being a Pan-Africanist. I've had a lot of people try to tell me those things don't matter, but I know they do*.

Ava was between tasks at the time of the narrative session in her faculty office at CUELA. She was completing and preparing paperwork for her upcoming/pending tenure and promotion process, and anticipating a visit from a local journalist who wanted to interview her about the current state of and trends in Black television—for example, the Shonda Rhimes and Issa Rae success of Black women being the creative forces behind popular television shows. At the same time, Ava was unpacking her workbag and troubleshooting a printer in her office, quipping, "I don't understand why we don't have wireless printers. That would be a gift. So, I have to just always remind myself, like, 'Well, it could be worse.'"

Ava had been a full-time, tenure-track faculty in the Department of Pan-African Studies at CUELA for 4 years. She started, however, at CUELA in 2006 as a part-time, adjunct lecturer in the department, joining the team at the request of the woman who now served as chair of the department, Assata (next narrative). Ava's academic focus was Blacks in film and American cinema. Additionally, she was an independent filmmaker and film director, who, after

completing a directing internship at CBS Daytime, was hired to be on the directing team of *The Young and The Restless*. She shared that the lead director of the show, "Taught me how to be a boss." Running the show like a boss was a theme Ava carried with her in her academic, personal, and creative arenas.

Ava was 40 and grew up in South Central Los Angeles, in a small Black Muslim microcosm and neighborhood with its own Black-owned grocery store. Her parents were from the Midwest, Hannibal, a small town near Kansas City, Missouri, which is also known as the hometown of *Huckleberry Finn* author, Mark Twain. She mentioned Twain as a reminder of her father's career as an author and her own filmmaking career—developing counter-narratives to dominant society's depictions of marginalized and minoritized groups. She was currently working on a project that focused on how Black Muslim women have been left out of the narrative of U.S. media on Muslims.

Ava identified as African American, Pan-African, Balalian, a group within the Black Muslim community, and as Muslima, a term for a Black Muslim woman. She identified as a womanist, a Pan-Africanist, and a cinephile, which is a lover of film. She shared,

> I find people who are unhappy don't connect strong with identity. They don't have an identity. They have an identity crisis. So I bang Muslima. I bang Balali. And I bang being a Pan-Africanist. I've had a lot of people try to tell me those things don't matter, but I know they do."

Ava was a single mother of a preteen son and shared that her marriage dissolved during the height of her filmmaking career and all that goes with maintaining a career in the arts. While in her full-time faculty work in Pan-African Studies at CUELA, Ava was an informal advisor

and supporter of the Black Student Union leaders during the demands process with the university, in 20152016. Additionally, she served as official advisor and supporter of the Muslim Student Association (MSA), which led its own demands process similar to the BSU. She frequently collaborated with the Cross Cultural Centers and its Pan African Student Resource Center to bring social justice-focused independent films and filmmakers to campus.

That Ava found herself teaching in a department that classified itself as "the academic arm of the revolution," came as no surprise. She shared that from as young as she could remember, she and her family had been involved in some sort of protest or awareness-raising effort about injustices in the community. "My dad, as you know, is an author and activist. So, I've just always been doing it from birth, or from jump. So, there."

Ava recalled, after transferring from attending a private Muslim school to a regular, public school, calling one of her elementary school teachers to task as an early act of resistance. "I was shocked at how they were teaching history," she shared.

I was like, "Huh?" Their history had none of the pieces that we were learning about, and I was shocked but also vocally shocked. From jump, fourth grade, I was like—in fifth grade, I told the teacher, "What? This is not—what are you teaching—for me," 'cause I grew up with people who thought, as you know at some point, and Malcolm, you've seen the research there, was some point I identified as being God, or that the Black man was not less than. So, I didn't know how to be small, and I still don't, actually, I don't understand it.

Whether it was protesting Korean shop owners for not allowing Black teens in their stores, to changing the way she identified racially and in terms of faith—Balalian—Ava shared

that she always grew up in a space of social justice and social activism. "For me, I didn't even know the difference."

Ava equated working in higher education to her past life as a filmmaker. "It's a different kind of job," she shared. "I treat it almost like being an executive producer of *The Young and the Restless*, so I run it like a show." Running it like a show often included problem solving, connecting people with each other for collaborations, and developing ally relationships—both public alliances and private alliances—in solidarity for various campus causes.

As a Black woman faculty working in one of the smaller departments on campus, in terms of full-time faculty and campus support, Ava shared, "Our department is 'do much with so little.'" She continued:

> We are expected to do so much. I was on a panel the other day and I was talking   about how I have students texting me just a few days before about being harassed by the police, as it's happening, or while it's happening, or after. We're also expected to be—I'm never off the clock. I'm always here in some form or fashion, or try to be. So, that should be pushed; that should be pointed out, for sure. You have to always be here, even if we're not here. That's important.

Despite feeling like she is always on the clock, Ava shared that getting a full-time, tenure-track position was "like winning the lottery." She remembered her days as an adjunct instructor and the self-imposed pressure in preparation for attaining a full-time appointment. "I used to work like a full-time professor—as you know—when I was a lecturer," she said.

> You won't survive if you don't. My advice to lecturers is to understand that. I think in general lecturers are exploited. That's a whole other conversation. If they want to survive

health-wise, they shouldn't allow themselves to do it. But if they want to keep their job

they have to do it, and they do.

Part of her survival strategy in the academy includes self-care, self-preservation, and

thinking about her health.

You have to think about self-preservation too, at some point—self-care. I think Audre

Lorde talks about that, like the ultimate act of warfare; resistance is that self-care. I'm

realizing—my mom died at 44—I'm almost that age, so I have to take my health a little

more serious at this point. But yeah, I'm always here in some way. I can't even explain it.

I have a therapist. I have to have a therapist. I have to go to therapy. . . . What Ed from

*Young and the Restless* taught me, too, is sleep. He takes a nap. He used to take a nap

every lunch at *Young and the Restless*. One time he let me come in there when he was

napping, and he said, 'Now, it's moving too much in the room.' I was like, "Oh right."

So, I know you've got to sleep. You've got to eat. Actually, I try to take really good care

of myself, and in different ways . . . I won't lie, I'm not a person who just totally treats

myself bad. I try to make sure I got—therapy is a must in organizing how much I am

going to let people exploit me.

At CUELA, Ava shared that her department and the Cross Cultural Centers were spaces

where she felt like she mattered. "I feel like we just have carved out spaces," she said. "I don't

go on spaces that I don't feel like I matter."

I think we're sometimes an afterthought. We're celebrated for our culture and for our

gifts and for our labor. We're devalued and celebrated at the same time. So, we're

celebrated, exploited, devalued, celebrated when it's hot. Black people—I'm just in that

vein now—actually, as Jay-Z says, we shift the culture. We are American cool. We influence so much of what America manufactures all over the world. It's so valuable, it's a mistake not to house it and put it on display.

Ava offered support and solace to the BSU board during its demands and protest process of 2015z-2016. She recalled that time period being one of personal and professional stress—a right-wing speaker and the speaker's off-campus followers showed up at CUELA, some allegedly armed with guns, BSU was simultaneously attempting to make the case that Black students were under attack at CUELA, Ava was in the human resources process for her full-time, tenure-track position, and, at the same time, her pre-teen son was in and out of the hospital. In her narrative, Ava spoke about being attacked on campus and trying to contend with this, while dealing with her son's illness.

On campus, as you know, there was—somebody wrote some . . . I got attacked, actually attacked, someone anonymously attacked me through email under the name of Deep Throat. I'm a filmmaker, so if you use "Deep Throat," I know all the meaning of it. So, I'm laughing so hard. Somebody told me that that happened, and they had tried to come in my classroom, and all kinds of crazy stuff

My son, as you know, was very sick and there's a way that I can't be in jail because somebody outside of myself relies on me at some point, with these seizures. I remember my son being very sick in the hospital, dealing with him, and realizing that Black Lives Matter actually is a medical concern, too . . . They try to come in here and try all kinds of shit. I remember thinking, 'I've got to fight for this kid. They're going to kill this kid,' literally thinking, like seeing and hearing and realizing it on a personal level

that I've got to fight for my kid, "The police may not shoot him, but they'll kill him here in the hospital," so realizing that that connected without officially saying it aloud, but then talking with Dr. Assata on the phone one day and saying, "I think this shit is happening here, too. These doctors, they don't really fucking care about my kid." I started thinking about it; I'm like, "It's all connecting." It's a medical thing, too. That fight was really moving people to care enough about my kid, this little Black boy.

It was in her role as advisor to the Muslim Students Association (MSA) that Ava once again found herself at the center of student activism on campus, following the November 2016 election. "My department chair sort of handed me the torch, it was 'Okay, we need to connect; raise visibility of the Muslim students, connect them to this struggle which we saw happen, we still see happening with the new administration.'"

While Ava advocated on behalf of Muslim students with the CUELA Academic Senate, the student leaders of MSA were planning their own demands and campus walkout process, similar to what the Black Student Union had done a year earlier. Some of their goals included the establishment of an Islamic Studies academic department, funding for campus programming about the Islamic faith and on Muslims in the United States and worldwide, and leadership development opportunities for students affiliated with the MSA. Similar to BSU, MSA leaders – all women—demanded a meeting with the CUELA president to discuss their needs.

I remember being—I had to be confident with the Muslim students, like, "Okay, so this is what is going to happen," even if you're scared as fuck, right? I just remember them getting great pride in it, that they had done good work, and me telling them. Sitting there on the couch I looked at them and I said, "You will be the ones they write about." So,

you're not doing this for yourself right now. You're doing this for the students; the

Muslim students who came before you, who will come after you. I know it's scary . . .

They were impressive. People were impressed at how they handled themselves. They

protested differently at that point; it was a different way. But they were effective. They

needed to follow up, but they were very effective. They had to have followed up—their

power, right. If you think about it, that was Muslim women. That's a voice that is often

said that they are small in Muslim communities; that they're not valuable. I just thought

of them, in that moment. I remember this moment. I'm a filmmaker, so I remember

things. I remember thinking, "Man," like filmmakers, I'm just thinking about the movie.

That's what I remember.

When it came to thinking about what Black women needed in Higher Education, Ava

considered a variety of areas.

It's important for the school to recognize that Black people matter. They need to

hold that space. This is America. We already—you know, as we know the discussion

about Black people in terms of Black bodies, right? Why would there not be a space that

recognizes that Black people were exploited? It's important that we have the Pan-African

Studies department. So for me, it's like we're doing the work but I do think it needs to be

pointed out that it's at a cost, possibly to our health, to our personal and interpersonal

relationships, and it tracks back to. . . .

Ava wondered if the challenges that Black women face, at the hands of and in the process

of participating in higher education institutions, would cause those with power in the institutions

to consider their own role in inflicting harm on Black women's lives.

I think of the image of Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind* and the concern for her as

mistress. I don't care about the movie *Gone with the Wind*. I only care about Hattie

McDaniel, the mammy. So, am I the mammy in academia? I know I'm more than that,

but the reality is that we need more support and we need to be– and you think about what

Hattie McDaniel was doing outside of *Gone with the Wind*, her social justice work, all the

work in terms of what it's called—redlining. I don't know if that is the term—but she

was basically very active and she used her space. . . . I guess what I'm saying is that in

the end they wouldn't even bury her in Hollywood Forever. She wanted to be buried next

to the other movie stars and they didn't want to do it. But then years later they wanted to

correct it and bury her there. I think that speaks to how I feel we are being treated in some

way.

As we end our narrative session, Ava noted the manner in which Black women are denied

access and their contributions devalued:

We're doing important work. It's going undocumented. Eventually people radar it

as important. We just want to be in the space that we deserve. But we're being denied the

access, possibly with of course our friends and things, possibly. We had the GE fight for

Ethnic Studies, right? Then all of a sudden, history proves that they were wrong and we

were right. We can't brag about that, right? Then everybody tries to make it right. . . . I

think we're in the trying to make it right space, but it is important to remember that this is

a cycle and I know that we're going to be back here again. We're just assembling our

troops, and ultimately I hope this research proves that we need more troops. . . . The only

thing I would say is that am glad you're here and you're going to be able to answer this in

real time. I think that the research is going to show that we are devalued in Higher Education.

**Assata**

*Students are our family. It's very familial, and I think Black women take it on probably the most. So there's the overwhelming feeling of that—like it's a lot, to have hundreds of students who are your children, right? But it's also the beautiful space, right?*

Assata and I attempted to schedule meetings several times with each other for the narrative session. After four or five attempts over a few weeks, I received a text message from Assata saying that she was in the area, in between meetings and needing to leave soon to pick up her children from school, and would be stopping by for the narrative session. Assata and I have known each other personally and professionally for almost 10 years; this is the way we work together. On this particular day, Assata was on crutches due to a recent foot injury. We met in an empty office space that happened to have boxes where she could elevate her foot. Assata assured me that we could take as long as we needed for the narrative session, even with the spontaneity of the meeting.

Assata had been full-time faculty in Pan-African Studies at CUELA for 15 years. It was her first faculty position after completing her doctoral work in political science, with an emphasis in Black Power. She quipped that it was the only position she applied for in her job search, because she knew she wanted to work at CUELA, in Pan-African Studies, and with Dr. H., who was chair of the department at the time of her job search. She had served as chair of the department for almost 5 years, a promotion that happened after the unexpected death of the long-standing department chair in 2013.

For the first years of her time as chair, Assata was literally a one-person team leading the department—herself, an administrative assistant, and a group of part-time, adjunct instructors. In her tenure as chair, Assata had grown the department, in terms of full-time faculty hires and number of students who majored and minored in it, due to ongoing advocacy on behalf of the department by her and by student activists. The department boasted a 100% graduation rate for students who majored in Pan-African Studies. Assata was proud of the growth that had occurred in her tenure as chair, but was quick to point out the collective, team effort of students, staff, and campus collaborators who had helped Pan-African Studies develop into the "intellectual arm of the revolution."

Assata was born in Oakland in the 1970s, but joked that she was forever 29-years-old— "so the math is wrong, right?" She shared that her parents were not Black Panthers, but that she grew up as part of the Panther Cub generation—meaning, being friends, classmates, and comrades with the children of Panthers.

She was a single mother with three children, 13, 11, and 7, and said she was raising them in the same way she was raised in super conscious, super Black, radical Oakland—to speak up, to challenge injustice when they see it. She shared a story of how her two daughters' current Spirit Week theme at school is "The Wild West" and "Patriotism," and that both of them had already planned how they would speak up and speak out during the school's festivities about the race-gendered inappropriateness of the Spirit Week themes, in light of the administration. She commented, with a smile, "So my children are raised to open their mouths, and they do. And it gets them in trouble sometimes, but that's okay. That's the kind of trouble we like."

Assata's academic interest was Black Power. Her dissertation explored Black women and political leadership, which eventually led to her developing a Black Womanist leadership model. The model was essential to her praxis as an academic, activist, and community member. Assata was also a founding member of Black Lives Matter and had contributed her leadership to the Los Angeles and national efforts of the movement.

For Assata, there was never a "coming to" social justice. It was something innate, always there, always present. "I was born into social justice, right?" she said. "I think that—I guess I just always knew if something—it was kind of a given that if something is wrong, you open your mouth. And so, I haven't had a problem opening my mouth."

Assata attended Berkeley High School and shared an early experience initiating a protest against a convenience store adjacent to the school.

> So a lot of us would go to Blue and Gold during the lunch break. And they developed a policy that one student could come in at a time, which they only applied to the Black kids, right? So we picketed Blue and Gold. Like it was a given, like, when they did that. We were like, "They're only doing that to the Black kids, and we're not even the ones who steal. It's the white kids that be stealing." So we got out there and we had our little picket signs and we picketed Blue and Gold. And they took that sign down and they stopped that one student at a time thing.

As a full-time faculty with tenure, plus being a department chair, Assata had multiple responsibilities she juggles simultaneously.

> Black women in academia? Overwhelming. Overwhelmed. There's a whole lot heaped on our—both heaped on our plates, as well as like what we're obligated to do, that

nobody is heaping on us, but we have to do it. Otherwise, there's no point in us being

here, right? So everything from—you know, like a lot of the students call me mama. So

what does that mean? How do you earn? Like for me, that's an honorific title. Right? So

how do I earn being mama, right? Like, well, you can call me if you're feeling sad. You

can call me if something crazy is happening or if you're happy about something. And that

means 3 o'clock in the morning phone calls sometimes, right? That means caring.

Students are our family. It's very familial, and I think Black women take it on probably

the most. So there's the overwhelming feeling of that—like it's a lot, to have hundreds of

students who are your children, right? But it's also the beautiful space, right? And then

you have your colleagues, who also become your family, right? So there's beauty in that.

Assata says that a major part of her job was always staying on her toes, keeping her eyes

open, trying to stay ahead of the curve with campus politics for the protection of her students and

her department.

I feel like I'm in constant fight mode, and I don't know that that's very different in

academia than other places. There's no place of rest. In terms of—within academia,

especially teaching Pan-African Studies, there's the survival of the department, there's

the survival of our students, there's my own survival, right? I'm always looking

sideways, especially at administration, about why are they doing what they're doing?

And so it's exhausting having to constantly be—to have your gloves on, right? But you

can't take them off, because the truth is —even when you're—when you're wrong. So,

99 percent of the time, you really are in a fight, right? But that other one percent, you

may not be in a fight, but you've got to keep the gloves on because you don't know,

right? So it's like—it's like the same as living in the world as a Black woman, right? When you go shopping and hey ask you for your ID with a credit card. And they go, "Oh, we ask everybody." Now maybe that one store does ask everybody, but 99 percent of the stores don't, right? They're asking you, because you don't have the right to have a Gold MasterCard. And so it's like this constant state of fighting that I feel like—is maybe it's more intense in this career because we're not expected—there's an expectation that we don't belong here, right?

Assata shared that early in her career, she faced challenges by non-Black students about her status as a professor and a person with authority over their learning experiences.

And I'm getting older now, right? Even though I'm 29, right? When I started here, I really was in my 20s, right? So it's shifting a little bit for me now, where when I walk in the classroom, most of the time they know I'm the professor. Right? Most of the time they recognize me as a professor, right? When I started, and I'll say through my mid-30s, they would question it. Right? And part of it is because I'm older and also I have a stronger reputation on campus, so most people know who I am . . . but there is also a constant challenging. I remember early in my career, I was teaching a class and a white male student challenged me on a book that he was assigned, that I assigned. And I was like, "Who are you? You don't have a Ph.D. And you're an undergrad student in a GE class and you're questioning me about the appropriateness of this book, because you don't like what it's saying?" Because it was like a critical film class. But you know nothing about critical film. And so, yeah, so that's kind of the part of the experience.

Assata continued with how she has experienced life as a Black woman faculty working in Higher Education.

Black women professors are not thought of as intellectuals, right? And you see it, like when you think about how they talk with experts about phenomena. Right? Like television news does this, right? Yeah, Cornel West is probably one of the most brilliant minds in the world, right? . . . That said, we've got Angela Davis, we've got bell hooks, we've got Patricia—I ain't never seen Patricia Hill Collins on television. You know? Why are we not? And these are seasoned people, right? Wendy Smooth, Ange-Marie Hancock, right? So there's a de-intellectualization of Black women in Higher Ed, right? So I think that we need to be lifting up Black women as thinkers, not just workhorses. Right? Like we are, what Zora Neale Hurston called, "the mules of the world?" We're the mules of the university, right? They're quick to hand us some report to get done, that our name doesn't even go on. They're quick to do that.

Even with the challenges she has faced and observed of other Black women in the academy, Assata believed it was a rewarding profession. "It's the free-est job you're ever going to have," she said.

If we think about what our job really is, your job is to write about, think about, and teach about what it is you're passionate about. And to turn other people on to your passions. Ain't no other job—and you get paid a living wage, right? Every other job, you are literally working for someone else's agenda. This one, at least, you get to have somewhat of your own agenda.

Assata added that the best part of her job was working with students.

I think my voice is—the attempts to silence my voice – everywhere on campus, except in

the classroom. Like I think my power and my place of the most comfort on campus is

with my students, right? Like if all I had to do was be with the students and not write

reports and not go fight the Academic Senate, it would be lovely, right?

Assata developed a Black Womanist Leadership model as part of her dissertation

research. She shared how her model—combining theory and practice; being proactive, rather

than reactive; group-centered and leader-full leadership; and traditional and nontraditional

engagement—was part of her living praxis and centered much of the scholarship and practice of

organizer, Ella Baker.

I think, a difference between Black women faculty—Black faculty generally, but

especially Black women faculty—is that, we are very clear about our relationship with

community. That, you know, there's not the kind of – often times what's imposed upon

us is the segmenting of our lives. You're a mama in this space, you're a community

member in this space, you're a professor in this space. Right? . . . And I think those of us

who are conscious, like recognize that that's oppressive, and so we do as much work as

we can to integrate our lives. And so what that's meant is like also integrating our

community work. And all studies show that like the most engaged folks in community

work are Black women, right? That we integrate what we do on campuses.

Assata shared that she did as much work as she could to move students beyond the

campus. The campus-community bridge was important to her, and she wanted students to know

their temporary identities in the university should provide benefits to their communities. "Like

your work, their work, our work, shouldn't just be for the benefit of the campus community. So

involving students in social justice work—and recognizing—getting them to recognize that that's part of their call, right?"

Part of Assata's calling included teaching about activism—the what, why, and how of organizing and disrupting—in her Pan-African Studies classes at CUELA. She beamed with pride reminiscing about how students had taken on community action, including a dozen or so being original members of Black Lives Matter in Los Angeles. "I think that's hugely important that, yeah, there's the activism that they do on campus, and that's connected with activism that they do in the community," she said. "That's really a duty we have."

For Assata, engagement in both traditional and nontraditional methods of social change was important.

So, engage in the ways that the system tells you to engage. So I actually, and womanist leadership says, go ahead and vote. Go ahead and write that letter to your congress member. Now the truth is, ain't nobody ever voted their way into freedom. Ever. Right? But go ahead, it's a good exercise, you know And, you still have to do the non-traditional stuff —which I think is the piece that makes most people uncomfortable.

Assata shared that there were a lot of people who, prior to her involvement with Black Lives Matter, viewed her as kind of an emerging traditional leader to be groomed for political office someday. She said that once she got involved publicly with Black Lives Matter, and other efforts to raise awareness of police brutality and excessive force in Los Angeles, the same people would tell her: "You're not a yeller. Why are you yelling?"

They're killing our children, and what you want me to do is not yell? Because it doesn't look good for someone with a doctorate to be yelling? I'm a mama, you know? Trayvon

Martin is Sybrina Fulton's child. I don't really care if this is respectable or not. Right? . . . So the non-traditional piece, I think, is the part that a lot of people—you know, we spend our whole lives being conditioned by a society that wants us to fall in line. Everything tells us to fall in line. School tells us to fall in line. Workplace tells us to fall in line. Family structures tell us to fall in line. So to step out of line and say—staying in line is oppressive, right? It requires a degree of sacrifice. So I will never be able to run successfully for political office. That's okay. That's okay.

As the faculty advisor for BSU, Assata said she was encouraged by the work of the Black women students leading campus activism at CUELA in 2015–2016.

Oh my God. I was—well, I know this is your interview, but Oh my God, I was just so proud. I was so invigorated and alive and hopeful, and our students are so brilliant. Like sometimes they'd be coming back from something they did and I'm like, "You all did what?" And then they got on their little smartphones and showed me. I mean, it was just—it was beautiful. So that's how I felt. I felt proud. . . . And it's still moving, right? So that's the foundation. We got the housing. We got funding. Pan-African Studies, in terms of faculty, we're hiring again. We've hired every single year for the last four years, right? And the reason we keep hiring is because of them. Right? Because they tried to not hire that year and the students were like, 'Oh hell no.' You know? And so I think that we're going to – that the foundation they laid, is going to continue.

While reflecting on 2015–2016 at CUELA, Assata pointed out a consistent pattern for community activism to eventually spill over into campus activism.

They were building off of Mizzou. And it was kind of a convergence of both Black Lives

Matter and then Mizzou and students were connecting community to campus. And that's

what happened in the Black Power Movement. Right? So Black Power Movement is born

in '65, Panthers form in '66, the takeover of San Francisco State is '68, right? Black

Lives Matter is born in 2013. 2015, you've got the student movement born. So it's kind

of two years for the community work to kind of, I guess, blossom on campuses. Right?

And they were building from 2014-2015, because that was the Ethnic Studies fight.

Assata shared that while most of her advocacy and activism had been for the larger

community, there was one place where she probably needed to give more attention. "Where I

haven't fought is for myself," she said.

Like how the hell is it okay for me—and you know, for some time I was the only Black

woman chair on campus. How is it okay for me to make 30 percent less than the next

lowest-paid chair? Right? Universities got to look at that. Universities can't be doing that,

right?

Additionally, Assata noted that her workload was heavier than that of her non-Black

peers, due to the cultural taxation that comes with being a Black woman faculty at CUELA and

in academia in general.

There needs to be a recognition of—all of the extra stuff that we do, right? The

mentoring, the being here late at night. Like if there's a night I don't have to pick up my

kids, I'm here until, you know—until whenever. When we were doing semester

conversation, I was here regularly until like 3 am. Regularly. Like some nights I would

spend the night in my office, right? Because I had to get it done. And there is no

compensation for that. And just like they do in other places in the world, but I think more so because we're so isolated here, even though we're seeing numbers in terms of gender within Black communities of Black women  getting degrees at a higher rate than Black men, there's still like the de-valuation of Black women, right?

Finally, Assata asserted that life for Black women in academia was one of not being recognized, and that was something she would like to change in Higher Education.

I don't want to make it about me, but I'm going to give one more example. Two years ago, so not this fall, but last fall—the Academic Senate or Provost gave some kind of report. Now, this is the height of Black Lives Matter, right? I'm one of the founding members of Black Lives Matter. I was doing probably 3 to 4 media appearances a day, right? Like always on MSNBC, CNN, BET, Roland Martin, whatever. I was always on. For convocation, they did something about faculty in the news, and they named like 20 faculty members. Guess who wasn't named? Now, I'm not saying that—this is not a— I'm not trying to stroke my own ego . . . But by sheer measure, ain't nobody on this damn campus been on the news more than me. Nobody. Not the university president. Nobody is more recognizable on this campus than I am. And so you're doing a piece on faculty in the media and I'm not—you didn't even bother to name me? Come on, man. I think that was actually the point I was on the cover of *LA Weekly*, named by *LA Weekly* as one of the ten most-influential people. So I'm just saying, that's an example of what I'm talking about.

**Summary**

This chapter focused entirely on the voices and stories of six Black women participants speaking about their experiences on a university campus. Across the critical narratives in this study, several issues emerged related to the experiences of Black women involved as faculty staff, and students. In Chapter 5, an analysis and discussion of these issues will be presented, along with implications, conclusions, and recommendations. This critical analysis of the stories shared by the women, along with its relationship to the research in the field, is specifically aimed toward better understanding the issues faced by Black women activists in higher education and some of the ways in which institutions can be more responsive to their needs and attentive to their contributions.

**CHAPTER 5**

**DISCUSSION**

*If playing the race card is fighting for human rights for Black people unapologetically …*

*Then DEAL ME In!!!*

Erica Garner (2016)

In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks (2003) pondered the idea that most of her students, and, in fact, most people in the United States "are rarely in situations where they must listen to a Black person – particularly a Black woman – speak to them for thirty minutes" (p. 31), and in the rare chance they must hear a Black woman speak, they "find it hard to listen to a Black woman . . . speaking ideas and opinions that threaten their belief systems" (p. 33). With hooks's assertion in mind, this final chapter analyzes and discusses the significance of the critical narratives of six Black women in higher education—two students, two staff, and two faculty—who were involved with activist work for social justice at CUELA, on their campuses, and also in their communities.

In addition to exploring emerging themes of the critical narratives and their similarities and differences with literature about Black women in higher education, the chapter ends with implications, recommendations, future research possibilities, and conclusions. Although each of their stories differs slightly in presentation or expression, they weave a picture of the higher education landscape that Black women students, staff, and faculty must navigate and negotiate daily at the academic borderlands—specifically those who voice and act to challenge injustices and inequalities on their college campuses. The findings and themes will be presented in response to the research questions that informed this investigation.

**The Campus Experiences of Black Women Faculty, Staff, and Students**

There are efforts to position Black women as a new "model minority" in higher education (Kaba, 2008), based on the lengthy history of their participation in the institutions and a glance at enrollment, retention, and graduation rates compared with Black men and compared proportionally with other demographic groups in the United States. The assertion has been rejected by Black women scholars studying the experiences of Black women in higher education (Patton & Croom, 2017), arguing that such a designation does not take into account the challenges, successes, and unmet needs of Black women on college campuses. The critical narratives collected in this dissertation also reject a "model minority" status, based on their campus life experiences at CUELA.

> I think the irony of that is that we would ideally think that in a more educated space, that the words would change, the feelings would change, the experiences would change. But in many ways, they are very similar to outside of here, if not at times worse. When you work in Higher Education, these are the people you work with. And they think they're experts. They think their learning has stopped. (Core, 2017)

As they relate to the question of campus life experiences of Black women faculty, staff, and students, three themes emerge from the six critical narratives: (a) feeling compelled to address campus and community issues through activism, (b) horizontal support and relationships with each other in the face of campus isolation, and (c) cultural taxation, whether imposed by the institution or self-imposed.

**Community-to-Campus Activism**

In 1964, Ella Baker said, "Until the killing of Black men, Black mothers' sons, becomes as important to the rest of this country as the killing of a white mother's son, we who believe in freedom cannot rest" (Ransby, 2003, p. 335). As explored in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the murders of unarmed Black women and men at the hands of police and others made national headlines. The Trayvon Martin murder by George Zimmerman in 2012 was one of the more visible and high-profile cases in terms of media attention, and was quickly followed by others. Following Zimmerman's acquittal in July 2013, a number of protests took place across the United States, and the Black Lives Matter hashtag and movement was born (Botelho & Yan, 2013; Garza, 2014; Ross, 2015; Khan-Cullors & Bandele, 2017).

Each of the women in this study mentioned Trayvon Martin's murder by George Zimmerman (and Zimmerman's court-sanctioned acquittal) as being a pivotal moment in their lives as activists. For the student participants, Trayvon Martin was a wake-up call to reflection in their academic and personal lives, as he was, or could have been, one of their peers. As shared in their critical narratives, the students made connections between Trayvon Martin, police brutality, and the conditions they face at CUELA. Aaliyah, President of the Black Student Union at CUELA, and a frequent guest/user of the Cross Cultural Centers on the campus, stated:

> And think that the first set of shootings that happened were—Trayvon Martin had just been shot and I think someone else shortly after—and I was devastated by that because I have a younger brother, I have nephews, I have—you know, so I was in this place of not understanding And then summer we started seeing more shootings and I think Mizzou happened in like the beginning of fall or during the fall and that was across the nation—

seeing all the campuses that were experiencing like all these various challenges in regards to like race and who they were. And then—and I said this—it's very true for me—it made me really think like, "Man, we are experiencing stuff here too that we just kind of like sweep under the rug to keep . . . " But really thinking about more than just standing in solidarity—like there's a lot of stuff that we have to—that we need to recognize and fix here—for us to be able to be successful.

For the staff and faculty, who had been involved with social justice work for much longer in their lives, Trayvon Martin represented a lifelong of injustice they had seen regarding the ways in which Black people, in particular young Black men, have been treated by police and other authority figures in the United States. Furthermore, for the participants who identified as mothers, aunts, or older siblings/cousins, Trayvon Martin represented someone who could be family. Ororo shared,

> After Trayvon Martin got killed, Black people in the community were like, "enough is enough." I think that a lot of Black women were like, "They're killing our Black men." These students on this campus who are part of BSU during this time come from those communities. So they're coming back to campus saying, "Well, let's look at campus and see how campus is supporting us."

Regardless of their level of social consciousness, or when and how they came to understand social justice, Trayvon Martin emerged as a consistent theme, which drove the six participants to community activism and eventually to campus activism. Brooks (2016) and White (2016) crafted the connections between Trayvon Martin's murder, Black Lives Matter, and the

rise of Black student activism at Mizzou and other higher education institutions in 2015, 2016, and beyond.

The significance of Trayvon Martin's death in 2012, young people, and the call to activism is beginning to emerge in scholarly texts (Umoja, 2013) and mainstream television shows like *Shots Fired* (Bythewood, Bythewood, Cerar, & Lemmons, 2017). In a personal conversation in January 2016, Umoja told me, "Trayvon Martin is the Emmett Till of the current generation." Till's death in 1955, and the subsequent acquittal of Till's murderers by an all-White jury moved Black activists to mobilize Black people to engage in traditional and untraditional actions to raise awareness and to voice discontent with the criminal justice system in the United States, activity that continued onto college campuses with organizations like Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

The connection between police shootings, Black Lives Matter, and subsequent campus consciousness and activism by Black students is made further by White (2016), who asserted,

> As the groups and activists organizing around the call of #BlackLivesMatter targeted the systematic disenfranchisement of Black people, it was inevitable that their attention would turn to university campuses, which are microcosms (and in some cases, sources) of these larger societal trends. From inside academia they began to mobilize around and explore questions of how to disrupt institutions that had been created, funded, and organized primarily for the preservation of a white wealthy ruling class. (p. 90)

Conscious Black people have never been able to divorce themselves from community issues once they are on college campuses. That each of the six Black women whose critical narratives are highlighted in Chapter 4 of this dissertation discussed the connection between

Trayvon Martin and their own personal and professional activism is significant. In her critical narrative, Assata, chair and faculty in Pan-African Studies at CUELA, pointed out a specific pattern connecting community issues and activism to campus activism—a pattern that professionals in higher education should consider as issues of social injustice affect the Black community and activism.

> They were building off of Mizzou. And it was kind of a convergence of both Black Lives Matter and then Mizzou and students were connecting community to campus. And that's what happened in the Black Power Movement. Right? So Black Power Movement is born in '65, Panthers form in '66, the takeover of San Francisco State is '68, right? Black Lives Matter is born in 2013. 2015, you've got the student movement born. So it's kind of two years for the community work to kind of, I guess, blossom on campuses. Right? California University East Los Angeles has a rich legacy of student-initiated activism.

Much of the activism on campus has been spurred by issues in the surrounding community and at-large—from the 1968 school walkouts in LA, to women's empowerment marches of the 1970s, to neoliberalism's effects on tuition and fees from the 1990s to now, to current day issues such as the Muslim ban of 2017, calls to build a border wall between the United States and Mexico, and ongoing conversations of anti-Blackness, policing, and the community. Each of these community issues has contributed to student activism and their speaking out at CUELA.

The pattern of Black women students, staff, and faculty connecting community issues to their campus should be no surprise, an assertion Assata made in her critical narrative by stating,

We are very clear about our relationship with community. We do as much work as we can to integrate our lives. And so what that means is like also integrating our community work. And all studies show that like the most engaged folks in community work are Black women, right? That we integrate what we do (in community) on campuses.

Though the literature and the critical narratives highlighted in this study indicate that Black women may integrate into the community and engage campus issues they are passionate about in their lives, they are by no means a monolithic group void of diversity of thought, behavior, or backgrounds. To assume so would essentialize all Black women, a practice that diminishes the unique perspectives Black women activists may bring to university and community settings. In the case of this study, it should be noted that the two faculty members could be classified as having  grown up with class privilege—having had immediate family members both complete college and be involved with activism in their communities, and having completed advanced degrees at top-tier research institutions. While their knowledge of navigating institutions both through their intellect and their activism may have provided some sense of privilege, they, like the other Black women who provided critical narratives, share a historical legacy and experience of racism and sexism in the United States. from which their activism, solidarity, and community was built.

As such, the critical narratives presented in this dissertation give life and meaning to what Collins (2000) asserted are the connections between Black women, higher education, and activism in the academy and community, posing, "African American women's intellectual work has aimed to foster Black women's activism" (p. 6). Further, Jean-Marie et al. (2009) asserted that the calling for Black women in the academy to serve students and community, despite the

challenges they face, is often rooted in a purpose beyond their individual professional gain. The words of Congresswoman Maxine Waters (2017) summed up best the position that Black women take when it comes to the fight and struggle for social justice and their own survival: "I am a strong Black woman. I cannot be intimidated, and I'm not going anywhere."

**Isolation, Marginalization, and Need for Support**

Black women faculty, staff, and students make up about 2% of the CUELA campus population. The painfully low numbers of Black women on campus are a factor in a second theme—numerical isolation, horizontal support, and vertical oppression—that the women discussed in their critical narratives when describing their campus experiences at CUELA. The women described how they strategized to combat numerical isolation on campus. A discussion about the emotional side of isolation—how they felt silenced, marginalized, elevated, and mattered will come later in this chapter.

For students, taking on a second major—Pan-African Studies—in addition to their health-and-nutrition-related majors, was a strategy used to survive numerical isolation on campus, for in Pan-African Studies classes they knew they would encounter Black/women students, staff, and faculty on a regular basis. Additionally, by reinstating and leading the Black Student Union student organization, and then utilizing the Pan African Student Resource Center in the Cross Cultural Centers as a resource, the students were able to self-create and self-define a sense of community among the small numbers of Black students on campus.

For the staff and faculty, involvement in the Black Faculty and Staff Caucus at CUELA was one strategy utilized to survive numerical isolation on campus. Additionally, by connecting with Black students via the classroom in Pan-African Studies, mentorship opportunities, and

interaction at events presented by the Pan African Student Resource Center and Cross Cultural Centers, the staff and faculty were able to find a critical mass of Black people on campus with which to find connection, meaning, and community at CUELA.

The low numbers of Black women students, staff, and faculty at CUELA mirror the national data about Black women in higher education published by the U.S. Department of Education and National Center for Educational Statistics (2013). Despite the painfully low numbers of Black women at CUELA, six Black women were at the forefront of activism, demands, and subsequent campus conversations on climate for Black students, staff, and faculty at CUELA between 2015 and 2017.

As women connected to the politics of Ethnic Studies, Cultural Centers, and campus activism at CUELA, the six women in this study are indeed in a unique and isolated space, one which Bell et al. (1999) likened to, "marginalized women studying marginalized women in a marginalized area of study" (p. 70). Darder (2012) described this space of marginalization in higher education as the academic borderlands. It is at this space of isolation, where Black women in the academy find themselves "dubbed as activist scholars" and "can find themselves exiled from meaningful participation in the evolution of university programs and departments by an antidemocratic wave that silences and banishes their contributions to the wasteland of irrelevancy" (Darder, 2012, p. 422).

The isolation of those who are deemed, or consider themselves, activist scholars and practitioners is an intentional act of oppression against those seeking socially just conditions for marginalized and minoritized people in higher education. Neoliberalism and its effect on the university agenda related to Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, student activism, and Black students

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—specifically Black women at the university—has masked the White supremacist roots of this cunning form of capitalism, which seeks to guide—in the case of this dissertation—Black women university students, staff, and faculty concerned about institutional and systemic inequities away from the politics of resistance. For those Black women university students, staff, and faculty who choose the politics of resistance and work as border intellectuals in the academic borderlands (Darder, 2012) in the quest for more socially just and equitable institutional and systemic policies and practices in-and-out of the classroom, they may find themselves facing the negative impact of neoliberalism by being relegated and confined to the academic margins of the university. These borderland practitioners and "radical scholars can find themselves exiled from meaningful participation in the evolution of university programs and departments by an antidemocratic wave that silences and banishes their contributions to the wasteland of irrelevancy" (Darder, 2012, p. 422).

The six, whose critical narratives were the basis of this dissertation, summarized their relationships during the time of activism and demands as horizontal support with each other, while simultaneously experiencing vertical oppression and nonsupport from campus administrators. In the case of CUELA campus demands between 2015 and 2017, the support that Black women students, staff, and faculty provided to each other—especially to the students engaged on the frontlines—was especially meaningful, given the numerical and ideological isolation they felt at the time on campus. The sense of solidarity, even across their class and professional status differences, was significant to the women individually and collectively, and significant to the advancement of the goals of their demands on campus administrators. As six women who bonded and developed community across various positionalities at CUELA, the

process can be described, as Darder (2015) has posited, "solidarity and difference intertwine to create the social and material space for students to critique oppressive attitudes and practices of their everyday" (p. 56). Further, the importance of solidarity and community link to essential elements of Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000), Black Womanism (Abdullah, 2003, 2007, 2017; Abdullah & Greer, 2007), and Ella Baker's participatory leadership, emphasizing community building and leadership development across levels of education, position, or perceived importance.

As such, for the six Black women who shared critical narratives for this dissertation, the harshest critique was for administrators at CUELA, with whom all said the relationship is one of transaction, characterized as having very little contact except for wanting something or when "shit hits the fan," and where questions about the intentions of administrators and their support for Black women—before, during, and after the BSU demands—is always at the back of their minds. As Solange shared in her critical narrative, "We needed to stand in solidarity during the demands, and keep being mindful of how administration can use students to pit us against each other."

The six Black women in this study felt a sense of skepticism and critique toward CUELA administrators, to whom they initiated demands and wanted answers about campus climate for Black students, staff, and faculty. As Ororo stated in her critical narrative, of the 2015–2017 demands process and the perception of relationships between administrators and students, staff, and faculty,

There were no high-level administrators around. There were no administrators. I think

they weren't there because I think that the students did not trust them, because they did

not see them at anything or they didn't feel the support from them."

To Black women, and other marginalized and minoritized communities, it can feel

insulting to hear that they have public support for their community and identity by university

leadership, but then be privately worked against by those same people by having funding cut or

withheld, facing sanctions for speaking out or protesting, having their issues never make an

agenda, or having their issues never followed up on, forgotten about, and left to drift in the wind.

In their narratives, the women identified how mistrust festers and grows between them and

campus administrators. Black women, and other marginalized and minoritized communities, do

not like or appreciate two-faced, lying, or racist colleagues or campus leaders saying one thing

publicly and then doing something the complete opposite behind closed doors or in private

meetings. Additionally, they do not want to experience gas lighting—that is, having someone tell

them the oppression they are experiencing is not happening or is just an emotional or imaginary

feeling.

What the women and their critical narratives offer in terms of university administrators

connects with the work of Giroux (2002, 2014). Giroux critiqued universities as creating new,

and formerly nonexisting, administrator titles and positions contributing to "the rise of a bloated

managerial class" (Giroux, 2014, p. 16) which serve to control and "fashion compliant workers"

(Giroux, 2002, p. 429) within academia, and "all too frequently positions of academic authority

have been awarded to opportunistic careerists who remain completely untroubled by the burdens

of complicated thought and the fight for ethical and political responsibility" (2002, p. 79).

In light of the horizontal support and vertical oppression that the women experienced during the 2015–2017 BSU demands, a theme emerged about their relationships in their critical narratives. Each of the women named Ella Baker, and specifically some element of participatory democracy or participatory leadership that Baker embraced while leading the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Some of the elements of participatory democracy or participatory leadership—grassroots involvement in decision making, minimizing hierarchy, embracing the community's knowledge of itself and its needs, and a call for direct action—were utilized by Solange and Aaliyah, presidents of the Black Student Union at CUELA, in their work leading the BSU and in making decisions about how to proceed with crafting and negotiating their demands with CUELA administrators.

As Solange shared in her critical narrative, "We held space for people to just throw demands at us. We wanted everybody to be heard before we issued demands." Similarly, the women leading and advising the Muslim Students Association, which issued demands to CUELA administrators shortly the Black Student Union, utilized elements of Ella Baker's strategies of selflessness. Ava shared, "I kept them centered and said, 'You're not doing this for yourself right now. You're doing this for the students —the Muslim students who came before you, who will come after you."

The same elements were critical in the relationship building and mentoring between the Black women faculty, staff, and students during the demands process. As for her work advising the Muslim Students Association and the collaborative mentorships that formed during the group's demands process shortly after the Black Student Union, Ava shared, "I just remember

being—I had to be confident with the Muslim students, like, 'Okay, so this is what's going to happen,' even if you're scared as fuck." On a similar note, Core added,

I think what also ended up happening is we – again, knowing each other's strengths, allowed everybody to know who to send students to for what. So even though it was crisis time, we already—we all had relationship so we all knew what we were all good at or what we could help with.

Though the two faculty members—Ava and Assata—profiled in this study strongly identified as embracing Black Womanist theory and thought, the students and staff —Solange, Aaliyah, Ororo, and Core—had yet to claim or name an identity related to Black Feminist or Black Womanist theory and thought, or to feminism in general. It is significant because many of the elements of Ella Baker's participatory leadership that the students and staff discussed in their critical narratives parallel those of Black Feminist or Black Womanist. Parallels include emphasizing flat, horizontal, and nonhierarchical ways of operating that sees and develops leadership in each person involved in a movement or organization, qualities rooted in Black women's ways of being (Abdullah, 2007, 2017; Abdullah & Freer, 2007; Hill-Collins, 2000; Walker, 1983). As Solange shared in her critical narrative of the Black women-led demands process at CUELA, "Black women have a very unique way of leadership."

The critical narratives illuminated that horizontal support and vertical oppression were part of the lives of Black women students, staff, and faculty who sit at the academic borderlands. Though all the women identified elements of their ways of being, leadership and relationship building that mirror participatory democracy, participatory leadership, Black Feminism, or Black Womanism, their personal identification with, or knowledge of, the concepts of "feminism,"

"Black Feminism," or "Black Womanism" are at varied stages. How Black women at the academic borderlands come to be, lead, and build relationships embracing Black Feminist and Black Womanist thought without actually embracing the identities is a worthy point of further inquiry.

**The Cost of Cultural Taxation**

A third theme that emerged regarding the campus life experiences of the Black women faculty, staff, and students who shared critical narratives for this study, is cultural taxation. Cultural taxation has been described as work on top of work, jobs beyond the job description, and duties above and beyond what is expected in a higher education context (Padilla, 1994). In practice, cultural taxation plays out in numerous ways in the campus lives of popular faculty of color, popular staff from marginalized and minoritized communities, and Black student activists: being requested to sit on campus committees and work groups (often as tokenized members), club advising, participating in or facilitating campus events and activities, writing recommendation letters, personal and academic counseling, and role modeling and mentoring new or established faculty, staff, or students from marginalized and minoritized identities.

Additionally, cultural taxation can be self-imposed, as each of the women in this study shared, as a way of fulfilling an obligation to the communities from which they come. As such, there may be a conflict between the cultural sensibilities of Black women and the institutions in which they serve, since often, the self-imposed work based in moral and cultural obligation is unvalued, unrecognized, and unrewarded by peers, supervisors, and university administrators (Canton, 2012; Padilla, 1994), although it is valued, recognized, and rewarded, in whatever ways it can be by students. At the same time, institutionally or self-imposed cultural taxation can be

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linked to a sense of isolation on behalf of Black women campus activists, as presented earlier in this chapter—seeking the answers, being the support, providing an anchor to marginalized and minoritized students can lead/push faculty and staff of color, especially, to go, go, go on behalf of students, yet it is disabling by causing them to overwork. Darder (2015, May 9) posed that, with cultural taxation, seldom is there "the recognition that the achievements of working-class women of color required from us two or three or four times the amount of work to receive the same respect and recognition" (p. 2).

In describing the cultural taxation they experience as Black women students, staff, and faculty activists at the academic borderlands, several key phrases came up in the critical narratives: (a) We go, go, go, do, do, do; (b) If we're not stopping to talk and smile, it's because we have somewhere to be; (c) I ain't got time; (d) We got shit to do; we get shit done; (e) I feel like I'm superwoman; (f) We're the mules of the university.

The source of the cultural taxation that Black women experienced at CUELA was complex. As Assata shared in her critical narrative,

There's a whole lot heaped upon our—both heaped on our plates, as well as what we're obligated to do, that nobody else is heaping on us, but we have to do it. Otherwise, there's no point in us being here, right?

The cultural and community obligation Assata and the other women in this study spoke of— activism for social justice on and off campus —connects with the tenets of Black Feminism and Black Womanism and what Collins (2003) posed, "African American women's intellectual work has aimed to foster Black women's activism."

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For the Black women students who initiated demands for CUELA administrators to address campus climate for Black students, staff, and faculty, the role of activist was work on top of their work as student scholars. In their critical narratives, Solange and Aailyah shared that their only intentions with Black Student Union were to get the student organization recognized and running like any other club at CUELA.

Once Mizzou and the demands on that campus went national, and other Black Student Association chapters issued demands at their campuses, Aaliyah felt pressured to act,

Initially, I didn't think we should do anything. I thought we should do something, but I didn't know what. And I didn't think what we should do was necessarily protest. I'd never led a protest or a walkout or whatever.

She added,

I think a lot of times we're challenged, feeling like you have to be like a superwoman. I think that comes from a place of activism and in a place of like having to work and having a personal life outside of that and then having to balance things as a student as well. I'm understanding strength and endurance.

Ava spoke of the added duties she took on while providing support to Solange, Aaliyah, and the leaders of the Muslim Students Association, adding, "We are expected to do so much. I was talking about how I have students texting me all the time. I'm never off the clock."

Likewise, Assata shared,

There needs to be recognition of—what do they call it? —cultural taxation, right? So all of the extra stuff that we do, right? The mentoring, the being here late at night. Like if

there's a night I don't have to pick up my kids, I'm here until, you know—until whenever.

She went on to share,

The university wants us to treat our students as customers. And we're like, "No, our students are our family." It's very familial, and I think Black women take it on probably the most. So there's the overwhelming feeling of that.

In the discussions related to the theme of cultural taxation, the topic of mental wellness and self-care came up in many of the critical narratives. Solange spoke of depression and experiencing highs and lows while in the midst of the demands process. Aaliyah spoke of falling to her knees and crying on more than one occasion. Ororo spoke of being in a simultaneous space of supporting student activists and taking care of herself by maintaining a fitness routine. Ava spoke of keeping her therapy appointments. Assata spoke of activism as personal and community wellness. Core, a licensed therapist, spoke of providing a space for all of them, and added, "My role was definitely support, but in the form of ensuring that they weren't sacrificing parts of themselves that they would have difficulty regaining. Definitely the healer mode. A lot of them were really, really, really struggling with anxiety, posttraumatic syndrome (during and after the demands)."

Finally, for the women who shared critical narratives in this study, cultural taxation can also manifest itself in the work before work—thinking about, planning ahead, strategizing, figuring out how to stay ahead of those campus colleagues who are not supportive of them, their work, or their activism.

This came out clearly in Ororo's critical narrative when she shared her routine before interactions with certain administrators on campus. "I have to make myself a script, like, 'Say this like this, so this person doesn't get offended,'" Ororo said, and continued, "and it gets really tiring trying to do a script, because you don't want someone else to not hear you."

Assata echoed a similar campus life experience related to the work before work. She shared,

> I feel like I'm in constant fight mode. There's no place of rest. There's the survival of the department, there's the survival of our students, there's my own survival, right? I'm always looking sideways, especially at administration, about why they're doing what they're doing. And so it's exhausting having to constantly be—to have your gloves on, right? But you can't take them off.

Cultural taxation is the third theme that emerged regarding the campus life experiences of the Black women faculty, staff, and students who shared critical narratives for this study. As the theme of cultural taxation—work on top of work—emerged in this study and others (Canton, 2012; Lomax, 2015; Padilla, 1994) related to the campus experiences of marginalized and minoritized people; it is, indeed, a significant conversation that university administrators should have about the ways in which the campus climate overworks and under-recognizes the over-labored experiences of Black women students, staff, and faculty on their campus.

**Being Elevated or Silenced at the Academic Borderlands**

As they relate to the question of what do Black women faculty, staff, and students specifically say about being elevated or silenced at the academic borderlands of university life, three themes emerged from the six critical narratives: (a) where and with whom on campus they

feel they are elevated and *matter on campus*; (b) where and with whom they feel they are *silenced and marginalized on campus*; and (c) navigating *life as Black women on a predominantly Chicanx Latinx college campus* in Southern California.

**Mattering on campus**

The experiences shared in the critical narratives in this dissertation indicated that the literature on mattering has merit and meaning when examining where Black women specifically say they felt elevated at CUELA. The critical narratives of the Black women in this study indicated few places on the CUELA campus where they felt elevated or like they mattered: anywhere on campus where Black people congregated and could be themselves. Where no space exists, the women said they created their own space of celebration, fitting with Black feminism and Black womanism tenet of self-determination. Ava shared, "I feel like we just have carved out spaces to honor ourselves and each other." To this point, Core said, "We throw our own parties for each other. We celebrate each other. I don't think the campus knows the relevance of celebrating Black women and Black womanhood, especially 'cause of where we're situated in East L.A."

The six women identified four spaces at CUELA where they felt like they mattered, were celebrated or, at minimum, acknowledged as Black women: (a) Pan-African Studies, (b) cross cultural centers, (c) counseling and psychological services, and (d) housing services and residential Life. In terms of why they felt those four spaces were significant to their mattering on campus, each woman shared that those spaces have faculty or staff who show an interest in their lives and who appreciate who they are as Black women. In these spaces, the women indicated,

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they feel they can be themselves authentically and without censoring parts of their identities, thoughts, or opinions.

Additionally, they identified that their expertise and contributions are valued in the four spaces where they feel like they most matter at CUELA. Finally, as an integration of community and campus life is important to the lived experiences of Black women in higher education (Abdullah, 2017; Collins, 2000, 2013), the four spaces of mattering that the women identified regularly address social justice and identity issues. Here, the women indicated they encounter staff, faculty, and peers—mostly Black, but other groups of color as well—who listen, engage, and encourage robust conversations about the social justice and identity issues that are on their minds.

For faculty and staff, one significant finding is that they found the most meaning or mattering in their interactions with the students they serve and work with. Ororo indicated, "The place where I feel like I matter the most is with the students that I interact with and engage with. I'm here because of them. So my priority is them first." Similarly, Core shared, "The students, they view me as, I think, an auntie. Some of 'em, I'm maybe more like momma. I think they know we're family. I think of them as family." Finally, Assata shared,

> I think my power and my place of the most comfort on campus is with my students. Like if all I had to do was be with the students and not write reports and not go to fight the academic senate it would be lovely.

Each of the women indicated that the act of someone checking in with them—a student, staff member, or faculty—not just for academics or professional purposes, was significant in feeling like they matter in a space. The importance of staff and faculty who care, especially in

culturally focused spaces, is a key factor in the process of mattering for marginalized and minoritized people in higher education (Conerly, 2017; Toya, 2011; Welch, 2009). With this in mind, Toya (2011) indicated that relational leadership—that is, leadership based on nonhierarchical and collaborative student, staff, and faculty relationships in higher education setting—add to a sense of belonging and mattering. Many of the elements of relational leadership mirror those of Black feminist, Black womanist, and participatory leadership theory that the women noted in their critical narratives as significant to their leadership.

Schlossberg (1989) explored the concept of mattering and marginalization for students on college campus, and identified five characteristics of mattering: (a) attention, (b) importance, (c) dependence, (d) ego-extension, and (e) appreciation. With this in mind, Schlossberg posed a correlation that the more places students feel they matter on campus, the greater their attachment, involvement, and retention to graduation on campus. Building upon Schlossberg's qualitative work around the construct of marginality and mattering, Rendón (1994) introduced the first quantitative research resulting in what has been defined as validation theory, referring to proactive and intentional actions by faculty and staff, in and out of the class, to validate students' identities, learning, and personal development. Additional qualitative (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011) and quantitative (Hurtado et al., 2011) research suggests that in-class validation for students of color promotes a sense of empowerment that leads to their subsequent involvement in out-of-class settings.

**Being Silenced on Campus**

As the literature confirms, there are efforts to silence the academic, professional, and spiritual contributions of Black women to their higher education institutions and to the academy.

The same could be said for life in general in the United States and efforts to keep Black women in a space of silence, subordination, and servitude. Collins (2000, 2007) and Walker (1983) wrote of the deliberate process of the intellectual and community work of Black women being "thrown away" (Collins, 2000, p. 5). This, despite the long-term and high rates of their participation in community activism, and their higher-than-average enrollment, retention, and graduation rates in higher education compared with Black men and compared proportionally with other demographic groups in the United States. To this point, Collins (2000) posed the question, "Why are African American women and our ideas not known and not believed in?" (p. 5). The deliberate effort to silence Black women and push their work to the academic borderlands is "neither accidental nor benign" (Collins, 2007, p. 395). Further, Scott (1985) and Collins (2007) posed that suppressing knowledge and work produced by people of marginalized and minoritized groups—in this case, Black women—helps to keep oppressors in power because of the apparent lack of dissenting voices present in work produced by the oppressed.

Assata shared: "I think my voice is—the attempt to silence my voice—everywhere on campus, except in the classroom." To this point, Core added,

I don't think we as a society really—either we—either it's so know that it's intentionally silenced so that—and this is what I'm coming to understand, that power is so great that it —they almost feel like they have to keep it under wraps. Or it's so underestimated that it's dismissed.

While, for some, it is intuition about a space or people at CUELA that leads to being or feeling silenced, as Ava shared: "I don't go in spaces that I don't feel like I matter." Core shared a similar sentiment, and said, "I also don't go where I don't feel valued."

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Moreover, the critical narratives of the Black women in this study indicate that being silenced is part of their reality and experience at CUELA; and that being silenced is a deliberate act done upon them. Three issues emerged related to being silenced and marginalized on campus: (a) academic major, (b) double consciousness, and (c) disconnection with administrators.

*Academic major:* One, both students spoke of feeling like their academic majors—public health and nutritional science—were spaces where they felt like they did not or could not have voice. Students shared that course content in their majors was not culturally relevant to Black or Black women community issues. Additionally, students shared that the low numbers of Black students enrolled in the majors, and thus in their major classes, added to a sense of isolation and being silenced. In response to these factors, both students chose to add a major, Pan-African Studies, to find a space where they felt they would matter and would have voice. It is significant that students add a second major to their academic aspirations as a way of finding voice, mattering, and belonging, especially given that both students were transfer students and had already devoted notable time to their academic pursuits in community college and at CUELA.

*Double consciousness***:** Second, the topic of double consciousness (DuBois, 1902; Fanon, 1967), that is, wondering how one is perceived through the gaze of non-Black people, emerged as a significant finding for the students as it related to being silenced. Both students worked as student assistants in the admissions office at CUELA, and described feeling like who they were as Black women did not matter to coworkers in the department. Solange shared that a full-time supervisor asked Aaliyah to check Solange for being too vocal about social justice and issues of race. Solange said, "You have this, like this almost sense of double consciousness. You're

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always battling with does this have to do with me. We think about race more than anyone else, so you wonder if you're making the workspace uncomfortable." Aaliyah shared,

> As someone who works on campus, you want to kind of get away from the spaces where you're working to reboot. I feel like what it is is a "pretend to care, but not really care," and that's draining and that's something that's felt throughout.

***Disconnection with administrators:*** Finally, interactions with administrators emerged as a topic in the theme of where and with whom they felt silenced and marginalized at CUELA. The topic of administrators and feeling silenced and marginalized was illuminated in all six critical narratives, but was most vehemently shared by staff. About this, Ororo shared,

> Where I feel a little marginalized I would say would be with administration. What happens is that a lot of the engagement is driven on title. So I'm not an upper-level administrator, so I feel like other administrators who are upper-level, they don't consider my feedback or the experience that I have on this campus for certain matters that pertain to students.

For Core, being the only Black counselor on staff and understanding the effects of racism on mental health made it was especially important for her to be invited to the table on conversations on campus climate. However, she shared,

> On campus climate. That would be a committee that I think you would want the Black counselor to be a part of, right? And so nothing there. I think people are fine with letting us have a voice on the ground as interveners. But when we wanna talk about policy, when we wanna talk about systemic change, we're completely not heard. We get a lotta nods and "You make a good points," but on the agenda, we don't even make the agenda.

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The feelings of disconnect between Black women and university administrators is significant and worth exploring further. In the six critical narratives, the women shared their deep commitment to social justice, identity, and campus activism for equity and inclusion. This commitment may indicate there is a disconnection with campus administrators, a level of staff in universities that Giroux (2004) asserted, "remain completely untroubled by the burdens of complicated thought and the fight for ethical and political responsibility" (p. 79).

**Being Black on a Predominantly Non-Black Chicanx Latinx College Campus**

CUELA has the designation of "Hispanic" Serving Institution (HSI), which means that the institution is part of a federal program designed to assist higher education institutions in their efforts to help first-generation, majority low-income "Hispanic" students. The designation is tied to money and populations served. The designation does not correlate with leadership, praxis, or values affiliated with Chicanx Latinx communities. In addition to having the HSI designation, the CUELA campus had a student population of almost 60% who identified as Chicanx Latinx, a fact to which Aaliyah shared in her critical narrative, "This is like a HBCU for Spanish-speaking people."

Black women faculty, staff, and students made up about 2% of the CUELA campus population. The painfully low numbers of Black women on campus are a factor in a second theme—being a Black woman on a predominantly non-Black Chicanx Latinx campus that is HSI-serving—that the women discussed in their critical narratives when describing their campus experiences at CUELA.

With some of the most blunt statements in their critical narratives, the women in this study shared that the identity of Black womanhood is not celebrated at CUELA. Further, some of

the women spoke freely about the nature of being marginalized and minoritized (Black) on a campus made up of a majority of marginalized and minoritized communities (Chicanx Latinx). Anti-Blackness by CUELA's majority population came up frequently in the critical narratives about their experiences as Black women on campus. As well, a disregard for and invisibilization of Black women in the larger campus context came up. One of the participants joked before the recording of her critical narrative that CUELA as an institution gets into and celebrates Homecoming Week in February more than Black History Month. To this point, Ororo said, "I don't think that they've done anything to celebrate Black women. It is just not even talked about."

Solange shared that the campus narratives about diversity and numbers appear to focus primarily on Chicanx Latinx communities at the expense of other groups. "When I was working as an orientation leader, we used to highlight all the time we're one of the most culturally diverse universities," she said.

> And the president like to say that in his opening speeches. And I keep looking over at other Black orientation leaders and be like, "what the hell do they mean by diversity?" So I'm like what do they mean by diversity or is it just they're trying to say we're a Hispanic-serving institution?
>
> "It's tough here and we got a lotta people of color," Core said.
>
> Anti-Blackness is in every culture and every group. And so we've even seen on this campus, where we've been working with another ethnic group—and they are sabotaging our efforts. They are going behind our back to the president about our efforts. They are

refusing to give up any space, even if they occupy 60 percent of it. How do we get people in those places to call out anti-Blackness in their own spaces?

Core continued, "Anti-Blackness, for us, is everywhere, in every community. So I think that's what's working against us when we talk about celebrating Black women."

Aaliyah shared the following in her critical narrative:

Who gets celebrated at CUELA? I feel like our Latino folks—which makes sense—and the LGBTQ-plus populations are celebrated to some extent. They make sure to funnel all their resources into that and I feel like what's left out is everybody else—specifically Black women and the Black population as a whole."

The critical narratives of the women in this study indicate there is merit in exploring their experiences as Black women on a predominantly non-Black Chicanx Latinx college campus. Much has been written about the experiences of Black women faculty, staff, and students in predominantly White institutions (Croom & Patton, 2011/2012, 2017; Edwards et al., 2011). There is little-to-no literature exploring the experiences of Black women, or Black students in general, on campuses with predominantly non-Black Chicanx Latinx populations or with the HSI designation.

There is a growing body of literature exploring the concept of anti-Blackness, or, disgust with, Blackness and Black women, in academic, political, and social settings (Coates, 2015; Dumas, 2016; Hancock, 2004; Matias, 2016) that, in combination with an analysis of further critical narratives by Black women on predominantly Chicanx Latinx campuses, might reveal experiences that would be helpful to university campuses navigating increasingly diverse populations of minoritized and marginalized students.

**Implications**

*Recognizing that precisely because we are constantly in the process of becoming and,*

*therefore, are capable of observing, comparing, evaluating, choosing, deciding,*

*intervening, breaking with, and making options, we are ethical beings, capable of*

*transgressing our ethical grounding.*

Freire (1998)

Highlighting the narratives of these Black women from California University East Los Angeles, a campus with a rich history of student agency, activism, resiliency, and self-determination is important. Black women have played a long and active history and role in activism work for social justice—from the early scholar-activist work of Maria W. Stewart and Anna Julia Cooper; to anti-enslavement abolitionists; to civil rights organizers and activists who embraced traditional and nontraditional engagement; to Black Lives Matter; to campus demands of 2015 to today. That these six Black women found themselves engaged, to varying degrees, in activism on a predominantly non-Black Chicanx Latinx campus with a Hispanic Serving Institution designation in Southern California is significant.

The critical narratives of the Black women in this study indicate there were few places on the CUELA campus where they felt elevated or like they matter. On a campus of 28,000 students, there were four spaces at CUELA that the six Black women shared they feel like they mattered, were celebrated, had voice, and were acknowledged as Black women: (a) Pan-African Studies, (b) cross cultural centers, (c) counseling and psychological services, and (d) housing services and residential life. If that is the case at one university, with a majority people of color population, one can only imagine what the experiences are for Black women at predominantly

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White institutions. Hence, it bears asking the question: how are universities prepared to serve the needs—in genuine, caring, and authentic ways—of Black women students, staff, and faculty?

Moreover, especially in the divisive and hateful era of Trump, several implications should be considered by administrators at CUELA and elsewhere when it comes to Black women who navigate the politics of Ethnic Studies, Cultural Centers, and student activism at the academic borderlands. For example, Black women integrate community and campus issues in their lives. As the literature and the critical narratives indicate, there is no separation in their lives or concerns. Whether the issue is Black Lives Matter and police brutality, anti-Blackness, advocating for marginalized and minoritized groups, demands for campus equity and equality, voting for progressive candidates during elections, or other community issues that arise, Black women will speak up, engage, and get involved. They lead, both within the Black community and within larger communities.

Given the current Trump administration in Washington, DC, which seeks to promote politics that punish or shame marginalized and minoritized groups, it should be expected that as these issues of hate take hold on college campuses, Black women will engage in traditional and nontraditional ways in their campus and home communities. This implication becomes increasingly important as Black women continue to increase in their enrollment, persistence, attrition, and graduation rates in higher education. Though Black women may be small in numbers at CUELA and on other college campuses, they are big in their outspokenness on social justice and equity issues. As such, campuses need to be prepared to work with and create environments that welcome the voices and engagements of Black women.

Black women self-determine and self-define what feels safe, what feels authentic, and where, when, and with whom they feel silenced or elevated on college campuses. As implied by the critical narratives, Black women can read through and discern disingenuous, uncaring, and fake interactions with people on campus; they know when someone is for them, against them, or running a scheme or game. Given this, university leadership should look at how inclusive the campus climate is for Black women. An implication of this study is that university administrators must be willing to listen and engage in genuine, caring, and authentic ways with Black women. Ideally, this listening process will occur before there are signs of any discontent or unhappiness by Black women with the campus climate. Listening to Black women on a regular basis would help administrators empathize with their day-to-day experiences on campus, and would also help better inform policies and practices affecting the lives of Black women.

With this in mind, the need for additional resources and initiatives, which take into account the experiences, needs, and involvement of Black women in developing them, is a key implication of this study. A consistent thread among the critical narratives is the importance of university leadership to engage with Black women on a consistent and proactive basis. The absence of this commitment will contribute to the continued feelings of marginalization and being silenced by Black women.

The importance of Ethnic Studies and Cultural Centers is a crucial factor in the self-identity, mattering, belonging, and celebration of Black women. Whether they become introduced to these areas when entering college or lifelong social justice advocates, these spaces become important havens on college campuses that otherwise may be hostile or unwelcoming to Black women—especially those who engage in traditional or nontraditional ways for social

justice. Hence, an implication here is that campuses must invest time, money, and other resources in making sure the campus community understands the importance of Ethnic Studies and Cultural Centers to marginalized and minoritized communities. This also implies that Black students, and specifically Black women, need to be connected as early as possible— upon admission or, at minimum, during orientation—to Ethnic Studies, Pan-African Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, and the campus Cultural Centers as a proactive measure for success and connection.

The politics of the borderlands are significant for Black women engaged in campus social justice work. For those marginalized women doing marginalized work on behalf of marginalized students, the politics of the borderlands is one where they are "never meant to survive, and yet survived" (Darder, 2015, May 9, p. 3). The academic borderlands are under constant attack on university campuses, where discourses of differences are undermined, where the work of Ethnic Studies and Cultural Centers are on guard against efforts to terminate or cut them, and where borderland scholars can be exiled from mainstream university group-think (Darder, 2012). In the capitalist and neoliberal university, borderland scholars and activists "can experience isolation and disconnection, in a perpetual game of sordid competition" (Darder, 2015, p. 57) and "become more and more estranged from one another, their labor, and the world around them (Darder, 2015, p. 58)." It is in this space of Eurocentric structures of exclusion where Black women as borderland scholars must navigate the dialectical tensions that seek to silence them, their scholar-activist work, and their networks across positionalities and titles.

In addition to navigating Eurocentric structures of exclusion predicated on individualism and competition, the women in this study voiced concern for the ways in which they are viewed

and valued as Black women within a predominantly non-Black, Chicanx Latinx campus environment. In the CUELA campus setting, which has a "Hispanic"-Serving Institution designation, Black women at the academic borderlands voiced concerns with navigating Eurocentric institutional policies and structures, at the same time navigating anti-Blackness on multiple levels within the majority non-Black Chicanx Latinx population. For the Black women activists who shared critical narratives in this study, the politics of the borderlands kept them wondering where and with whom they fit beyond their tightly knit personal and professional campus circles.

Given this knowledge of Black women who engage at the academic borderlands, universities should better prepare to address the needs of Black women enrolling in higher education. It brings to mind the question: in what ways and what spaces does the university offer to Black women faculty, staff, and students? Are they made to feel part of the campus community by specific, genuine, and meaningful outreach and relationship building? Or are they as Collins (2000) and Walker (1983) asserted "thrown away" on campus due to their small population numerically? Similarly, the ethical implications behind how and when Black women are engaged, celebrated, and silenced on college campuses are daunting and important issues to address—issues which cannot be addressed without the full participation of Black women in the shaping, establishment, and implementation of spaces that meet their academic and scholarly needs as participants and leaders on the campus.

<center>**Recommendations**</center>

*Right thinking is right doing.*

<div align="right">Paulo Freire (1998)</div>

It is at this point of self-reflection where university leaders and administrators must consider and act upon the recommendations of Black women students, staff, and faculty on their campuses.

**To Improve the Campus Life of Black Women: In their Own Voice**

Black women have made major contributions to higher education and, equally, have succeeded in the institutions as students, staff, and faculty. Despite being one of the most educated, proportionally, compared to other demographics in the United States, they have not always been treated with the respect they deserve. As one of the consistent themes of the critical narratives suggests, Black women need to be listened to. They have a lot to say about how they would like to be treated as Black, women, activist, scholars in higher education.

Rather than impose a series of recommendations from the researcher's point of view, it is important to listen to what Black women have to say first about what campuses can do to address the needs of Black women. The following summarizes – in their own words – the recommendations made in the critical narratives of the six women in this study.

*Solange:*

> I think it'd be beneficial instead of administration waiting for moments like that to happen to have quarterly or semesterly town hall meetings or something like that where different people from different communities would come up to the mic and speak to the president directly. They always have town hall meetings when S-H-I-T has hit the fan

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and then they're like, "Oh, I didn't even know you were feeling this way or this is what's even going on in the campus." It's like well, you should check in with us.

*Aaliyah:*

I think it's important to provide a space where it's like, "It's ok to just let go and be." I feel that it's important for spaces to be just thought about for and focused on you. Where people check in on you—you good? what's going on? I've found that a lot of people aren't like that with me—which is fine because I can make it, I'm good, but I feel like in the moments where people were like genuinely showed concern I was like, "Oh my God. Wow." Just the little bitty things, you know? But you understand what I'm saying, like those things really matter so much because it's like people are actually – they actually care and they're looking beyond the surface – even if they don't understand it.

*Ororo:*

My recommendation would be to allow us to have our voice. Include us in things that we should be included in, and then allow us to have our voice when we are in that space, as opposed to having some kind of strange fear. It's like we're at work. We're professional. We know how to be professional. I'm not gonna throw a piece of paper at you because I don't like something you're saying. I think the institution needs to have real mentoring programs, but instead of creating them from the top-down, I think they should be created from the bottom-up. I think they should include students, staff, and faculty, but it needs to be across levels.

*Core:*

That question is almost like the "if you had a magic wand and you could . . . " it's almost

so fantastical you can't answer it. You know what I mean? It's so far outside of what we

believe will happen—here's what's happened, though. Black women aren't looking for

that to come. We're just creating our own shit. I've lost the desire to want something

from them. They killed that last November with the election. I've lost the desire to want

something from them. It just comes with too much. It just—it always has strings attached

of some sort or expires or will only give them a pass to think.

I just think we need to rethink Higher Education. We need to rethink that

specifically as Black people from a decolonized standpoint. We need to think, what does

that mean? What side are we trying to fit into? —do we wanna do this this way? So I

think that's the next question.

*Ava*

So for me, it's like we're doing the work, but I do think it needs to be point out that it's at

a cost, possibly to our health, to our personal and interpersonal relationships, and it tracks

back to; I think of the image of Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind* and the concern

for her as mistress.

We're doing important work. It's going undocumented. Eventually people radar it

as important. We just want to be in the space that we deserve. But we're being denied the

access, possibly with of course our friends and things, possibly. We had the GE fight for

Ethnic Studies, right? Then all of a sudden, history proves that they were wrong and we

were right. We can't brag about that, right? Then everybody tries to make it right.

I think we're in the trying to make it right space, but it is important to remember that this is a cycle and I know that we're going to be back here again. We're just assembling our troops, and ultimately I hope this research proves that we need more troops.

*Assata:*

Pay us. Like how the hell is it okay for me—and you know, for some time I was the only Black woman chair on campus. I'm one of two Black women chairs on an entire campus, and we have 40-something departments. How is it okay for me to make 30 percent less than the next lowest-paid chair? Right? Universities got to look at that. Universities can't be doing that, right?

There needs to be a recognition of—what do they call it? —cultural taxation, right? There needs to be a recognition of—all of the extra stuff that we do, right? The mentoring, the being here late at night. I think that we need to be lifting up Black women as thinkers, not just workhorses. Right? Like we are, what Zora Neale Hurston called, "the mules of the world?" We're the mules of the university, right? They're quick to hand us some report to get done, that our name doesn't even go on. They're quick to do that. So I'm just saying, that's an example of what I'm talking about.

As indicated in the excerpts of the women profiled in this study range, their recommendations call for interventions that create genuine spaces for Black women; where administrators listen to Black women; create mentoring programs for Black women; recognize, document, and reward the important work of Black women; increase the pay of Black women burdened with the cultural taxation of being overworked as university tokens; and to those administrators who want

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to manage and monitor the every move of Black women students, staff, and faculty—leave them alone, let them be autonomous, give them space to work, to be, and to breathe, in their own ways on campus. If campuses are serious about embracing emancipatory and liberating experiences for Black women students, staff, and faculty, their administrators and leaders might want to heed carefully the expert words and stories of Black women who know their lives and experiences better than anyone else. In their words, a new day is dawning and time is up for ignoring Black women students, staff, and faculty relegated to the academic borderlands of the university.

**Other Important Actions**

Further, the Black women in this study said it best in their critical narratives. In addition to their recommendations for what higher education can do to address and improve the campus life experiences of Black women navigating at the academic borderlands, there are other important actions these institutions should consider. These actions must be directly linked to addressing the need for space and mattering; opportunities for networking and connecting; embracing women of color feminist theory and praxis; serving a campus where people of color are the majority; and integrating a praxis of love.

***Space and mattering***. First, it is notable and alarming that the Black women in this study could identify at most four spaces at CUELA where they feel they mattered, were valued, and celebrated – Pan-African Studies, cross cultural centers, counseling and psychological services, and housing and residential life. As spaces that embrace liberatory pedagogy, position teachers, staff, and students as co-creators of knowledge, promote an ethic of care, validation, and create the classroom and co-curricular conditions for liberation (Conerly, 2017; Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Toya, 2011; Welch, 2009), institutional environments must understand their

influence on the social and academic experiences and outcomes of marginalized faculty, staff, and students in higher education. When spaces such as Ethnic Studies (Pan-African Studies) or cultural centers are questioned or targeted by colleagues with putdowns about their legitimacy on campus, it demeans the scholarship, study, and labor of the professionals who create the spaces Black women seek and/or need for their survival. As such, this constitutes both a moral, and ethical imperative for social justice leaders and higher education administrators to develop an active consciousness about, name, problematize, analyze, and act upon the importance of campus climate, developing spaces where Black women can feel and be themselves, and embracing/urging an ethic of care in the praxis of staff and faculty who influence the environments of their departments and offices.

*Opportunities for networking and connecting*. It is notable that the Black women in this study found the four spaces through a modern day underground railroad of support—via Black Student Union, Black Faculty and Staff Caucus, being shoulder-tapped about Black-focused spaces—eat CUELA. On a campus with almost 28,000 students, and less than 2% Black women on it, it is miraculous that they were able to find the four spaces they deemed supportive to their identities. It poses the question: what about other Black women (not in this study) or Black students in general who do not find those four spaces? Where and how do they succeed, feel validated, heard, or like they matter? If they do not find a space of mattering, something the literature states as important in campus satisfaction and retention (Conerly, 2017; Hurtado et al., 2011; Rendón,1994; Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Schlossberg, 1989; Toya, 2011; Welch, 2009), are they left adrift and without any support or safety net at CUELA or other institutions of higher education? An investment in connecting Black women—and Black students in general—

to identified spaces of mattering on campus is a recommendation for university leaders. This is in line with Ororo's recommendation of creating places where mentoring for, and between, Black women can occur.

   ***Embracing women of color feminist theory and praxis***. Another recommendation relates to the topic of women of color feminism, and embracing the values congruent with women of color ways of being. The largest population at CUELA is women of color, with Black women being a small number within the population. Given this fact, it is recommended that the campus consider a university-wide embrace and intellectual exploration of women of color feminist theory and praxis. Scholars have examined the transformational power of Black and Chicana feminism in the thinking and practices of people working in higher education, challenging patriarchy, and reframing the ways in which women and men perceive women of color – particularly Black women (Anzaldua, 1987; Collins, 1986, 1989, 2000, 2013; Gordon & Henery, 2014; Sáenz & Bukoski, 2014). By looking at ways to infuse women of color feminism into the institutional fabric, it would send a strong signal to women of color that their realities and ways of being are important. It would also transform the institution, as women of color feminisms can provide a powerful lens through which to analyze inequalities and oppressive institutional structures.

   Though they may have differing ways of accepting or rejecting feminism, each of women identified components of feminism, Black feminism, and Black womanism as key to their own ways of being and leading. Embracing women of color feminism on an institutional level would help fuse the day-to-day practice that many women are already embracing with theory. For the

women in this study who shared critical narratives, it would add academic meaning to what they are already practicing in their leadership and activism.

      ***Serving a campus where people of color are the majority***. Finally, CUELA was founded as a predominantly White institution that happened to attain an HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution) designation. It is a designation tied to federal funding based on populations served. This is in juxtaposition with HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) campuses, which were founded specifically with Black students, staff, and faculty in mind due to being excluded from historically and predominantly White institutions of higher education. HBCUs embrace values of the Black community, practice in liberatory and humanizing ways with their campus communities, and embrace the development of critical consciousness of Blackness, which, in turn, produce a high degree of campus care, loyalty, success, and graduation (Darrell, Littlefield, & Washington, 2016). With this knowledge that HSI institutions are essentially historically predominantly White institutions with a new label, it bears the question: what would happen to the institutional practices, as they relate to Black women, if the campus embraced values, practices, and policies that resonate with people of color communities, much like HBCUs do? If a campus like CUELA were to embrace and put into practice values, as well as hire faculty, staff, and administrators reflective of its majority people of color population, would campus demands issued by Black and Muslim students addressing campus climate be necessary? What would the students be able to focus their energies on if the institution embraced values both of communities of color and women of color feminist theory? One can only imagine and look to the example of HBCU campuses, where there were no issues of demands related to campus climate for Black students issued. Further research into the operating values of HSI campuses,

and the ways in which they embrace or challenge status quo and Whiteness as a framework is important for the institutions and the field.

Tied to this reflection of serving at a university founded as a predominantly White institution, which then took on an HSI designation, and then amassed a now 80% campus population of people of color, university leaders must reflect on Whiteness and the emotionalities of Whiteness (Matias, 2016), anti-Blackness (Coates, 2015; Dumas, 2016; Hancock, 2004), cultural taxation (Padilla, 1994; Shavers et al., 2015), and tokenism's connections to overt, covert, and aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996; Flores Niemann, 2012), and the ways in which these concepts play out, in obvious, subtle, intentional, or unintentional ways in the lives of Black women at the academic borderlands on their campuses. As noted earlier, CUELA experienced a major transition in 2013 with the retirement of its Black president, who had served in the role for almost 35 years, and shortly after with reassignment of a popular Black Vice President for Student Affairs who had served in the role for almost 15 years. A number of new administrators, many White, joined the CUELA campus as university leaders. The first demands issued by the Black Student Union occurred within a year of the vice president's reassignment. In this reflection on overt, covert, and aversive racism, an important element for university leaders to explore is the effects of the retirement, resignation, or reassignment of long-term and popular Black university leaders on their campuses on issues like morale, mentoring, and campus climate, especially for Black women and Black students in general on their campuses.

*A praxis of love.* The final recommendation is not as tangible as the others. It requires deep reflection, humility, honesty, and openness. Love as praxis. Love is rarely, if ever, discussed in higher education institutions. However, love has been embraced as essential for us

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to achieve a humanizing, liberatory, and transformational educational experience that engages the cultural, intellectual, emotional, and physical aspects of our lives (Darder, 1998, 2015, 2017; Freire, 1971, 1998; hooks, 2003). As Darder (2015) posed, "A pedagogy of love can be best understood as a deeply purposeful educational practice, fueled by an emancipatory political vision" (p. 63).

University leaders can transform themselves and their institutions by reflecting on and embracing a sense of compassion and consciousness in every aspect of their work. Developing a sense of compassion and consciousness is organic and evolutionary—readings and dialogue can be provided to help the process, but a personal choice to reflect and embrace love as praxis is more authentic and transformational. Developing courage to question and challenge asymmetrical power dynamics, respecting the dignity of people—especially the marginalized and minoritized within our campuses—acting to transform and disrupt institutional practices that are oppressive, and staying engaged in the fight for justice are all elements of embracing love as praxis.

Essentially, a praxis of love—a love ethic—insists that educational leaders develop an uncompromising commitment to the liberation of marginalized and minoritized communities on their campus. It means seeing the humanity in each person, listening, reflecting, and also embracing a "love that could be lively, forceful, and inspiring, while at the same time, critical, challenging, and insistent" (Darder, 1998, p. 567). Moral and ethical leadership are essential to university administrators wanting to embrace an ethics of love. The wanting piece is essential. As Darder (1998) posited, love in praxis requires of university leaders a "commitment to

consistently reflect on their practice and to consider the consequences of their thoughts, words, and actions within the classroom and beyond" (p. 576).

As it relates to working with Black women who are doing campus activism, it could mean that university administrators pause on being defensive of themselves or higher-level administrators, and really take an inward look at their practices, procedures, policies, and politics that cause activists to have to activate. It could mean taking a pause and looking at the humanity of campus activists, and instead of labeling them troublemakers, disruptors, making things bad for campus, take time to reflect on the mental, physical, and emotional toll that having to activate for social justice on campus means. It could mean administrators listening to stories—a process that connects critical race theory, critical pedagogy, and Black feminism/womanism—and taking them as truth when Black women, and other marginalized/minoritized communities, talk truthfully and candidly about their campus experiences. A love ethic, instead of retreating to fear, blame, and anger with campus activists might transform relationships, policies, the institution as a whole.

Probably the most difficult of all the recommendations, embracing love as praxis is an intangible, yet attainable, way of being for university leaders who want to incorporate these values into their personal and professional lives. The key is to want, need, and desire to act out of love at all times. Based on the critical narratives shared in this dissertation, and the many untold stories never brought to light, it is a moral and ethical imperative for university leaders to address and take seriously the needs of Black women on their campuses, especially those who are doing the work university leaders should do for social justice and equity on their campuses. Freire (1998) posed, "It is immorality. Here I want to repeat – forcefully – that nothing can justify the

degradation of human beings. Nothing." (p. 93). By ignoring, silencing, rendering voiceless Black women on their campuses, as they shared in their critical narratives, university leaders are essentially writing off the lives of a most talented, educated, and insightful population of leaders whose only intentions are to make their institutions better for the students, staff, and faculty in the community.

## Future Research

There is a need for future research related to the experiences of Black women in the academy. One includes an examination of the relationships and communication between Black women and campus administrators, given that the more vehement commentary in the narratives focused on administrators. Next, as more campuses become majority marginalized and minoritized-serving campuses, an examination of how they move toward or resist embracing values, curriculum, and ways of being of the communities they serve could be a starting point for future research. An examination of relationships between Black women activists and Chicanx Latinx women activists in higher education, and collecting critical narratives of where and how they support, conflict, and connect with each other and their respective or collective causes on campus could be a future research topic. Further, there is a need for studies that help translate the findings of this study across multiple group identity categories. Future studies are needed to examine the politics of diversity work in the university setting and negative impacts toward social justice (i.e., cooptation by people and departments not trained in a social justice lens, inclusion of dominant community narratives claiming discrimination by efforts to liberate traditionally minoritized and marginalized people, etc.) Finally, expanding the sample of Black women activists providing critical narratives—either at the same campus site of this study, or

additional campuses—could be important in further validating or providing critique. The critical narratives and subsequent findings provide numerous points of inquiry for future research related to the politics of Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, and student activism in higher education.

## Conclusion

The issue of power remains cloaked in neutrality and dressed in good intentions on the university campus. Yet, power exhibits itself in how money is spent, whose thinking and participation is valued, and how decisions are made. The liberation of oppressed people is not part of the narrative or agenda of power on college campuses. As stated in their critical narratives, Black women are not even on the agenda.

Though each of their stories differs slightly in a number of ways or presentation styles, they weave a picture of the higher education landscape that Black women students, staff, and faculty—particularly those who voice and act upon injustices and inequalities in those settings— must negotiate and navigate daily. The narratives reflect major issues that Black women faculty, staff, and students experience in the larger landscape of higher education, and specifically at the CUELA campus with its own unique characteristics. Often, the stories shared in the narratives are told only within-community and behind closed doors, among trusted friends, sister-friends, and colleagues.

A consistent thread of the critical narratives is the self-determination, self-definition, and self-directed level of activism each of the women exerts for causes beyond their self-interests— their self-interests are community interests. These are Black women on the academic borderlands "within the university, whose scholarship seeks to explicitly challenge longstanding structural inequalities and social exclusions" (Darder, 2012, p. 412), who are seeking to create inclusive

and just communities for Black students, staff, and faculty. Their narratives give life and meaning to what Collins (2000) asserted on the connections between Black women, higher education, and activism in the academy and community, "African American women's intellectual work has aimed to foster Black women's activism" (p. 6). The politics of Ethnic Studies, cultural centers, and student activism have been, are, and will be present and continue to contend with issue related social justice within higher education. For the Black women students, staff, and faculty at the academic borderlands who, each day of their lives must engage in traditional and nontraditional ways for social justice, the struggle continues.

## Epilogue

*The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman.*

Malcolm X (1962)

I came to this project with the assistance of Dr. Antonia Darder, who challenged me to think and dig deeper about my initial dissertation topic. She posed, "What makes you mad? What do you want to add to the field about the problems that make you mad? What's calling you, Fred – where are you called?" At the time, Mizzou, the undergraduate institution where I earned a bachelor's of journalism was in the news due to Black students, athletes protesting, and demands being issued. What was happening at Mizzou in 2015 reminded me of the same issues and campus climate I faced as an undergraduate there years earlier. Concurrently, at my work campus, Black students were organizing and issuing their own sets of demands. At the same

time, Black Lives Matter, state-sanctioned violence targeting Black people, and themes of anti-Blackness permeated our public and private discourse.

All the courageous Black women leaders of all genders and sexualities leading campus demands, taking to the streets with Black Lives Matter, forcing conversations about rampant anti-Blackness in individuals and institutions, and facing the deaths of their unarmed young people due to police violence were on my mind. At the same time, concurrently, Beyoncé released *Lemonade*, a musical and video project, exploring the multi-faceted realities of Black women, and hashtags like #BlackGirlMagic and #BlackGirlsRock celebrated the work and contributions of Black women. Indeed, 2015–2016 was a trying, yet celebratory time for many of us who consider ourselves socially conscious and caring about the Black community. A common thread in all this was that of Black women leading, Black women being celebrated within the Black community, Black women being demonized and dehumanized by non-Black people. Black men were there, but not really there, in my observation as frontline initiators, people making things happen.

I came to this project with Dr. Darder's guidance and encouragement seeking to offer a critical counternarrative that could only be accomplished through a critical praxis of dialogue, grounded in a careful process of listening to Black women. My intention was, and is, to work and speak with, not for, the Black women participants of this study—who are professional comrades and personal friends—and do justice, to the best of my ability, with engaging their stories and critical narratives. In essence, my hope is that this dissertation constitutes a living praxis of what we must do in academic and co-curricular life in Higher Education, if we are to engage in emancipatory ways across our human differences.

What I learned, and what the rest of the world needs to do when it comes to Black

women, can be summed up in in the one-word title of a Beyoncé song: *Listen*!

**Appendix A**
*Background Information*

The following background questions will be asked of all participants in order to provide a consistent profile:

1. What pseudonym would you like to use?

2. What is your age (or age range)?

3. What is/was your major field(s) of study?

4. What is your professional and/or class status at the University?

5. What is/was your class status and graduation date(s)?

6. What professional or student organizations are you involved in and what leadership positions do you or have you held?

7. What is your ethnicity? What other identity markers are most salient to you and your life?

8. Can you tell me a little about yourself? – i.e., Where are you from? What are your general interests?

9. How did you end up working at or attending this university?

10. How did you develop an interest in social justice? Ethnic Studies? Cultural Centers? Activism?

The following questions were utilized as prompts during the critical narrative sessions, as needed:

**I. Experiences as a Black woman (faculty, staff, or student) on campus**

1. Where (and how) do you feel like you matter on campus? Where (and how) do you feel marginalized on campus?

2. In what ways do you see yourself on the inside and the outside (or borderlands) of campus life, academically, socially, professionally, personally?

3. Do you identify as/with feminism? Black Feminist Theory? Black Womanism? In what ways is Black womanist/womanism significant and salient to your leadership with and in your academic and campus communities?

4. How do you feel you are perceived on campus? (May continue this question by asking about how they feel they are perceived by various groups of people, by identity markers or professional status, on campus).

5. In what ways is your voice as a Black women faculty, staff, or student silenced on campus?

6. In what ways is your voice as Black women faculty, staff, or student elevated in your roles at borderland academics?

7. In what ways do you find your identities validated or celebrated on campus? What has the campus done to create a positive experience for you as a Black woman here?

8. What are some of the factors that have led you to stay at this campus as a professional or a student?

9. What are your support systems on campus?

10.      How do you feel your experiences as a Black woman in higher education in Southern California compare and contrast with your Black women peers in other parts of California? Other parts of the United States?

**II. Ethnic Studies and Cultural Centers**

1. Can you talk about your understanding of the historical background of Ethnic Studies and Cultural Centers (on this campus; in general) up to present day?

2. How discovered/got involved with Ethnic Studies on campus?

3. How do you feel when you are in the classroom of your Ethnic Studies classes? (For the faculty/staff: How does your feeling inside Ethnic Studies classroom or Cultural Center compare with how you feel in other settings on campus?)

4. How discovered/got involved with the campus Cultural Center?

5. How do you feel when you are in the campus Cultural Center? How does this feeling compare with how you feel in other settings on campus?

6. How would you describe the atmosphere of your Ethnic Studies classes? Cultural Center?

7. What role do you see Ethnic Studies playing on campus? What role do you see the Cultural Center playing on campus?

8. In your view, how do you see Ethnic Studies and Cultural Centers work on campus complementing, competing, enhancing, or conflicting with each other? How do you see these areas influencing your campus experience?

9. Is it necessary to have Ethnic Studies or Cultural Centers on campus?

### III. Activism*

1. Can you talk about your involvement with campus activism related to demands for racial/ethnic equity?

2. What did you experience as an activist, advocate, or supporter of activists in academic year 2015-2016?

3. In what ways did you find your voice as Black women validated or invalidated in your role as campus activist, advocate, or supporter of activists in 2015-2016?

4. Who supported you during the activism process? Who did not support you during the activism process?

5. What connections do you see in (your) on and off campus activism? How do the causes, your life missions connect?

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