

## An Independent Approach to Black Studies: The Institute of the Black World (IBW) and its Evaluation and Support of Black Studies

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**Abstract** The research on the history of Black Studies has not paid significant attention to the field's origins at Historically Black Colleges and Universities or to independent organizations. The Institute of the Black World (IBW) supported Black Studies programs by evaluating the theoretical and curricular foundations of the field. IBW was founded by faculty members at the Atlanta University Center and spent over a decade, as an independent activist think tank, evaluating Black studies in the desire to strengthen the academic basis of the field.

**Keywords** Black Studies · African American Studies · Institute of the Black World (IBW) · Black colleges · HBCUs · Vincent Harding · Atlanta University Center

As colleges big and small celebrate the 40th anniversary of their Black Studies programs, the traditional narrative of Black Studies beginning at San Francisco State University in 1968 and then sweeping across college campuses during the late 1960s and early 1970s only tells part of the story. Black Studies' conceptual origins emerged from the segregated and self-determined spaces that intellectual giants W.E. B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson were operating in during the early twentieth century. Specifically, two key conceptual models for Black Studies programs of the 1960s and 1970s were the Du Bois' Atlanta University Conferences and reports that began in 1895 and Woodson's Negro History Week started in 1926 under the auspices of the Association of the Study of Negro Life and History (now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History). Given that Black Studies' conceptual beginnings emerge from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and from the Woodson's independent Association, the scholarly inattention to these two locations, Black colleges and independent organizations, is a tremendous oversight. The Institute of the Black World (IBW) was one organization that represented the intersection of the development of Black

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Studies at HBCUs and the creation of independent organizations. IBW's history originates from a desire to answer Martin Luther King, Jr.'s question: Where do we go from here?; the need for new ideological and analytical approaches in the future of Black activism; and student and faculty demands for Black Studies at HBCUs. An examination of IBW's approach to Black Studies reveals an independent organization committed to strengthening the field's academic basis by consistently functioning as an outside evaluator of programs to identify and disseminate the best pedagogy for the field.

Founded in 1969 and located in Atlanta, IBW was formed when historian, theologian, and Spelman College faculty member, Vincent Harding, and literary critic and Morehouse college professor, Stephen Henderson, discussed the meaning of Black Studies and Black Power in wake of King's assassination. In conjunction with other faculty members at the Atlanta University Center (AUC)—Morehouse College, Spelman College, Morris Brown College, Clark College, Atlanta University, and the Interdenominational Theological Center—Harding and Henderson wanted to use their minds “in the service of the Black community” (IBW 1970b). They envisioned an independent approach to Black Studies that sought “the development of creative models for the kinds of Black Studies programs which will not be pallatives, but significant pathways to the redefinition of American education and of the Black Experience” (Harding and Harding 1997; IBW 1969a).

Under Harding and Henderson's leadership, IBW assembled, perhaps, the greatest collection of activist intellectuals in post-World War II America. At various points during the organization's history, IBW's roll of associates, contributors, supporters, and donors included famed dancer and choreographer Katherine Dunham, actor Ossie Davis, and novelist Chinua Achebe. IBW worked with prolific writers and teachers, such as novelist Margaret Walker Alexander and veteran sociologist St. Clair Drake. IBW valued the ideas from nationalists, such as John Henrik Clark and Julius Lester, and integrationists, such as Southern Christian Leadership Conference's C.T. Vivian. IBW worked with politicians, including Michigan Congressman John Conyers, and Atlanta's first Black mayor, Maynard Jackson. There was also a strong participation from Caribbean scholars, including activist and Marxist theorist C. L. R. James and historian Walter Rodney, cultural and literary critic Sylvia Wynter, and others. Many of these men and women supported IBW from afar as organizational consultants and donors and by attending key programs. Some scholars moved to, or regularly commuted to, Atlanta serving as the lifeblood of the organization, becoming what IBW titled senior associates. IBW's initial list of senior associates included historians Lerone Bennett, Jr., editor of *Ebony* magazine and author of *Before the Mayflower* ([Lerone 1963] 1993); historian Sterling Stuckey, author of *Slave Culture* (Stuckey 1987); economist Robert S. Browne, editor of *The Review of Black Political Economy* and head of the Black Economic Research Center; sociologist Joyce Ladner and author of *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman* ([Ladner 1971] 1995) and editor of *The Death of White Sociology* ([Ladner 1973] 1998); and political scientist William Strickland, former head of the Northern Student Movement. These activist intellectuals analyzed the educational, political, and activist landscape to develop analytical frames and activism strategies to further the Black Freedom Struggle in wake of King's assassination. This amazing collection of activist intellectuals transformed Harding and Henderson's ideas into a

vibrant activist think tank that produced research and analysis for activist communities, unlike traditional think tanks that produce research for politicians or for policy purposes.

This impressive roster of intellectual activists was a product of the vestiges of the civil rights and Black Power movements and the cauldron of student activism that occurred on HBCU campuses. Unfortunately, scholars of the history of Black Studies have not fully investigated these protest activities. The conventional narrative of Black Studies rightfully begins at San Francisco State University in 1968. Scholars such as Fabio Rojas (2007) have thoroughly examined the beginnings of Black Studies. In addition, scholars have thoroughly examined Black Studies at various predominately white campuses (Downs 1999; Exum 1985; Glasker 2002; McCormick 1990; Williamson 2004). Despite the tremendous scholarship on individual campuses, Black Studies at HBCUs have not received similar scholarly attention. Joy Ann Williamson (2008), for example, discusses the development of Black Studies at Black colleges in Mississippi as part of her larger study of the Black colleges in the state, and Noliwe Rooks (2006) and Fabio Rojas (2007) investigate the relatively few Ford Foundation grants awarded to HBCUs. However, for the most part the scholarship on Black Studies has marginalized the tremendous activism emanating from black college campuses.

Moreover, the limited scholarship on IBW has mostly focused on the organization's early years, including its Black Studies work (Grady-Willis and Winston 2006; Joseph 2003; Ward 2001; White 2008). This essay will connect IBW's early work on Black Studies with its later work on the Black Curriculum project to demonstrate the organization's longstanding support for strengthening the academic basis of Black Studies, while serving as an independent evaluator of programs and curriculum. IBW's work on Black Studies served as the organization's initial and last programs in its legacy as an activist think tank.

### **IBW and Student Protest at AUC**

On November 6, 1968, several Black students removed a White instructor, Justine Gianetti, from a Spelman College Speech Department class after she called a student a jackass. The students admonished the instructor, stating, "Your statement was indicative of your racist attitude and we do not intend for you [to] teach here anymore." After removing the instructor, a series of protests erupted across the six AUC institutions, with some students believing the instructor's ejection from class was "an important act of liberation." Building on the momentum of the protests, student organizers demanded a Black-oriented curriculum. HBCU students' conception of Black Studies, called a "Black University," suggested that the new function for the university was "to struggle for the liberation of oppressed people, specifically the liberation of African people everywhere." The removal of Ms. Gianetti marked the beginning of student activism for Black Studies at the Atlanta University Center, and the protest was a clarion call for the newly formed IBW (Terrell and Robert 1969).

In the months before Ms. Gianetti's ejection from her class, Harding, Henderson, and other AUC faculty members initiated plans for a Black Studies program on the

AUC campuses. According to the *Self-study* of Spelman Department of History and Sociology (1968), the school, despite a decade of civil rights activism, had just one course devoted to the Black experience in 1965. The inattention to the Black experience in the curriculum concerned students and faculty members. Harding, Henderson, and others believed that AUC was an ideal location for developing Black Studies because it was located in a large urban area with a significant African American population and had a diverse Black faculty, which not only included Harding and Henderson, but also sociologist Gerald McWorter, political scientist Mack H. Jones, historian Melvin Drimmer, cultural critic Richard Long, and others (Henderson 1968). As a result of student and faculty demands, the *Self-Study* noted that the AUC had expanded their course offerings to over 30 classes by 1968. Still, there was no Black Studies program.

As Harding and other faculty members attempted to build Black Studies at AUC, they simultaneously started an independent organization devoted to creating a Black Studies curriculum for a future program at the AUC and to evaluating Black Studies programs and curricula nationally. Months before protest began against Gianetti, Harding, Henderson, McWorter, A.B. Spellman, and Councill Taylor proposed the creation of The W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Advanced Afro-American Studies. The proposal recognized that the AUC had responded to student, faculty, administration, and community pressure by increasing course offerings. However, the authors did not believe that this was enough, and they also asserted that a core of teachers at every level needed to be established. They suggested that the AUC was an excellent location “to institutionalize the present surge of interest in the Black world” (Harding et al. 1968).

The Du Bois Institute was the precursor to IBW and was a multipurpose organization. First, Harding and colleagues wanted to produce research similar to the Atlanta University publications on Blacks led by Du Bois from 1897 to 1910 (Wilson 2006). Next, the Institute planned to offer additional courses to establish a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in Black Studies at the AUC. The academic basis of the degree program would be an enhanced research program that included community members, faculty, international scholars, and doctoral candidates as research fellows. Third, they planned for the Du Bois Institute to be community-oriented by providing the AUC and the Atlanta area with seminars, colloquia, and lectures in Black Studies. Finally, they sought financial, ideological, and political independence from the potential strictures of the AUC by aligning the Du Bois Institute with the emergent Martin Luther King Center. Overall, the proposed connection between the Du Bois Institute and AUC could possibly allow the Historically Black Colleges to “leap into an internationally celebrated status of pre-eminence and distinction, for having responded creatively and vigorously to the greatest domestic crisis of our nation in recent history” (Harding et al. 1968).

In order to demonstrate the importance of the Du Bois Institute to AUC, Harding, Henderson, and others added new courses with high profile faculty who were affiliated with the Institute. First, the Institute sought “the most creative scholars, writers, and artists” in the fields of Black Studies. It was hoped that these scholars, in conjunction with the Institute, might “uncover and review neglected or unknown data on the Afro-American experience, create through their research, writing and performances new knowledge and works, and disseminate these materials to the

Atlanta University Center Institutions, to the adjacent communities and other educational institutions” (Harding et al. 1968). The Institute gave the AUC colleges a preview of the curricular possibilities when it detailed the new seminars in Black Studies that would be offered the following year. For the fall 1969 semester, the Institute’s associates offered a variety of Black Studies courses: Lerone Bennett Jr.’s “Black Reconstruction in America”; educational specialist Chester Davis’s “Building Black Curriculum in Public Schools”; Stephen Henderson’s “Blues, Soul and Black Identity”; Joyce Ladner’s “The Socialization of the Black Child”; and William Strickland’s “Racism and American Social Analysis” (IBW 1969d). Harding and Henderson saw the proposed Du Bois Institute as becoming the preeminent independent space for Black Studies. This broader goal was reflected in the name change to the Institute of the Black World in 1969.

The name change reflected IBW’s pragmatic nationalist analytical framework. Under Harding and Henderson’s leadership, IBW’s associates generated an operational unity inside the organization and with other organizations through pragmatic nationalism, the belief that carefully constructed social, political, and economic goals designed to improve Black communities were more important than ideological pronouncements, conformity, and rigidity (Glaude, Jr. 2007; Shelby 2005). IBW’s pragmatic nationalism differed from the cultural nationalism promoted by Maulana Karenga, Amiri Baraka, and others. Black cultural nationalism suggests that the Black diaspora has a “distinct aesthetic, sense of values, and communal ethos emerging from either, or both their contemporary folkways and continental African heritage” (Brown 2003: 6). In addition, IBW’s pragmatism was less ideologically rigid than the Black Panther Party and others’ revolutionary nationalism that engaged Marxism (Smethurst 2005). Because of the diversity of IBW’s associates, which included, for example, cultural nationalists (Henderson), religious nationalists (Harding), political nationalists (Strickland), and Marxists (Rodney), the organization relied less on a common cultural heritage or a strict engagement with Marxism and focused more on immediate pragmatic goals aimed at improving Black political, economic, and social realities.

IBW’s diverse roster of associates sought a higher synthesis in their analyses by relying on the insights of Black cultural nationalism, political nationalism, integrationism, and Marxism. Despite its Hegelian origins, IBW’s creation of synthetic analyses stemmed from Martin Luther King’s insights in his last book, *Where Do We Go From Here?: Chaos or Community* (King 1968). King tried to reconcile the growing Black Power movement with the traditional civil rights movement. He wrote, “Our course of action must lie neither in passively relying on persuasion nor actively succumbing to violent rebellion, but in a higher synthesis that reconciles the truths of these two opposites while avoiding the inadequacies and ineffectiveness of both” (p. 137, emphasis mine). To develop a synthetic Black analysis that resulted from a variety of perspectives, IBW applied an operational methodology that it called “collective scholarship.” IBW’s associates used the varying ideas in a dialectical manner to reach a consensus, which became its analytical perspective on a particular subject. This dialectical process avoided the ideological trap of authenticity, whether nationalist, Marxist, or integrationist, and focused on generating political unity on sharply defined political issues. For IBW, analytical and strategic unity trumped ideology. Considering the divergent realities

facing Black American in wake of the successes of the civil rights movement in the form of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, as well as the sadness and distrust generated by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., IBW's pragmatism provided critical intellectual support for various movement activities that many deemed essential for the continuation of the Black Freedom Struggle in the 1970s. More specifically, IBW's pragmatic nationalism signaled a conscientious attempt to bridge the growing split between the mainstream Civil Rights Movement, in this case, represented by the Martin Luther King Center and the growing Black Power movement, exemplified by the initial thrust for Black Studies. IBW tried to find points of reconciliation between the increasingly antagonistic segments of the Black Freedom Struggle, the longer protest movement for racial and economic equality. Despite the desire for cooperation, reconciliation in Atlanta proved difficult, as a student protest strained the tenuous relationship between IBW, AUC, and the King Center.

AUC student and faculty activism made IBW's trilateral organizational structure unsustainable. Although initial protest surrounding Ms. Gianetti's outburst ended at the conclusion of the fall semester, and AUC presidents changed some of the social codes and promised plans for Black Studies, the following semester students continued their protests by asking for structural changes to the institutions. In April 1969, over a dozen students and two faculty members took over a Morehouse Board of Trustees meeting, demanding that AUC become a Black University. This demand was based on the ideas promulgated by Harding, Henderson, and others in leading magazines and journals such as *Negro Digest*. Scholars argued that HBCUs needed to reform their structures to become relevant to Black communities, promote a Black curriculum, and reduce or eliminate White financial controls of HBCUs (Hamilton 1967; Harding 1968; Henderson 1968; McWorter 1968; Harding 1970; Drake 1971). The AUC protesters reflected these themes with their demands that: (1) the Board had to accept that the name of the AUC be changed to Martin Luther King University; (2) Black trustees would manage the AUC; and (3) all six institutions needed to be merged into a single university. After holding the trustees, which included former Morehouse president Benjamin Mays and Martin Luther King, Sr. for over 30 h, the Morehouse Board agreed to add more Black trustees, make plans to merge the AUC colleges, and reiterated its desire to create a Black Studies program (Mays 1971: chap. 22).

IBW staff members Gerald McWorter (now Abdul Alkalimat) and A.B. Spellman were the faculty members that led the Morehouse Harkness Hall protest thereby implicating IBW. The King Center was upset because two members of its Board of Directors, Mays and King, Sr., were detained in the protest. In addition, AUC administrators were upset that faculty members had encouraged students and had led a coercive and potentially violent protest that disrupted the schools. The AUC presidents believed that Harding was the "mastermind" behind the protest, although he had not been on campus the day of the takeover. In a move to alleviate the pressure on the plans for the Du Bois Institute, Harding reluctantly agreed with the King Center Board's decision to force McWorter and Spellman to resign from the Du Bois Institute planning committee. By the summer of 1969, Harding and his associates reconsidered future plans working with the AUC fully accepting the political, financial, and ideological limitations of HBCUs. In the end, IBW agreed to teach the seminar courses scheduled for the fall 1969 term. By eliminating the

possibility of a formal connection with the AUC, Harding made the IBW an exclusive component of the King Center (Harding 1973; Watkins 2001).

Although Harding, Henderson, and others proposed an early plan for Black Studies at AUC, their involvement in establishing Black Studies at Atlanta University was minimal. The IBW backpedaled from its formal connection to the AUC because the events surrounding the Gianetti and Harkness Hall protests highlighted the lack of autonomy the Institute would have in its relationship with the universities, while AUC administrators were disinclined to make IBW a partner in planning for a Black Studies program. AUC's reluctance was rewarded by a \$315,000 Ford Foundation grant, the most given to any HBCU, to start a graduate program in Black Studies at Atlanta University under the leadership of literary scholar Richard Long (Rojas 2007: 138). Despite some IBW associates' concerns over the King Center's ideological perspective, Harding believed that the Center provided the type of autonomy the Institute needed to flourish. Much of Harding's faith in the King Center was based on his longstanding friendship with the King family (Harding and Harding 1997). Now independent from the AUC, IBW turned its attention to evaluating the Black Studies movement.

### Evaluating Black Studies

IBW's soured relations with AUC over the student protests may have ended IBW's opportunity to build a Black Studies program at the prestigious Atlanta HBCUs, but it did not alter the organization's commitment to Black Studies. IBW's core leadership Harding, Henderson, and now William Strickland believed that the Institute could help emerge Black Studies programs. The shift from building a program to collecting data and analyzing academic programs marks an important, but subtle change in IBW's history that signaled the beginning of IBW as an activist think tank. Tradition think tanks provide analysis primarily for politicians or political organizations (Abelson 2002; Ricci 1993; Smith 1991). As an activist think tank, IBW provided research and analysis for Black activist organizations. This position differentiated IBW, for example, from the Joint Center for Political Studies, another Black think tank founded by famed psychologist Kenneth B. Clark in 1970, whose research was primarily aimed at the growing number of Black elected officials (Smith 1996). According to IBW, it wanted to become "an international center for Black Studies." Consequently, IBW associates evaluated Black Studies programs to understand the "context" in which these programs were developing. To accomplish this task, they examined Black Studies programs' "relationship to the surrounding Black community, their sense of self-definition and direction, and the political struggles—of every kind—surrounding them" (Harding 1973).

IBW approached the academic field with five assumptions. First, Black Studies was not fully established, thus, there was no clear understanding of the "ways in which a profound mining of the black experience challenges and transforms the basic educational structure of the nation." Second, the process of defining Black Studies was "logically . . . a task and a challenge for black people in America and elsewhere." Next, IBW and the King Center wanted to play an important role in

defining Black Studies and creating models that linked the variety of perspectives on the academic field. Fourth, IBW believed that Black Studies should be interdisciplinary, meaning it wanted to explore how programs integrated multiple disciplinary perspectives. Finally, the associates believed Black Studies would take years, not months to build. They wanted to expose makeshift programs, while supporting strong, well-conceived programs. With these explicit goals, the senior associates, led by Harding, sought to build an organization that systematically lent critical support to Black Studies and move beyond the haphazard development of the academic field. By analyzing Black Studies programs, IBW associates recognized they could be criticized for their efforts. Nonetheless, IBW believed a pragmatic approach derived from empirical analysis, not ideology, would accommodate differing approaches to the field of Black Studies (Harding 1973; IBW 1969a).

IBW evaluated Black Studies programs and departments by surveying hundreds of them, asking questions about curriculum, philosophy, faculty statistics, and pedagogy. As IBW defined them, these research questions explored Black Studies on the White Campus, Black Studies on the “Negro” Campus, Black Curriculum Programs in Public and Independent Elementary and Secondary Schools, and Critiques of Black Studies. At the National Association of Afro-American Education conference in Atlanta later that summer, IBW introduced some of its preliminary results. The Institute concluded that many of the programs on White campuses were “unfocused in terms of content, structure, and ideology” and neglected areas such as Black Philosophy, the Caribbean, and Latin America. The data on programs on Black campuses were imprecise. However, Black Studies on both White and Black campuses had little “effect on the total life of the campus.” The data collected on independent public primary and secondary schools were, at the time, too incomplete to generalize (IBW 1970a).

IBW’s desire to evaluate programs drew criticisms in some circles. Former colleague McWorter, who had now changed his name to Abdul Alkailmat, led a group that criticized IBW’s research and its funding sources at the summer conference, describing IBW’s plans for Black Studies as neo-colonialism in an essay titled “Kweli” or *Truth* (1970). In a *Newsweek* article titled “Black (Studies) Vatican,” an anonymous critic described Harding as trying to become “the Pope” of Black Studies (1969). These criticisms notwithstanding, Harding and colleagues believed that it was paramount to continue with its evaluation of programs.

In November 1969, the IBW hosted “The Black Studies Directors Seminar.” At the seminar, more than 35 directors of Black Studies programs discussed and dissected the research collected during the summer. The attending scholars “attempted to identify that very small segment [of Black Studies programs] which seemed to hold some clear promise as possible models on which the thousands of Black students in northern schools could build in their movements toward an education appropriate to our struggle” (Harding 1973). IBW associates believed the seminar would begin to shape the field of Black Studies. The intellectuals at IBW agreed that an ostensibly color-blind universal curriculum was discriminatory toward the contributions of Blacks. According to historian and IBW senior association Sterling Stuckey, “our role . . . is to summon forth and cast out manifold white mythologies, to scatter the building blocks of the white American fantasy.” The scholars concluded that they needed a theoretical perspective to analyze and



understand the calls for Black Studies and Black Power. During the sessions, scholars emphasized intellectual opposition to the dominant racial theories, the need for programs to be relevant to Black communities, and the importance of structural and financial autonomy (IBW 1969b; Poinsett 1970).

The panel discussions helped the scholars in charge of Black Studies programs understand the challenges ahead. IBW senior associate and *Ebony* magazine editor, Lerone Bennett, moderated the first panel that included Armstead Robinson, the head of the Black Student Alliance at Yale and sociologist Basil Matthews of Talladega College. Robinson argued that Black Studies did not exist and that some Black students and faculty members were exploiting the emerging field for personal gain. He continued, “Students wanted A’s without studying and faculty wanted paychecks without presenting “innovative approaches to the study of the Black experience.” He continued that the only chance for Black Studies’ survival was committed directors. Matthews promoted diasporic study in order to “gain some insights into African culture” and what happened after slavery. Subsequent panels explored the problems that directors of Black Studies programs faced, including issues of staffing, curriculum, funding, and autonomy. The discussion revealed an unexpected problem in Black Studies: Black students did not take the courses seriously. “Directors, almost universally, reported that students were refusing to study using the rationale of ‘that’s the white man’s thing.’” Black students’ demands for Black Studies and subsequent behaviors, according to the directors, were a contradiction that many believed “could stifle and kill Black Studies and seriously impede the struggle for Black liberation.” At the conclusion of the symposium, IBW deemed the conference “fruitful” and asserted that “every participant left stronger” (IBW 1969c).

IBW’s Black Studies Directors Conference can be seen as the culmination of nearly 2 years of the examination of and participation in the Black Studies movement. IBW associates used the conference not to dictate how Black Studies programs should be administered, but rather to develop strategies on curriculum, faculty, and administration. IBW’s conference marked the shift in the organization from being a site for Black Studies to becoming an activist think tank. This change is significant because IBW’s trajectory moved away from Black Studies and education to analyze broader problems facing Black communities. Finally, IBW facilitated the stabilization of Black Studies program.

### **IBW’s Separation from the King Center**

Although plans for IBW had been in the works since 1968, The Black Studies Directors Seminar was the springboard for IBW’s official opening in January 1970. The program, “A Celebration of Blackness,” announced the Institute of the Black World to the world with flair. The 5-h event took attendees on an epic trek through Black History. Katherine Dunham’s dance troupe began the historically based performance with African dance, Margaret Walker Alexander recited poetry from the Harlem Renaissance, and Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti) ended the program with his Black Power poetry. Approximately 500 people attended the opening and toured the IBW offices, which were located in W.E.B. Du Bois’ old home at the edge of the AUC campuses. Beginning with its opening, IBW embarked on a broad program,

one that ended with Harding and other associates asserting that IBW was an activist think tank. In IBW's "Statement of Purpose and Program," associates declared, "the gifts of their minds are meant to be fully used in the service of the black community." Their purpose was to produce "scholarship in the context of struggle." IBW had ten areas of focus. The associates planned to define and refine Black Studies, create a Consortium for Black Education, conduct academic research, support Black artists, develop new teaching materials, craft a Black policy studies center, connect with intellectuals and scholars across the Black diaspora, prepare a "new cadre" of intellectuals "fully committed to the struggles of the black world," sponsor summer seminars and workshops, and develop a publishing program (IBW 1970c). After the Black Studies Directors Conference, IBW leadership de-emphasized Black Studies to implement other parts of its program including extensive publishing of associates' research and starting a policy center during its first year of existence. By embracing its expanded program, IBW set out to accomplish its diverse goals in areas of publishing its research, giving lectures, and holding meetings with Black intellectuals who held "varieties of opinions" (IBW 1970c).

IBW's connections to the King Center provided the structural and financial autonomy IBW associates sought and needed to accomplish an expanding agenda. However, as IBW associates worked on their programs, the public sympathy for King failed to translate into financial donations. With the King Center's funding threatened, IBW's structural autonomy as a component of the Center evaporated. The relationship between the Center and IBW deteriorated, leading to a contentious separation that strained longstanding friendships between Harding and the King family. The separation forced IBW to rethink its financial and organizational structure because it could no longer rely on an affiliation with the King Center to generate operating funds.

As funding problems became increasingly acute, the King Center insisted on narrow racial liberalism from all of its components, which reflected its larger goal of becoming the official interpreter of King's life and legacy. IBW's work in Black Studies and its larger operational plans sparked concern inside the King Center. Information about this growing internal intrigue between the King Center and the IBW leaked to the FBI, which had maintained surveillance on Coretta Scott King, Stanley Levinson, and eventually, IBW. According to a King Center informant to the FBI, IBW's "Statement of Purpose" indicated the organization was to be a "spawning place for activists" and the Institute's desires to rewrite Black history put it in "compliance with the thinking of persons believing in the most radical concepts of black supremacy." The informant kept the FBI abreast of the internal dealings, telling agents that Harding temporarily convinced the Board that the Institute of the Black World was keeping with the philosophy of King (FBI 1970).

While the King Center insisted on conformity, IBW implemented a pragmatic nationalism that listened to a variety of ideological and analytical perspective with the goal of combining the best and most useful ideas in addressing key issues facing Black communities in the post-civil rights era. In April 1970, the IBW invited Stokely Carmichael to speak in Atlanta. Carmichael's speech was one of his first after returning from a 14-month hiatus in Africa during which he reformulated his evolving analytical and strategic perspective. By all accounts and by his standards,

Carmichael's speech was fairly tame. He hinted at the behind-the-scenes tension between the King Center and IBW and called for unity. He said, "Dr. King never attacked any black man and that's why I had a great deal of respect and admiration for him—because he cared about his people and he always sought to unify us rather than to divide us" (Carmichael 1971). Despite Carmichael's conciliatory efforts, the King Center remained suspect of Harding and the IBW. The King Center Board of Directors were appalled that Harding and the IBW would invite Carmichael, a Black Power activist that many inside and outside the Center thought was the complete antithesis of King and his legacy of nonviolence (FBI 1970).

In the summer 1970, the King Center moved to limit IBW's autonomy and independence, believing the organization's nationalism, no matter how pragmatic, embarrassed the Center, tarnished King's integrationist legacy, and weakened the Center's fund raising abilities. A King Center committee evaluated IBW and concluded that the organization did not focus enough attention on the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., was not committed to nonviolence and believed it was improper for IBW to exclude White scholars. The evaluation left Harding little choice but to separate from the King Center on September 1, 1970. Officially separated first from the AUC and now from the King Center, IBW continued an ambitious program as an activist think tank, by developing a pragmatic nationalist analytical perspective on racial issues through intense evaluation of the leading Black scholarship past and present.

### Summer Research Symposium—1971

In early 1971, on the heels of its separation from the King Center, IBW associates clarified their role in the Black Freedom Movement. "We are intellectuals and we do intellectual work. That is neither a cause for shame or celebration. We have a role to play in the struggle. Our duty is to ascertain that role then play it" (Strickland 1970). This desire to define or redefine the role of intellectual work embodied the contradiction that the successes of the 1960s also led to ideological confusion of the 1970s. The Black Power movement inspired a variety of ideological perspectives and agendas. The wide-ranging discourses of Black Power ranging from cultural nationalism, political nationalism, Marxism, to Black capitalism found some agreement in challenging the mainstream liberal civil rights framework; but besides this oppositional stance, there was considerable confusion and contradiction (Allen 1969; Van Deburg 1992; Bush 1999; Joseph 2006; Fergus 2009). Ideological, political, and analytical confusion on the direction of the Black Freedom Struggle provided IBW with a tremendous opportunity to develop synthetic analytical frames that would create issue-based unity. Associates believed Black intellectuals had an essential responsibility to create a pragmatic unity centered on practical solutions to difficult problems that faced Black communities in post-segregation America. The Institute associates believed that intellectual work could develop such solutions.

IBW associates developed a synthetic analytical frame, which they called a "Black Perspective." This framework was predicated on the complex realities, past and present, of Black life. IBW's approach did not reflect racial essentialism or an assumption of homogenous Blackness, but it appreciated that in the post-civil rights

era African Americans still had to protest the continued manifestation of anti-Black racism in American institutions. Moving beyond the singular nature of institutionalized racism, IBW assessed structural racism (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967). Structural racism provided broader analysis to the issue by interpreting racism as a part of the social system and understanding racism for its effects rather than its content, appreciating both overt and covert forms of racism, and recognizing racism as a historical phenomenon (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Therefore, IBW's Black perspective placed structural analysis before ideology.

IBW associates planned to analyze critically from a Black perspective any proposed alternative system. IBW used its network of associates during the Summer Research Symposium in 1971 (SRS '71) to confirm that it was moving in the correct direction. In the summer, IBW invited Marxist and Caribbean theorist C.L.R. James, Caribbean literary scholar Edward Kamau Braithwaite, sociologist St. Clair Drake, and Caribbean economist George Beckford to Atlanta for SRS '71, which bridged IBW's earlier work on Black Studies with its future plans as a fully developed activist think tank. The symposium's theme was "The World of Black Scholarship—Past, Present and Future." The invited scholars addressed several topics during their seminars and public lectures, including critical examinations of seminal Black scholarship, projections of future research tasks, and the role of Black scholars. IBW identified a Black analytical perspective as one that would challenge the dominant intellectual and political hegemony by making structural racism the target of IBW's analysis. This view saw scholarly representations of social problems as a key to transforming them. Strickland described IBW's purpose and plan for SRS '71:

Our task then, goes beyond blackness, it is not only the resurrection of black history but the reinterpretation of the West. But this is simply not an arbitrary academic task . . . . In contradistinction then to the white approach and the black fixated approach we must clarify one essential dynamic which characterizes our struggle. We must apprehend and counterpose to the individualism and materialism the movement of men and social forces, the contradictions of oppressor AND [sic] oppressed, the politics of class and mass movement, the relation between black movement and white resistance. This is the historical necessity to define the black liberation struggle and the stage in which it finds itself. It is also a precondition to glimpsing the future that lies ahead (Strickland 1971).

For IBW, the symposium continued its work in Black Studies by identifying key scholarship that should serve as the basis for the emerging field, and the meeting further developed IBW's organizational philosophy of collective scholarship and dialectical analysis that it would use as an activist think tank.

The 6-week symposium consisted of seminars, research projects, and public lectures. There were four interrelated symposium goals: to introduce participants to the seminal works of Black scholarship, to introduce participants to major Black scholars, to engage the participants in serious discussions of the "past, present, and future condition of Black people (intellectuals, teachers, and educators) in the process of charting a progressive Black future based on our reassessment of our past and present condition"; and to develop a theory and methodology of Black social analysis (IBW 1971). The process of collectively developing methodologies and

social analysis exemplified the goals of the IBW. The conference served as “an integral part of the development of IBW” and was a “part of the clarifying process by which we [IBW] grasp the essential meaning of our history and flesh out the concept of ‘education for liberation’” (Strickland 1971).

During the SRS ‘71, James declared the Black scholar’s role is “to learn and understand and let people know what is happening.” He added that the Black scholar’s function was “to illustrate, understand it [the Black Freedom Struggle] and he must be able to explain it in historical and social terms, otherwise the education that he has and the money he may be getting are of no use to the Black people as a whole. He has a function to perform. He does not have to teach people to go and fight as they fought in Watts . . . but you [have to] have mass support for any work . . . that you may do.” James also stressed the need to write histories that represented a strong viewpoint, “The writers, particularly, in England,” he noted, “usually tried to be . . . well balanced, but you can’t write a well-balanced history of revolution because a revolution is something that creates disorder and unbalances everything. And if you are going to write on both sides, you write nothing!” Using his classic *Black Jacobins* ([1938] 1962) and W.E.B. Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction* ([1935] 1995) as models of revolutionary scholarship, James concluded that the works, “tried to show that black people were able to make historical progress, they were able to show how a revolution was made, they were able to produce the men who could lead a revolution and write new pages in the book of history” (James 2000; Hill and Robert 2000).

The other invited scholars made similar insights. St. Clair Drake outlined several fundamental roles for Black intellectuals, such as raising Black consciousness, supplying information for the movement, and creating special institutions, such as IBW (Drake 1971). West Indian economist Beckford emphasized linking intellectual production with the masses and explored the economic, social, and political causes of poverty in the Caribbean. Braithwaite discussed his thesis that the basis of West Indian folk society was African in origin and explored its implications for African Americans. Harding led an analysis of Bennett, Jr.’s *Confrontation: Black and White* (Bennett, Jr. 1965) and *Black Power, USA: The Human Side of Reconstruction, 1867–1877* (Bennett, Jr. 1967). He also delivered lectures on “the relationship of black religion to black resistance movements.” Strickland analyzed American politics through the framework developed by James Boggs’ *Racism and Class Struggle: Further Pages of a Black Worker’s Notebook* (1970). Finally, recently added senior associate and Jamaican Robert Hill historically analyzed Pan-Africanism through the lens of Garveyism (IBW 1971). The scholars emphasized the need to undermine prevailing representations of Blacks that created authoritative paradigms. These paradigms shaped the social and political actions and structures toward African Americans. As James said later, “all political power presents itself to the world within a certain framework of ideas. It is fatal to ignore this in any estimate of social forces in political action” (James 1974: 34).

The presence of James, Drake, and others crystallized IBW’s Black perspective and provided a strong interdisciplinary basis for emerging Black Studies programs because their research identified hegemonic structures. While the dominant scholarship privileged Whites, the middle-class, and men, the Black perspective addressed racial and class bias in American structures. Despite these insights, associates’ gender analyses were non-existent at this point, continuing a weakness

found often in Black (and White) intellectual history (Hull et al. 1982). This glaring limitation notwithstanding, IBW's analysis moved beyond liberals' representations of racial progress and embodied the potential of Black Studies. The SRS '71 was a dialectical process that provided the IBW with concrete examples of the type of scholarship that should be produced by scholars of Black Studies.

In 1974, IBW published a collection of essays, *Education and Black Struggle*, based on lectures from the 1971 Summer Research Symposium (IBW 1974). In the lead essay, "The Vocation of the Black Scholar and the Struggles of the Black Community," Harding challenged intellectuals to reassess their purpose and questioned whether intellectuals' roles were "out-of-style." He argued, implicitly addressing Black Studies scholars, "[T]he walls of the academy are, on the whole merely more tastefully, delicately wrought extensions of the walls of the government, industry, and the military . . . It is not surprising that they too should now encompass . . . increasingly frightened men and women." He added that too many Black Studies scholars had forgotten the purpose of their profession. In the context of the still-deprived Black communities of the seventies, Harding's defined the intellectual's role as needing "to speak truth." Harding's version of truth telling required studying Black experiences, defining a "hard black analysis," identifying the systems and individuals (Black and White) that opposed Black liberation, and acting upon these analyses. As he defined it, "becoming personally involved in the concrete, active struggle for liberation, entering deeply into its life, and opening our own lives to its risks, is, of course, the most unrespectable aspect of the vocation of the black scholar." Harding's clarion call to Black intellectuals also should be seen as a call-to-arms for Black Studies (Harding 1974).

### **IBW's Black Studies Curriculum Project**

Between 1971 and 1980, IBW faced a series of challenges that threatened the organizations very existence. After separating from the King Center, IBW was plagued by financial instability. Although associates continued to publish under the banner of IBW and conduct programs such as developing a Black political agenda, senior associates took jobs at various universities to alleviate the financial burden of their salaries. Harding taught at several universities including the University of Pennsylvania, Henderson moved to Washington, DC to teach at Howard University, and Strickland accepted a position at the University of Massachusetts. This left the day-to-day operations under control of the staff, led by Howard Dodson. Besides financial struggles, IBW incurred a series of suspicious burglaries in 1975. The thefts of office equipment, IBW publications, and interviews with leading Black intellectuals, including Walter Rodney, came on the heels of a series of racial attacks against IBW staff members (Dodson 1990). Unknown conservative forces, possibly the FBI, left multiple threatening letters for staff member Don Edwards because of his affiliation with the Venceremos Brigade and IBW. IBW received letters addressed to "Institute of Niggers," and the offices were burglarized ("Racists Attack Institute of Black World: B.P.P. Demands Investigation and Protection," 1975)). The events took a toll on the financial strapped organization, making it what Harding called a "resource center" rather than the vibrant intellectual environment of

the late 1960s and early 1970s. By 1980, IBW turned its attention again to Black Studies (Abelove et al. 1984).

The Black Studies Curriculum Project was IBW's last major program and was an attempt to restore the field's strong analytical basis, which was sorely needed in the growing conservatism of the late 1970s and early 1980s. IBW initiated the program as a response to Vincent Harding's stinging criticism of the field. Harding, in an essay that reviewed the highs and lows of Black activism in the 1970s, noted that Black Studies had been "absorbed into the structures, ethos, and aspirations of the American university system." He charged that the "Black Studies movement failed to carry to their logical, radical ends many of the challenges to the assumptions, ideology and structures of American higher education, failed to continue to press the critical issue of the relationship between Black people inside the university and those who will never make it." Black studies failed, according to Harding, "because many Black persons wanted nothing more than to be absorbed into tenure tracks, systems of status and communities of academic unreality" (Harding 1979).

Instead of just criticizing Black Studies, Harding and the IBW again evaluated Black Studies' curricula in attempt to identify the best approaches. IBW asked the more than 250 programs to contribute course outlines, theoretical summaries, and teaching methods. IBW planned three conferences between 1981 and 1982 to identify model courses in Black History, Black Political Economy, Black Sociology, and Black Culture. IBW had six goals for the Curriculum Project. (1) to provide with Black Studies faculties with new materials and approaches, (2) to encourage the exchange of materials, ideas, and methodologies in the discipline, (3) to supply faculty members with effective course material, (4) to promote novel approaches to teaching Black Studies, (5) to encourage "a higher level of critical self evaluation in the field"; and (6) to refine issues and problems in the field of Black Studies. To achieve these goals, IBW established a review committee in the selected fields that would evaluate the submitted materials (IBW 1981a).

In some ways, the 1980s conferences were similar to the 1969 Black Studies Directors Conference, IBW's first program. In both cases, IBW examined syllabi and curricular concerns. However, the growth of Black Studies programs and departments in the period between the two conferences meant more attendees at the latter conferences. Curriculum reviewers noted conceptual flaws continued to plague Black Studies. For example, historian Manning Marable reviewed Black History syllabi and Strickland reviewed curricula on the political economy. Marable concluded that the 55 course syllabi revealed "an appalling inability to think about education as a force in the liberation of Black people" (Marable 1981). Strickland noted that despite the fact that less than 25% of the submitted syllabi focused on the political economy, most of the syllabi were "groping after a more adequate interpretation of the Black experience" (Strickland 1981). The explicit political economy courses differed only because they had a more conscious analytical framework than the other courses. IBW's curricular analysis demonstrated that even after a decade of examining Black thought, associates still tried to advance the Black analytical framework for Black Studies and ultimately for Black communities (IBW 1981a, b).

Gender analysis was another scholarly area that had not been given enough attention by IBW or the field of Black Studies. During the Black Studies Curriculum Project conferences, Black women scholars “forcibly injected gender issues” into the discussions of Black Studies. Female scholars demanded that Black Studies take Black Women’s Studies seriously. They noted that many model syllabi made Black women’s cultural, intellectual, and scholarly contributions invisible (Hall 1999). The fact that female scholars had to stage a protest to have their voices heard further symbolized an analytical weakness within IBW, Black Studies, and the Black Freedom Struggle, generally. The movement identified how race, and at times, class operated in the American social structure, but Black activists often willingly accepted cultural norms in terms of gender and sexuality. When female scholars demanded that Black Women’s experiences and perspectives be considered and incorporated into the Black Studies curriculum, this defining moment led to the creation of Black Women’s Studies. In fact, no field in Black Studies has grown as quickly as the study of Black women.

The Black Studies Curriculum Development Project was IBW’s final attempt at pragmatism. The Curriculum project tried to reconcile the political and ideological divisions emanating from Black Studies programs. In addition, the increasing programmatic pressures of declining enrollments, as Black Studies in the 1980s had lost some of the urgency of its origins. Some Black students, mired in an economic recession, turned toward academic degrees that would secure middle-class status, not continue the Black Freedom Struggle. Despite IBW’s weakened status, the program was a success, as it again assembled a national collection of Black Studies scholars to debate the purpose and future direction of Black Studies.

## Conclusion

For more than a decade, IBW was the premier Black activist think tank. Under the leadership of Vincent Harding, Stephen Henderson, William Strickland, and later Howard Dodson, IBW employed a pragmatic nationalism that identified specific social, political, and economic issues facing Black communities, generating a synthetic analytical framework designed to incorporate the best ideas and concepts from various ideologies. One topic that IBW’s leadership and associates focused on for more than a decade was Black Studies. IBW’s founding emerged from demands for Black Studies at the AUC. The organizations’ founders were leading commentators on the growing Black Studies movement. More important, IBW took a practical approach to the field, through its 1969 Black Studies Directors Conference and its 1981–1982 Black Studies Curriculum Development Project. In total, IBW’s legacy is tied to the field of Black Studies, as the organization under Harding’s leadership strove to provide a strong conceptual and academic basis for the field. As Harding (1974) described, the vocation of the Black scholar is to “build black institutions which maintain and press forward truth.” As Black Studies departments celebrate their respective anniversaries, it is useful to remember IBW’s independent approach to Black Studies, which relied on pragmatic nationalism and a diverse roster of intellectuals



bound by the dialectical process of collective scholarship to produce at various times synthetic social, political, economic, cultural, and scholarly analyses.

**Archival Sources** Archives and Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center. Hoyt Fuller Papers.

Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. New York Public Library. The Institute of the Black World Papers. The IBW Papers are not fully processed. Notes will refer to series inside the IBW Papers.

Special Collections and Archives, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. Vincent Harding Papers.

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