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Stealing away: a study of the Black Studies Movement and its afterlife at Vassar College

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STEALING AWAY
A Study of the Black Studies Movement and its
Afterlife at Vassar College



A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Arts in
Africana Studies and Educational Studies

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to trace the ways in which the afterlife of slavery and its projects of inequality and violence perpetually staged challenges which Black intellectuals especially students continually must face. The goal is to show how these people exercised autonomy against the shortcomings of mass civic reordering's like the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil Rights Movement as they tirelessly pursued something better and *otherwise*. These moments symbolize the United States' belabored promises for racial progress against its benighted beginnings as a nation built on unfree labor. My analysis attends primarily to how Black students at Vassar participated in the Black Studies Movement in the late 60's and early 70's. All of which represented the promises as well as the the challenges of *stealing away*. This work wrestles with the success and failures of participating in knowledge production while still captured by the political limits of recognized institutions.

key words: Undercommons, Black Studies, student protest , inclusion, racial formation, Vassar

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Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 1: Situating the Self, I situate myself within the flow of Vassar's history of student activism. Explaining the ways in which my experiences positioned me to think about the institution's capacity to change. I also present the framework of how I think about concepts like race, racial identity development, and Blackness.

In Chapter 2: Transforming Kendrick House, I analyze Vassar's history of inclusion of Black students from the school's very inception. While presenting the various arguments and logics that attended to their inclusion. After I engage in excavating the history of Kendrick House during the time that it was the Afro-American Cultural Center that existed on Vassar College's Campus from 1970-1974. I also focus in on the legal as well as political reasons why the house was desegregated which enables a critique of the nature of unquestioned White separatism.

In Chapter 3: Reflecting Back-Alum Perspectives, I interviewed 3 Vassar alums who attended Vassar during the late 60's as well as easily 70's respectively and provide a qualitative analysis of their responses to the shifts that were occurring during that time. My analysis of their interviews helps to historically contextualize the movements that were occurring during their time at Vassar from actual primary sources.

In Chapter 4: Student Resistance in the Wake, I return to auto ethnographic method to think about the shifts in discourse which have happened during my time at Vassar. Generating my own histories of the ways the Black Lives Matter Movement impacted discussions on campus. I also reflect closely on what it meant to fight for institutional change in the legacy of the Black women who took over Main in 1969. I push the conversation beyond thinking through freedom using the institutional form towards the concept of Black institutional formation which is underground and exists alongside or beneath the recognized.

In Chapter 5: Afterlives in Academia, I gesture towards the signifier of the Maroon as I weigh in on the ethics of the Black student's relationship to their institution of higher education. I do so by looking at matters like debt and trauma to address the entanglements which Black students are often expected to address. I stage a refusal by side-stepping the matter of presenting a project of rehabilitating the institution of higher education but rather thinking beyond the current traditional institutional form towards something "otherwise."

Chapter 1: Situating the Self

"You've already made the choice, now you have to understand it."-the Oracle, The Matrix

Learning on the Institutional Margin

I remember when I was a sophomore at my historically white institution (HWI)¹ engaging in campus organizing to protest the state of Black students, students of color, women, femmes, low-income students and queer students who had been immiserated by the dynamics at here which continually reminded them that they did not belong. Some members of the group wanted to engage in a building take-over to show that the group was serious about its demands. It had been over 20 years since the last “successful” building take-over had occurred and the racial climate on campus was nearing a fever pitch. The classes that I took at the time as well as the upperclassfolk that I was meeting gave me the vocabulary to speak about how my Blackness squarely put me at odds with the institution. We formed coalitions like the one known as the Campus Climate group to make the case that the institution had not done enough or even worse allowed past demands to fall by the way side. The senior administration responded that they had done enough and that they were on a trajectory towards making good on their responsibility to these marginalized students. Many of us were not convinced. Every demand we had made in the past created a new labyrinth of circuitous meetings which rarely produced clear initiatives for institutional change.

In our activism to address the alienation we felt from the institution we ended up feeling more alienated by the bureaucracy we noticed as we tried to create meaningful change. We felt as if philosophically we were a great distance away from the considerations of the institution that

we were attending. As time went on I began to notice the limitations of this type of multi-racial or multicultural coalition-based activism to address the unique challenges faced by Black students on campus and as such I gravitated towards other Black students with a similar political critique. As Black students who chose to ally with one another we all understood the intensified social meaning this took in the context of a HWI's public spaces.

This formation harkened back to Beverly Daniel Tatum's rhetorical question of her eponymous text, "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" In the text Tatum argues centrally that Black children are taught early on to think of themselves in racialized terms because " ..that is how the rest of the world thinks of them. Our self-perceptions are shaped by the messages that we receive from those around us.." ² Placing a theory of racial identity development created by Psychologist William Cross in conversation with the experiences of Black school kids, Tatum recounts that Cross' model includes the following stages: *pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment.* ³ Pre-encounter which is the first stage speaks to the time when a Black child is adopting and taking on a wide array of the values put forth by dominant White culture, foremostly the idea that it is *better to be White*. Being White is best above all. In this definition Tatum positions White culture as the dominant culture which I agree with given the long-lived racial hierarchy in the United States which places White bodies, values, and ideas at the very top. Of course there are children who are an exception to this if their parents actively participate in resistant education. The second stage *encounter*, is usually caused by an event which forces the individual to see the impact of racism on their life. They must confront the vulnerabilities of their racialized social position. The response to this is *immersion/emersion*, during which a student responds to the vulnerability of feeling apart of this "targeted" racial group where one shows an

intense desire to identify with people of their own racial background. Once one is secure in their racial identity they experience *internalization-commitment* which is marked by a reduced drive to prove that one is performing Blackness the best. This increased self-awareness allows them to work with others across social identity difference more easily. The last stage is *internalization-commitment* weds the prior stage with a sense of their own racial identity which gears them towards creating change within society beyond their own race. Tatum reminds us that people move throughout the stages and may revert throughout their life depending on their life experience but experiencing reversion will look different based on one's life stage.⁴ Surely all the progress of the Post-Civil Rights Era after all the legal victories to get all the kids sitting together such obvious self-segregation would not be the case. This led me to wonder what it meant for Black students to form and find common space with other Black students at the fringes of institutional consideration in educational spaces formed by instances of perpetual exclusion.⁵ Cross' model is a useful guide still I sense there is a way in which one can be experiencing multiple stages at once. Even as I spent much time immersing myself in Black culture and making time for Black friends, I still did not find it difficult to feel a sense of commitment to multi-racial spaces.

My understanding of maroon formations is situated on the foundation that Tatum establishes in her analysis of Black racial identity development processes work but elaborated upon by the work of Neil Roberts. Today when people in the Academy are asked to think about maroons they imagine fearless, African-derived people somewhere in the New World of the chattel era clandestinely engaging in flight away from the plantation, running off to a hide-out somewhere in the impenetrable mountains. This dramatic historicist visualization becomes limited when they are asked to consider the possibility that Black students and their conspirators,

collaborators, allies may have maroon ways of being. Roberts in his text *Freedom as Marronage* as he defines marronage as the collective work of a “group of persons insulating themselves from a surrounding society in order to create a fully autonomous community...”⁶ This insulation can and does manifest in the spatial as well as the psychological. Marronage can be spoken about across time as a ethical response to the forces which are always pushing historically marginalized peoples to the fringes.⁷ To live politically as a maroon is to see a fringe existence as a point of elaboration. Marronage deserves a space for serious elaboration in the present era to think alongside the ways in which higher education has been framed as a path of flight for Black students for a long time while institutional racism haunts the project of this incorporation. There needs to be a grammar in higher education which builds off of the Black radical traditional to theorize what happens beneath the admissions letter and what that means for racial progress in America. This political philosophy relates specifically towards Black student social movement because it allows one to continual acts creating racial affinity space and distinct sites of inquiry within a distinctly Black historical epistemology.⁸

Further, Sara Ahmed helps me to think about the ways in which creating and instrumentalizing diversity as a form of performed racial labor in her 2012 text, *On Being Included*. In the text she meditates on the meaning and work of the diversity practitioner who is often ambivalently included to participate in the process of “embedding diversity into the ordinary work or daily routines of an organization.”⁹ She argues that the very condition of possibility for the diversity practitioner is the institutional culture which has not yet achieved diversity and inclusion. For political Black students on campus who felt as if they were being tracked to embody “the diversity” their role as practitioners of diversity often felt like an institution occupation which they had fallen into. Holding both the notion of Black student

activists performing a type of racialized labor alongside their resistance in the form of marronage, I seek to not only situate but return to this key foundational tension.

Central Explorations:

In my study I asked broadly, how did Black students at Vassar College during the late 60s and early 70s participate in and respond to the Black Studies Movement? The Black Studies Movement was a Black Power-inspired effort which specifically “revolved around black intellectuals, student groups, and the debates within the civil rights movement concerning black power and cultural nationalism.”¹⁰ And further what has been the impact of this activism on present day debates on the inclusion of Black students into institutions of higher education. At Vassar, I know that:

1. A handful of these Black students admitted to the college in the late 60’s and early 70’s participated in a take-over of the school’s main building in 1969 which ignited the creation of Kendrick House--a predominantly black residence hall ,which also served the purpose as an on-campus “Afro-American Cultural Center.”
2. The creation of a Black Studies Program.
3. The creation of an Urban Center in the Poughkeepsie Community where said Black Studies courses were taught for a time.

I understand these 3 moments as events situated within the Black Studies movement of the early 70s. Why was this mostly-Black residence hall so short-lived, surviving only 4 years? Further, what led to the subsequent closing of the Urban Center? And lastly looking towards the most long-lived aspect of these struggles, what has been the legacy of Black Studies in the wake of this? In the politics of these shifts we see what happens when the University or College giving itself the opportunity for it to recreate itself by digesting dissent, rejecting certain parts of its form and ossifying others.

Historical Background

To apprehend my central explorations and questions I will situate the Black Studies Movement in history by talking about what important historical junctures preceded it. I will do so by narrating the rise of higher education during 3 historical moments as they pertained to the incorporation of Black people into these institutions. The first moment lies within the ante-bellum era during the early formation of American colleges when enslaved Black people were used as physical labor to build and maintain colleges as well as physical learning implements for White students interested in the scientific inquiry. The second moment encapsulates the case of access to education for Black people in the post-bellum aftermath of the Civil War and the debates that erupted around what type of secondary education was most viable to provide for the uplift of the formerly enslaved race. And the last moment will be a look at impact of the Civil Rights Movement's juridical shifts which enabled for the rise of affirmative action policies of inclusion into white institutions of higher education.

The Advent of American Institutions of Higher Education

The rise of the American institution of higher education was a continuation of a multi-century medieval European ecclesiastical intellectual formation which colonized the New World. Roger Geiger offers an extensive historical accounting for this topic in his text, *The History of American Higher Education* wherein he notes that at Emmanuel College, founded in 1584 in Great Britain. Emmanuel College was founded to train ministers in the seeds of English Puritanism as they germinated into leadership in “the Massachusetts Bay Colony- including John Harvard.”¹¹

Craig Wilder in *Ebony and Ivy* positions these New World derivative college and university as attempts by European nations to “defend and regulate their colonial possessions” using the African slave trade to fund this strategic move.¹² Many developing colleges in the colonies sent officials to England (made rich by colonial trade) to petition the citizens there for the money to help expand these colonial institutions. What invigorated these donation drives was the championing of the cause of a colonial Native education by the instructors of these institutions.¹³ This was done all the while colonists and Native peoples were at the greatest odds in the midst of the French and Indian War (1754-1763.) In the time after the war’s end a distrust of Native peoples was only compounded when “even friendly and allied Native peoples” were seen as a threat by colonists such that Lord Amherst, the namesake of Amherst College inquired on the possibility of spreading small pox to weaken the formidable Native population. Attempts to educate Native students would languish in the time following that moment as well. At this time enslaved African people were not even considered as viable recipients of a colonial education regardless of how nefarious such an education would have been for them.

During this time racism, as a philosophy of ordering humans along a hierarchy, came to dictate science and theology which contorted to uphold the dominance of Whites.¹⁴ Reverend Samuel Stanhope Smith’s lecture before the American Philosophical Society in 1787 exemplified the intermingling of science and theology under the auspice of seeing the world through race. He argued “color relents as one ascends the social ladder.” A society that was able to effectively insulate themselves from nature were rewarded with White skins and favorable features. Essentially, successful civilization is what caused darker skin to relent.¹⁵ While today some may read Smith’s lecture as saturated with pseudo-science, it is important to note that his work “rested upon a century of research.”¹⁶

While Whiteness stood unquestioned at the top of this colonial racial hierarchy, Nativeness (red skin) and Blackness (black skin) were often put against one another in a dialectic struggle wherein redness was destined to win because of the perceived potentiality of Native civilization.¹⁷ When it came to Black skin, Blackness was read as an “eternal monotony” and an “immovable veil” which undermined the intellectual reliability of the beings who had it. Thomas Jefferson doubted the scholarship of the enslaved Black writer Phyllis Wheatley while he vociferously noted that he struggled to find a Black person with true intellectual skill. His sharp critique of Wheatley in contrast to the praise of Native scholarship exemplified Jefferson’s inability to acknowledge Black intellectual thought.¹⁸

Still, into the 1700s Black people were still largely not considered viable as students, however, the labor of their bodies had multivalent uses for early colleges. Their physical labor was credited with the building of the University of Virginia as well as many other colleges. White college students reportedly took delight in terrorizing the enslaved workers on these campuses by disrupting their work.¹⁹ While deep narration of their experiences on these campuses is not as expansive as it could be, Black people were integral to the day-to-day maintenance of early Atlantic colleges.

Following the practices of European colleges which had long used dissection to glean a better understanding of how the human body worked, American schools began to seek out corpses to ground the research ongoing at their early medical schools. A readily available supply of bodies was integral to the development and expansion of these institutions. Even in death the bodies of enslaved Black people found educational use as biological study aids. For example, at King’s College (Columbia University) in the late 1700s medical faculty and students “harvested colored corpses from the African cemetery for years, dragging cadavers across Broadway to the

dissecting table.”²⁰ The demand for dead bodies was so insatiable that it left many cemeteries vulnerable to the theft of desperate medical students, especially black bodies which were largely unprotected in their place of rest.²¹

Even with this being the case some enslaved Black people were still able to acquire rudimentary education through a handful of Black serving institutions and “hidden passages.”²² According to John E. Fleming in the *Lengthening Shadow of Slavery*, hidden passages were clandestine modes of education that enslaved people could access by “listening to the conversations of whites, ‘borrowing ‘ books and teaching oneself to read. . . .”²³ On many plantations the hidden passage took the form of what Fleming calls the “grapevine” which was a means by which information was spread among slaves. By way of the grapevine, news of varying importance could be spread without demanding high amounts of literacy. This form of information allowed the enslaved community to learn of dangers and pressing news ahead of its actual arrival. Historian William Banks points out that literate slaves could often trick slave patrols by forging permission slips while off the plantation. This problem became so widespread such that wanted posters would begin to mention a slave’s level of literacy.²⁴ Despite the dearth of formal education topics of freedom could become the very center of debate even in the shadow of education’s criminalization.²⁵

In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America*, Saidiya Hartman details the cracks in the plantation structure which seemed to allow for Black people to participate in clandestine learning through the practice of “stealing away.” In these moments, spaces that might have been meant for sleep or eating, were re-appropriated for the purpose of doing things like praising God or holding dances. Hartman contends that stealing away “played upon the paradox of property’s agency and the idea of property’s agency and the

idea of property as theft, thus alluding to the captive's condition as a legal form of unlawful or amoral seizure."²⁶ In spaces outside the gaze of the master and other White people, Black people could share information and accentuate the complex thoughts which they had always had. These moments pointed to the existence of learning in the space of the alternate and covert albeit in captivity.

The Post-Bellum Shift

As the anti-slavery sentiment grew among White abolitionists from the late 18th century on, the question of what to do with freed Black people loomed largely over American civil society. Every detail of a "legal" Black education would become a site of contestation. The uneasiness of Black education in the post-bellum era rested in the anxieties of the prior epoch. Many enslaved as well as free Black people in the antebellum era faced continued oppression because it was understood that their cheap labor challenged the livelihood of working class white people.²⁷ As W.E.B. Dubois pointed out in "Black Reconstruction,"-- "It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and tides of courtesy because they were white."²⁸ While the economic state of the South should have created the grounds for a common cause between free Black people and working class White people against an unfair class system, internalized notions of white supremacy placed the pressure solely on Black people. This tension mutated into an overall resentment towards most attempts at Black educational institutions being formed up until 1861, the beginning of the Civil War.²⁹

Banks reports that after the Civil War, the influx of new students at black primary schools outpaced the supply of available, trained teachers. Those who supported the education of Black youth began to open "normal schools."³⁰ Normal schools were essentially academies for the

training of teachers. At this time education beyond teaching at the primary level proved to be financially prohibitive. The black colleges that were founded to meet the needs of teacher who wanted to further their education struggled early on to survive solely on limited black philanthropy and benign state neglect, this created a long-term dependency upon white funding.

³¹The nature of the intellectual rigor of Black education was a major debate among many of the educated Black community but they often found that they did not have the power nor financial backing to implement the necessary changes. ³²

Under the thumb of wealthy white philanthropists, underfunded black schools were expected to follow the whims of whatever industry or educational philosophies their funders favored. White notions of the limits of Black intellect soon became the limits placed on these colleges. A broad liberal arts curriculum for example, was seen as something that would be a waste of time for Black students at the time. Well known White business man, Andrew Carnegie became the primary backer of the Black industrial college Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute founded in 1868. The culture of Hampton exemplified the ways in which these schools became sites of intense discipline for their students. ³³

According to Dan B. Croom and Antoine Alston in “The Problem of Agricultural and Industrial Education for African Americans” they explain that Hampton had an institutional commitment to performing labor as the central virtue that students were expected to learn and honor. Led by former Union soldier and Freedmen Bureau agent, Samuel Chapman Armstrong noted that the goal of Hampton Institute was to provide “a sound basic education coupled with vocational training.” ³⁴ Croom and Antoine go on to explain daily life at Hampton Institute as being built around the maintenance of the school’s on-campus farms as well as factories. This performed the double work of defraying the costs of room and board but also taught students the

importance of hard physical work.³⁵ It is at Hampton Institute where Booker. T. Washington would be educated and it is this experience that would influence his leadership of the Tuskegee Normal Institute. The model of industrial education pioneered at Hampton and adopted at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute would come to be formally known as the Hampton-Tuskegee model. As normal schools the goals of both was to train educators in rudimentary subjects while teaching them the value of physical labor especially as they would find themselves teaching in Black working class communities.

Booker T. Washington, with a Hampton education went on to be the most well-known proponent of agricultural as well as industrial labor as Black uplift which he sensed would not raise the ire of white onlookers of Tuskegee. This accommodated white expectations of Black intellectual capacities and allowed the school to continually strong support from their benefactors. The work for Black people he believed was not hidden under a stack of books in the library but out in the fields, farms, and factories doing practical work. Equality was not something that Black people could simply be granted by White people. Equality was something that Black workers would earn through their toil. most famous for the stance he put forth in his Atlanta Exposition Address of 1895 before a crowd of mostly White people where he argued that Blacks “Cast down your[their] bucket...” where they were be it “agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service and in the professions.”³⁶ While it is acknowledged that Washington lobbied against discrimination towards Blacks this politics is understood as a type of accommodationism because it curbed Black people from becoming the civic rivals of whites.

Proponents of liberal arts education like W.E.B. Dubois sharply critiqued what he called the “Hampton Idea” in a 1906 critique. In the piece Dubois puts forth the argument that the rise in industrial manufacturing created an obsession with what he calls the “technique of earning a

living and with the enormous success in this struggle with the jealous material world.”³⁷

Technical work such as building tools or garments which was once a domestic effort for foremostly had become institutionalized. And with it, a heavy emphasis was placed on the goal of pursuing an education that could make money within this industry. Dubois accuses Hampton as being the center of this trend in its efforts to corral Black higher education around practical education solely. As a counter-balance he pivots towards the historical example of Greece where “..for instance the higher training became very largely aesthetics and literature suited to a nation of artists and philosophers...” which he admits left “fatal gaps in the fuller human training.”³⁸ A balanced approach was needed but at Hampton from his personal point of view industrial education had taken the lead. Showing what might be seen as a pragmatism about the issue Dubois argued that insofar as the Black community could “afford” there should be those among the educated who could receive a liberal arts education. This highlighted Dubois’ two interests in a quality liberal arts education and an endorsement of the notion of the Talented Tenth. In 1903, Dubois published an essay called the “Talented Tenth” charting his vision of how a distinct Black Intelligentsia might flourish. These people would not simply be industrialists focused on making money but philosopher-kings who possessed a higher existential and intellectual aspirations for the Black race.³⁹ It should be noted that while Dubois popularized the notion of the Talented Tenth he did not originate it. This notion was introduced by Henry Morehouse in 1896 who was in favor of Black students receiving a liberal arts education.⁴⁰

Separate and Unequal

Early responses to attempts to desegregate were often rebuffed by the “separate-but-equal” clause put forth in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896 which “upheld the concept

and practice of state-endorsed racial discrimination.”⁴¹ The fight for equal government support for Black education would come to a head with the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court Decision of 1954. While the Decision is often referred to as one single court case it actually was the consolidation of multiple cases which included *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the District of Columbia case of *Bolling v. Sharpe*, the Delaware case of *Gebhart v. Belton*, the South Carolina case of *Briggs v. Elliott*, and the Virginia case of *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*.⁴² School-based racial segregation became difficult to ignore at this point. James Patterson points out in his text *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone And Its Troubled Legacy* points out that many Southern states were more prepared to address creating educational equality even as they maintained a commitment to segregation during this time.⁴³ Desegregation seemed almost unimaginable for many in the South. Proponents of desegregation believed that Black children should be able to attend any school in their towns in well-built schools. The growing push for desegregated schools put pressure on a centuries-old racial regime which would infuriate many White people who feared that educating Black children with their own might create improper interracial context as well as disruption within the community.⁴⁴ Regardless the momentum to change the face of schools across the country was building.

The activism that followed the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision which gave a strong constitutional basis to allow Black children to learn across the color line in institutions which were state funded was a watershed moment which brought many Black students into White institutions of higher education where they found that the expectation was that they assimilate into the ongoing Euro-American concerns of the Academy and not cause disruption.

⁴⁵Up until this point most college-educated Black people in the U.S. had attended Black-serving

institutions like Howard University and Fisk University.⁴⁶ The striking down of “separate but equal” accommodation standards for maintaining segregated facilities such as schools and government offices opened up the possibility for Black people to attend historically White institutions of higher education which had largely barred their admission in the past. The rise of Black Power throughout the country in the late 1960s had a marked influence on many of those same Black college students entering historically white institutions of higher education at the time which would lead to infamous fracturing clashes.⁴⁷ The record on Black program houses or residence halls on college campus is scant because before the 1960’s not that many Black people were being admitted to HWIs and when they were they often were placed in off-campus accommodations. The Black residence halls (like Ujamaa House at Cornell, 1972, Malcolm X House at Wesleyan University, 1969, Ujamaa House at Stanford University, 1970) were a formation that burst forth largely in the late 1960’s as many Black students shifted from simply wanting to be included to wanting their own distinct spaces within their colleges and this is the moment they would have the demographic numbers to do so.

Theoretical Framework

My research took me in the turbulent space of a fleeting moment in Kendrick House's history. Built in 1929, Kendrick had long served the college as a living space for a variety of different Vassar College community members. In this examination I am not interested in the retelling the House's whole story but a sliver of time when it housed Black students for a stint in the early 1970s. At that time Kendrick was a haven for Black people, away from the center of the campus at its periphery.

My discussion of Black student activism hinges upon a specific understanding of race as well as Blackness. I define a race according to Ian Haney Lopez as "a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, elements of their morphology and/or ancestry" which must be "understood as a sui generis social phenomenon in which contested systems of meaning serve as the connection between physical features, faces, and personal characteristics."

⁴⁸ And by extension racism as discrimination on the basis of this constructed category. Further, I understand Blackness as the racialized descriptor for a type of estrangement created by Atlantic chattel slavery. This is the understanding that Saidiya Hartman comes to early in the text *Lose Your Mother* when she visits Ghana to find that her shared racial Black phenotype with other Ghanaians was not necessarily a point of commonality. She notes "A black face didn't make me kin."⁴⁹ As a Black American-born woman they call her "obruni" or stranger in the local language, Akan. In essence Hartman explains that Blackness is the improvisation of "captives, exiles, and orphans in the Aftermath of the Atlantic slave trade. Racial solidarity was expressed in the language of kinship because it both evidenced the wound and attempted to heal it."⁵⁰ To accept the identity of Blackness is to accept and organize around the ongoing estrangement from

natal home (Africa) across space and time. This is the understanding with which I use the word “Black.”

I draw from Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s racial theoretical framework—racial formation. Racial formation is what the scholars call a historical process of ascribing a specific meaning to a group of people for the purpose of developing a hierarchy of social control.⁵¹ I understand racial formation as a process that constantly regulates and shapes who has access to libidinal and political economies in society. Racial formation theory allows me to see the transformation of racial categories throughout history. Perceptions of race are ultimately mobilized in what Omi and Winant call “racial projects” which actively redistribute economic, political, and culture resources along select racial lines. Fundamentally, racial formation theory acknowledges and rides the tension between race as a category that is socially constructed and a category that is based on specific material combinations of phenotypes such as hair texture, facial features and skin color.⁵² Projects which are structured along racial lines are not racist simply because they acknowledge the existence of race. Rather a racial project is racist “if and only if it creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race.”⁵³ I understand that Black program houses are racial projects, but not all are racist racial projects.

With this said I bring into the conversation the notion of Anti-Black racism as a modifier to make more specific the impact of racism on Black people who have been historically constructed as the ultimate Other and in opposition to Whiteness and its values of purity, civility, and order. In this way I am resistant to the usage of terms like racism and people of color in cases where the discrimination or aggression towards Black people seems to be clearly within the context of a history of Anti-Blackness. Professor of Ethnic Studies, Jared Sexton situates this

desire to make racist violence against people of color and Black people as the same as what he calls “people-of-color blindness.” People-of-color-blindness is further defined as a:

form of colorblindness inherent to the concept of “people of color” to the precise extent that it misunderstands the specificity of antiblackness and presumes or insists upon the monolithic character of victimization under white supremacy.⁵⁴

This understanding of Anti-Black racism is a tension which will present itself more clearly towards the latter portion of my study. Though I think it is important for me to state this early on to allow my ensuing discussion to pay full attention to the gravity of Anti-Blackness’ impact on Black students and their experiences with inclusion into the very institutions which had so long excluded them.

Methodology

In my thesis research I foreground the research method of auto-ethnography to best encapsulate the method employed in my thesis. In this way as I analyzed archival texts and interviews I was perpetually aware in which what happened during the moments described impacted me in the present. This helped me understand how Black students at Vassar responded to the Black Studies Movement as well as the legacy of their response. Even as I tried to disentangle myself from my experience attending Vassar as a Black student, I found it difficult to participate in an objective historical analysis of all the events which I lived in the wake of.

Autoethnography is described by Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams & Arthur P. Bochner in their 2011 journal piece “Autoethnography: An Overview” as a research-based approach which “seeks to describe and systematically analyze(graphy) personal experience(auto) in order to understand cultural experience.”⁵⁵ This approach refuses maintaining an objective or non-biased gaze upon histories within which a researcher may find themselves connected to. It

acknowledges that interpretation of events that occur in society by the researcher also constitutes a form of exploration and interpretation of the self. In process examining one's own biases or pre-conceived notions as they apprehend key events which have passed as well events which are occurring which, in the literature, are known as "epiphanies."⁵⁶To understand the historical context of Black students beyond me and their relationship to institutions of higher education I have turned to archival research and textual analysis.

Under the category of my autoethnographic study, multiple sets of data have have informed the process of my analysis. They include interviews, archival research, as well as examination of pertinent literature. Today, literature on the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Studies Movement and the Black Power Movement is rich and varied. Historically situating Kendrick House will be made easier by the treasure trove of this information. Archival research of old Vassar based publications like the Miscellany News as well as the Vassar Quarterly, alum interviews and texts will offer an important look at the the political climate of the late 60s which fueled the agitation of Black students to found their own space within the institution. These texts also show the logics of inclusion and integration that preceded these students. The Miscellany Archive offers snapshots of Kendrick at its most climactic but the mundane strivings which escape the purview of official record leave a notable gap in the house's history. I have also watched past published video interviews and reaction pieces by Black Vassar alum across time to help add dimensions to add context to the explorations of the archive.

I first began my search for interviews by consulting a professor who I knew had connections to Black Vassar alums due to an oral history project that she had directed last year. It was a project that I was also apart of and I had interviewed a handful of alums from the late 70s as well as the 90s. However, I had not spoken to any alums through this project who had

attended Vassar during the time period that I was focusing on for this specific study. I then elected to send out a post to the African American Alumnae/i group that was on Facebook which offered a handful of alums who had direct experience with the time period I was interested in. While I received many interested alums, I narrowed my target interviewees to three alums. Bicentennial, a 62 year old Black man, class of 1976; Ms. Storm, a 65 year old Black woman, class of 1968; and Youthfully, a 64 year old Black woman, class of 1973.⁵⁷ As a researcher I wish I could have had interviewed even more people but I knew I was limited by time and resources. And thus I knew the people who I reached out to had been apart of a self-selecting group who were interested enough in still associating with their Vassar experience that they were still apart of an alum group and were also interested in being interviewed about their Vassar experience.

In my interview of all three alums my questions pertained to asking about social context that each came from before their time at Vassar as well as the historical context. I knew that many Black youth during the late 60s' were politicized by the Civil Rights Movement but I did not want to assume the trajectory of their socialization before or during their time at Vassar. My questions also pertained to the experiences that these alums had during their time at Vassar. My questions sought to guide the conversation around how they related to Vassar as an institution as well as Kendrick House as a Black program house.

While the lens of this project is turned towards what seems to be the past, the social dynamics that made Kendrick necessary as an ostensible haven arrives at a moment in time where the continued disenfranchisement of Black people has reconstituted calls for more Black affinity housing/space options on residential campuses at traditionally White colleges like Vassar. All the while historically Black colleges and universities which had long welcomed

Black students face growing challenges such as dwindling enrollments and anemic endowments from generations of racialized poverty. These calls have re-ignited timeless debates on “what it means to be Black” and to form Black communities in racially diverse spaces. Even higher education, which has often been presented as a path of flight for Black people from some forms of subjection find themselves chafing against the rebar of a society which has yet to exorcise the Anti-Blackness which limits and haunts their study.

In trying to retell and piece together the moment especially the life of Vassar’s first and last sanctioned Black program house my exploration might be read as a call to resuscitate the space as it was. Even as I try to use the sources at my disposal to talk about resistance in the walls of Academia, I must reckon with the challenges and limits of trying to return the “bricks” of a fragment, a moment unmoored, which moves through time. Kendrick comes to us in the longings of Black students dispersed today across campus who are sometimes still able to recall it from hearsay. I know that I must reckon with a community that coalesces out of terms which include but still exceed bare necessity and the wonder of its invention.

Chapter 2: Transforming Kendrick House

“So much is defined by the moment of our writing”- Saidiya Hartman

Vassar College was the last Seven Sister Colleges to “knowingly” admit Black women. According to Linda Perkins in “The African American Female Elite: The Early History of African American Women in the Seven Sister Colleges, 1880-1960” W.E.B. For a time, Dubois was especially interested in the admission rates of African American students at historically white institutions like Vassar. These numbers were dismal and Dubois sent a correspondence year after year to these institutions inquiring on the admission policies when it came to Black students.⁵⁸ Dubois’ public inquiries would be one of many attempts by Black community leaders to press the question of inclusion of qualified African American students into historically white institutions of higher education.

While Vassar’s administration showed a resistance to matriculating Black students the institution still participated and sponsoring discussions on the matter. Perkins notes that in the late 1930s at a conference supported by Vassar as well as the Young Women’s Christian Association--Reverend James Robinson, an African American minister from Harlem NY spoke on the matter of race by “challenging the White women students to improve race relations by getting Vassar to open its doors to Black women.”⁵⁹ Robinson’s sermon and subsequent search for a Black applicant would help to usher in the matriculation of Beatrix McCleary ‘44.

Beatrix McCleary sensed that she had been “recruited” to attend Vassar and adjusted very well to the school’s environment. McCleary was apart of what I regard as the 2nd generation of Black students at Vassar. Characteristically these were students who were knowingly admitted as Black applicants and did not have to hide their Black identity to attend the school unlike their

predecessor Anita Florence Hemmings who graduated in 1893 and a multitude of other anonymous Black women who possibly passed in their times at Vassar. According to McCleary in an article she wrote in the *Vassar Quarterly* released June 15 1946, she recalls being treated as a curiosity to her white classmates such that she admitted in retrospect “I represented the Negro Problem- in capitals- and the Raymond House students were interested in that problem and in seeing that Vassar solved it successfully. That I should be thought, at least at first, as the representative of a problem race rather than as an individual was natural; it was also sometimes difficult.” All of her classmates were ceaselessly amused and interested in McCleary’s opinion on race relations in the greater context. According to McCleary her skin tone often caused people to confuse her for “American Indian or Hawaiian, or even East Indian.”⁶⁰ As a light skinned Black she was often allowed her to pass as phenotypically non-Black, McCleary noted that darker skinned Black students often faced more overt discrimination. To counter this, she noted that integration of “Negro students would be the best solution address discrimination so they could be ‘known as people.... [to]demonstrate, by their presence at college, that background, intelligence and ability are more important than color in making good members of the college community.’ ”⁶¹ McCleary believed that Vassar creating more opportunities for encounter between Black and White students would help to humanize these Black students to the White student body. Especially if these students could be in a variety of residence halls so their presence on campus would be normalized. McCleary’s successful attendance at Vassar College would be used to make the case for the increased enrollment of Black women at the school.

Along with petitioning Vassar and its counterparts to admit more students like McCleary, W.E.B. Dubois also visited the school on April 22, 1942 to speak on the matter of race relations. The speech was entitled “The Future of Africa in America.” During this time the United States

was in the midst of World War II. Dubois noted that in the air of global arrest it seemed that the “Negro Problem” was continually ignored. While the social problems of the Negro might have been put on the backburner of the nation, the end of World War II would again bring up the specter of Anti-Black as a vital societal issue. In the labor movement with its strong class analysis, Dubois found that white workers were unwilling to “recognize Negro laborers as fellow human beings.”⁶² Dubois understood that WWII would not last forever and whether or not White working class men could see common cause with their Black counterparts the “Negro Problem” simply would not disappear.

Dubois reflected on past moments in history where Americans had tried to address the Negro Problem. One method he recalled was to attempt to convert all enslaved Black people in the colonies to Christianity in the hopes that their newly gained religious identity would have freed them from bondage. Threatened by this move to challenge the burgeoning racial democracy of the American colonies, Dubois recalled that the Virginia Legislature in 1667 passed a law stating that “Baptism doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom, in order that diverse masters freed from this doubt may more carefully endeavor the propagation of Christianity.”⁶³ Stated in this manner, Dubois was pointing out that questions regarding the ethics of enslaved labor had long been apart of the Negro Problem. Labor rights was not simply a white man’s problem. Early American colonies had long fiercely debated the place of the enslaved African. They were caught between the place of losing control of the enslaved African’s population growth in the New World while also desperately being dependent on the unpaid and forced labor of that same population. Most shamefully many expected the enslaved African to simply die out. The persistence of the race once emancipated created the condition of possibility for Dubois’ very presence at Vassar College which tacitly accepted the

persistence of Black peoples yet further refused to see the worthiness of including them. Much like McCleary he urged that the audience move to regard “Negroes and mulattoes as human beings.”⁶⁴ Addressing the Negro Problem as he put it both at places like Vassar College would have global repercussions.

Case Study: Kendrick House’s Transformation

Kendrick House was built in 1929 outside the Main Gate of Vassar College on Raymond Avenue. Behind it sits Vassar Lake named after the school’s founder, Matthew Vassar, a wealthy businessman of the late 19th century who would go on to found Vassar College. Kendrick House was built initially for the purpose of housing faculty and graduate students. The changing landscapes of American race relations both within and beyond Vassar decisively pushed the purpose of the house towards that of a student dormitory for Black students in the fall of 1969.⁶⁵

The transformation of Kendrick House into “the [Black] House” occurred while Vassar College was at the nexus of multiple pressures. The energy of the Civil Rights Movement captured the imagination of many Black students on college campuses all across the country while the rise of Black Power activism ignited calls for more militant strategies to challenge racist institutional structures. According to William L. Van Deburg in *New Day in Babylon*, the rise of Black Power began to be used with increasing frequency after June 16, 1966 when a group of civil rights activists gathered in Greenwood where Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) member, Stokely Carmichael reportedly said “The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin’ us is to take over. We been saying freedom for six years and we ain’t got nothin’. What we gonna start saying now is Black Power!”⁶⁶ This electrified the crowd before him, many of whom were battleworn Civil Rights activists gathered to continue the 200-

mile “March Against Fear” from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson Mississippi in honor of James Meredith to place a spotlight on the ongoing racism and voter suppression ongoing in the South. However, in the second day of the walk he was shot by a white gunman and could not continue the protest with his injury. Carmichael and other members of activist organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) responded to this by continuing the march to assert that activists would no longer be ruled by fear of anti-black violence. This moment signified the sharp break away from the more conservative style of the Civil Rights Movement and its leadership. Later Martin Luther King’s assassination on April 4, 1968 would send shockwaves throughout the country. King’s call for nonviolent resistance which preceded his death seemed to prove for them the limitations of non-violent politics.⁶⁷

Black Power activists made radical demands of society through militant displays of Black pride which opened the door for many Black American youth to see themselves as the vanguard of what would come to be known as the vanguard of the Black Studies Movement dedicated to the transformation of their colleges to usher in more profound change.⁶⁸ Black student activism, most of which was nonviolent, created the condition of possibility for the rise of Black Studies. At historically Black schools like Howard University formed groups like the Nonviolent Action Group (NAG) to fight against national racial discrimination.⁶⁹ It seemed as if many active Black students understood the value of institutions of higher education as sites of power which could be manipulated into conceding to some demands through nonviolent action even as they agreed with arguments for revolutionary violence and avidly followed the work of radical Black nationalists like Frantz Fanon who condoned such resistance.⁷⁰

Vassar student at the time, Claudia Lynn Thomas ’71 recalled that King’s assassination

had a radicalizing impact on her which changed her “from a store-bought-hair-wearing freshman, trying to assimilate into a ninety-eight percent White student body, to an outspoken H. Rapp Brown-quoting sophomore with an Afro.”⁷¹ This aesthetic as well as intellectual transformation came long with incisive critiques of token inclusion and lily white campuses. At many historically white institutions of higher education these students felt that their learning potential was hampered by these dynamics.

Student activists at Vassar forced the College to contend with what it meant to truly commit to racial inclusion through concrete institutional policies *by any means necessary*. Many of these students felt that it was vital that their college education work in the service of preparing them to be apart of the change that they wanted to see in the world. It would be key to be at institutions which taught them their history and prepared them to be of use to their communities. If these institutions were not equipped to do that then they would need to be changed.

A handful of Vassar’s 3rd generation of Black students characterized by their admission between 1960 and the early 1970’s formed the Student Afro-American Society(SAS) which was founded around the same time to begin to advocate and organize to foster Black culture on campus. In a conversation with an alum prior to my research she laughed as she recalled that the SAS meeting probably happened in someone’s dorm room. Many of her Black classmates were often placed with White roommates who sometimes resented the placement. Biondi corroborates this move by administrators to spread the students throughout campus when she points to the case of Wesleyan University where a student opined that the “official policy was to keep us apart... But it didn’t take us long to find each other.”⁷² When SAS put forth these demands the administration come to see see the prospect of creating both a cultural center in the community

which would house the Black Studies program as well as a predominantly Black residence hall as possible.⁷³ The college leased a building in Poughkeepsie City to house the new Black Studies program. Even with these advances in accommodation to Black students on campus, many on both sides of the issue making the school more inclusive still felt that the Administration viewed these projects as temporary efforts.⁷⁴ An eye-opening moment for Thomas was the dispute that another fellow Black student, Gloria, had with her White roommate. Gloria had found the diary of her roommate and had noticed mentions of her in which the roommate made anthropological assessments of her. These assessments ranged from descriptions of “stature, girth and other physical characteristics - including her eating habits, sleep patterns and bathing practices.” Even once Gloria had brought the issue to administrators of the school, it was she who was forced to move to a spare room which was isolated from the rest of the rooms in her residential hall.⁷⁵ This moment showed that change had to happen at a faster pace the administration was willing to allow.

The discussions about the timing and expedience of structural change at Vassar led to the students in the Student Afro-American Society creating a list of demands which were released in April 30, 1969 which called for:

1. That Black studies be expanded into a degree-granting department.
2. That an increased number of black professors be hired to accommodate this expanded program.
3. The immediate renovation of the entire Urban Center.
4. That we receive those funds which have been promised in addition to any extra funds need for the expansion and continuance of the Black Studies program.
5. That the college buy a bus for transportation to and from the Urban Center
6. That Vassar College hire a separate black counselor whose additional job is to place black students after they leave Vassar.
7. That a black housing facility be provided by 1971 which will eventually accommodate at least 200 students.
8. That an architect be on contract to design this facility by Monday, November 17th, 1969.

9. That black students are provided with agreeable black housing until the construction of this facility is completed.⁷⁶

At the time the administration did not take the student demands seriously. In this moment Black students realized that they had to escalate and publicize their fight for more resources that centered and taught about the Black experience. On October 25, 1969 a group of over 30 Black students picketed outside of Alumnae house when a Seven Sisters Conference was happening. To show their anger they burned the effigy of a pig. This protest was seemingly ignored by the administration.⁷⁷

In the days following the burning of the effigy and picket in front of the Alumnae House 34 Black women students engaged in a multi-day occupation of Main Building known as the “Main Takeover” or the “Sit in” which vastly disrupted College operations. After 3 days all demands were accepted and there would be attempts to implement them. It is out of these ensuing discussions that the Caitlin Report overseen by Board of Trustee member, Sally Caitlin, was produced which documented and affirmed the needs for the school to fulfill all the demands that students made. This laid the groundwork for creating an environment which would be more complementary to Black students at Vassar.

Unquestioned White Space

The death knell against Kendrick House’s majority Black housing sounded with the passage of a New York State Regents Position Paper No.15 Minority Access to and Participation in Post-Secondary Education by the New York Board of Regents in June 1972.⁷⁸ In an article entitled “The Kendrick Decision: Action and Reaction” by Miscellany News Writer Mary Knox she outlines the politics which underpinned the State’s attempt to desegregate Kendrick. The legislation defined “segregated facilities as ‘ those in which admission or residence is restricted by the institution or with its consent, to persons of a particular race, color or national origin.’”⁷⁹ This placed undue scrutiny on

the AACC as a residential space which housed a majority Black population. Knox notes that Professor of History at the time, Norman Hodges, expressed confusion over this focus of legislation saying “Kendrick was selected as a symbol. I do not understand why just one aspect of the college was examined rather than looking at the total lack of integration at Vassar...”⁸⁰ Knox further illustrated that the house’s desegregation was somewhat of a political sacrifice. It allowed the school to show that it was making good-faith efforts to desegregate while it opened enrollment to more Black students and faculty thus saving the school from losing \$700,000 in yearly government aid and it seems some bad-press.⁸¹ The financial solvency of the school was put against the radical imaginary of the Black student activists who had risked their place at the school to participate in the Takeover.

Many times during conversations about desegregating Kendrick House observers pointed out how this move would undermine the voice of the few Black students on campus. In the article “Desegregation Forced” written by Debbie Seaman it was argued that to desegregate Kendrick would mean taking “free choice of housing away from blacks while continuing to allow it to white students. Vassar’s lottery housing system and voluntary association have produced all-white houses, yet there has been no objection to this.”⁸² When pushed by students to consider the re-marginalizing nature of forcing Black students to more fully integrate into the student body, Board of Regents member Dr. Kenneth Clarke “.. reportedly answered that this was hiding from the issue, and that the only way that blacks would be able to deal effectively with white society was to come into constant confrontation with it.”⁸³ Such an argument crystallizes what Black Vassar students had been made to feel ever since they began attending the school.

Student at the time, Paula Williams, who met with Clarke believed contrarily that Black students would not be made stronger from being constantly at struggle with White students.⁸⁴ While socially just in principle, Clark’s argument as well as New York State’s law took at an already vulnerable Black space at Vassar. Far from being a matter of a social break-down or failure to dialogue the remaking of Kendrick House as “the Black House” highlighted was that hope of a mass desegregation of higher education placed onus on the liminal spaces of Black affinity while struggling to address the unquestioned White mass at colleges which seemed to be operating on a vastly different time-line for social change. The

forced desegregation of the House in 1974 was built on a specific notion of what integrated space looked like. The closure of Kendrick House gestured towards the interdiction upon an attempt at anti-institutional institutional flight initiated by some of the Black students at Vassar College. This was an intentional and decisive move away from the center of the institution dispersed where Black students would be dispersed among White students. This visually spatialized the racial difference that many Black students were made to feel on the campus.⁸⁵

Explaining the Specter of Black Uprising

In my study of how Black students at Vassar participated in the Black Studies I struggled at first to see beyond the definitive state and federal laws which presided over the matter. As mentioned earlier there was a clear tightening in restrictions around making sure that housing accommodations for Black students on college campuses were not racially segregated. However, I was interested in knowing whether there was more. I began following the intersections between Civil Rights leadership and the discourse on Vassar's campus in the late 60's and early 70's.

A key figure which arose from these interactions was a Psychology professor named Dr. Kenneth Bancroft Clark who was a Board of New York State Regents Member at the time. His involvement with the Civil Rights Movement and the *Brown V. Board of Education* Supreme Court case warranted further analysis. Dr. Kenneth B. Clark was a renowned African-American psychologist whose work was heavily used in the case against racial segregation in schools also known as separate but equal schooling during the 1954 *Brown V. Board of Education* decision which was presided over by the Supreme Court. His work in conducting the research in "doll test" described in an interview as a comprehensive study of "how people develop a sense of their own being."⁸⁶ This was seminal in making the case for the deleterious nature of segregation and racism on the self-image of Black children. Clark used a series of interview questions to learn more about the opinions that children had about black and white dolls to answer larger questions

about racism's impact on the subconscious. The findings from this study helped him to formulate an argument for the adverse impacts that racism had on children, especially Black children. His work doing this study among many others on the topic of race and poverty cemented him as a thought leader in the fight against racial segregation.

By the time Clark participated in the desegregation of Kendrick House as a New York Board of Regents member in the early 70's he had lectured at Vassar multiple times over on his efforts to address the issue of urban poverty which heavily impacted Black people in the industrial cities of the North.⁸⁷ One wonders why a school like Vassar primarily made up of middle and upper class white people seemed to take such interest in the research on racial segregation and urban poverty until one considers the social context of the school as well a country at the time. In his 1968 text *A Relevant War Against Poverty* Clark sought to make sense of the unintelligible moments of Black rage like the urban riots that plagued the summers of the throughout the 1960s. He championed the use of well-structured "programs to protect the interest of the poor."⁸⁸ For upper class white people and perhaps even Black people, Clark's work helped to make sense of the specter of violent responses to persistent poverty and to provide community-based remedies for this issue. It is important to note that Clark was not the only person invited to campus to speak on urban poverty either during this time period but his later participation in the successful attempt to desegregate Kendrick House warrants a deeper analysis of how his scholarly convictions enabled him to make the cross-over to dictating racial social policy in institutions of higher education like Vassar College.

In his 1965 text on urban poverty *Dark Ghetto*, Clark calls the "dark ghetto" the resultant space created by white society which constitutes "social, political, educational, and—above all—economic colonies."⁸⁹ His work as the director of the federally backed Harlem

Youth Opportunities Unlimited(HARYOU) helped him to learn more about the working class of Harlem, *Dark Ghetto* went beyond the data which the organization had founded.⁹⁰ The dark ghetto creates a “subject peoples” who are the victims of historical and continued violence by white society-working class as well as unemployed Black people. The ghetto is a space which is simultaneously ignored but but obsessively surveiled and targeted. Such a dynamic generates a scenario which produces pathological subjects but also offers a clear demonstration of the pathology of the society which has made the dark ghetto possible.⁹¹

Dark Ghetto marks a shift in methodological analysis for Clark as he positions the role of the researcher to understand these issues as he underlines the importance of the “involved observer” or in other words the researcher who is willing to embed oneself in the life of his or her research subjects. Such a researcher must be attuned to the unique histories of those he seeks to work with. This text broadly constitutes a point of departure for Clark as he realizes that simply asking that his subjects answer surveys would not simply suffice for a comprehensive understanding of the resident of the ghetto. Interestingly Clark gestures to the work of Bruno Bettelheim and Viktor E. Frankl who employed a similar research method to understand the horrors that many people faced in German concentration camps.⁹²

Still, as an established Black middle class academic Clark was attentive to how his class and education privilege made him distinct from the Black people of the ghetto that he was learning about. Like them, he had been raised in Harlem but he “made it out.” He mentions in the wake of his discussions on involved observation that growing up in the increasingly segregated Harlem left an indelible psychological mark on him when he notes that while the return to the neighborhood of his childhood was a voluntary choice he pondered whether the prisoner “could ever fully escape the prison?” His words gesture towards his reading of Harlem as an open-air

carceral space and fuels his desire to address the issue. This point also helps to identify the specific roots of Clark's distaste for segregation. Through social mobility, Clark "stole away" from Harlem but did he ever *get away*?

Clark most importantly offers a vivid sense of how he views segregation broadly. He acknowledges the psychological safety one finds in living in a space with others of their own racial background. In racially segregated spaces like Harlem, he argues that one finds "psychological safety in the ghetto; there one lives among one's own and does not risk rejection among strangers."⁹³ But when the Negro or Black person leaves the safety of their home they must confront white society. Encounter with white people is the rub that those who are proponents of segregation as an affirmation of racial pride must face. Such a persistent racial group identification would override the oppositional and nuanced gaze of the individual. Furthermore, a person be they White or Black too attached to their own racial identification would not be able to participate in building a better future if they are unable to participate in inter-racial community.

Clark believed deeply in the importance of racial integration as a core component of racial justice. Those of the urban ghetto who faced brunt of living in a racist society, he argues, were under no illusion about the wonders of systemically being forced to live in a space where they were denied resources to live with dignity. Racial segregation as it is in Harlem and neighborhoods like it cannot be explained away by stating that they "prefer to be with their own people." According to the psychologist it seems to confuse such a sentiment with racial pride misreads how power works; such acquiescence to the state of things was the acceptance of defeat in the face of injustice.

In 1966, Clark would be appointed to be the first Black New York Board of

Regents member which would give him the political ability to more directly address the end of racial segregation in schools all across the state.⁹⁴ He would prove to be uncompromising in his vision for integrating all schools in New York State. Clark believed so strongly in the importance of integration that he quit his position as board of Trustee member at Antioch College 1969 when the institution agreed to go forward with a plan for separate Black housing in respect of Black student demands. It was unsurprising that by 1974 when Clark was a New York Board of Regents member with a fierce dedication to racial integration that he would take the political stance that he did with Vassar. Still by 1986 as he witnessed the resegregation of schools across the country as a product of white flight and legacies of red-lining, Clark found himself frustrated and pessimistic about the movement at this time. This sentiment was chronicled in a Evening News article entitled “Kenneth Clark retires with dream unfulfilled” where Clark says, “ I think I’ve not been particularly effective as a member of the board.”⁹⁵

Unquestioned White Space

The emphasis on integrating the few Black students who matriculated into the student bodies of HWIs often belied and left unquestioned the historical whiteness of these institutions. In her article “Racial Authenticity and White Separatism,” Amie A. Macdonald pushes back against the notion that initiatives by students of color to form racial program housing are inherently racist acts. In her 2000 piece engaging what she defines as the future of racial program housing on college campuses, Macdonald acknowledges that while progress had been made to address concerns of racial exclusion in institutions of their education, students of color were still facing continual acts of microaggression from these institutions.⁹⁶ Derald Wing Sue defines microaggressions as “the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights , snubs, or insults , whether intentional or unintentional based solely on their marginalized group

membership.”⁹⁷ Citing a 1994 New York Times article called “In School” which outlined the positive impacts of racial program houses at Cornell, Macdonald finds that in fact that “program houses offer students of color the opportunity to empower themselves through the development of political identities.”⁹⁸

Furthermore Macdonald critiques Shelby Steele’s argument that the politics of difference has gained far too much prominence in the activism of Black students because such a politics “grounds assertions of wroth and power on difference alone.”⁹⁹ For Steele, social identity markers only hold as much power as they are given in society and understands race as an “unprincipled source of power.”¹⁰⁰ By Steele’s logic, self-segregation even for purposes of social justice would be a reification of these distinctions not a manner of addressing them. Macdonald counters this argument by pointing out the numerous instances in which Black people practiced strategic self-segregation to achieve their goals throughout time like organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Black Panther Party and the list goes on.¹⁰¹ While Black people had historically derived power from expressing and acting on the basis of racial solidarity, participation in political action that acknowledges the weight of these identities reifies the ways they have been used to cause violence.

Recent campus literature allows us to see the temporal and perceptive disjuncture between the imperatives placed on forming White space versus Black space. “#FerryHouseSoWhite: An In-Depth Look at Whiteness in Ferry House” written by former Ferry resident, Alessandra Seiter ’16 tells the story of the unchallenged Whiteness of a co-op which has been located at the center of campus for over 50 years.¹⁰² A house which not only was contemporary to Kendrick but also one which outlived it.

In a similar way, #FerryHouseSoWhite sparked discussions on what Ferry House's largely unquestioned existence meant given its history.¹⁰³ #FerryHouseSoWhite was a timely intervention in the conversations of predominantly White spaces at a historically White institution like Vassar. Terms like diversity and inclusion sanitized of their true political force from the crucible of the Civil Rights Era. As Seiter recalls in the 1950s the development of Ferry House was encouraged through the funding of a wealthy White Vassar family who donated a \$200,000 gift to have the house built. In contrast, the formation of Kendrick House as a cultural center and living space for Black students at Vassar came in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. Attempts to close spaces like Kendrick was regarded as a bold tough-on-segregation move to directly combat institutional racism and the exclusionary nature of segregated spaces on college campuses, the Black student voice was put at odds with state policy. Ferry House can be defined as a racist racial project in the vein of Omi and Winant's definition because while it was created during a time that the school had few students of color, the subsequent lack of a concerted effort to address its overrepresentation of White students has not been addressed, thus leaving the paradigm unquestioned. Ultimately targeted initiatives, even those willingly undertaken by Black students like Kendrick House were framed as detrimental not only to minority students but also their majority counterparts(read: white.)¹⁰⁴ Ferry House does not survive with its anemic amount of students of color simply because the House itself is uniquely racist. It is directly linked to the institution which it is home to and is allowed to maintain an ongoing segregationist pathology which largely goes unrecognized because it is the norm for the campus.¹⁰⁵

Chapter 3: Reflecting Back: Alum Perspectives

"I want to go into that den of those elegant people with

their old ideas, smugness, and just drive them insane."
 -Nina Simone

After spending a great deal of time immersed in historical texts, Vassar publications, and old interviews, there were questions that I wanted to ask alums who attended the school that time that I realized I would have to ask on my own. I embarked on finding interviews as mentioned before by reaching out to the Facebook group for Vassar Alums I received a flood of responses from people eager to participate or who knew people who would be eager to participate, I really wish I had the time to speak to more of them in moment because of the wealth of experiences and nuanced ideas about student activism occurred during the time period I was interested in which was the late 60's early 70's.

A bias I had to disabuse myself of was one that presumed that every Black student who at Vassar was foremostly politicized in the same way and secondly that they were all conscious of the greater social dynamics that had brought them to Vassar and created the experience they had. As I spoke to each alum I had to stay conscious of whether the commentary they were making was what they were thinking in the moment versus what they had learned after the fact. My prompts welcomed them to participate in a revisionist analysis of their own history whether I was aware of it not. In the end I spoke to 3 alums: Ms. Storm, a 65 year old Black woman, class of 1968 ,Bicentennial, a 62 year old Black man, class of 1976 and Youthfully, a 64 year old Black woman, class of 1973.¹⁰⁶ The following analysis will be an analysis of each interview.

Ms. Storm

Ms. Storm was a part of a feeder program which targeted high-achieving Black students. She admittedly applied to a number of colleges and her top choices were University of

Pennsylvania(UPenn) and Vassar. While she had always wanted to go to UPenn she decided on Vassar. She noted that there was “something” about Vassar that she liked. When she got to campus she instantly gravitated towards the Student Afro-American Society which had formed sometime between 1963 and 1966. This was also during a time when many Black students on college campuses were participating in nation-wide Black Power conferences.

At the time I was reading literature about the role of the Women’s Movement at Vassar and was interested in the ways that Black Vassar women might have participated in it. I asked Ms. Storm about it, she responded that the prevailing sense of the Women’s Movement was that it was for white women and it was single issue. Whereas the Civil Rights Movement, in her opinion, was trying to address many of the issues that all Black people were facing. Still, at the time there was a lot of different student protests going on like the Divestment campaign from South African companies during Apartheid.

Ms. Storm recalls that the activism of Black students sometimes pushed the envelope of resistance on campus. Such as the protest in front of Alumnae House where the pig made of pillow cases was burned in effigy as well as the Building Takeover. The takeover, she said frustrated many of the white students on campus because it disrupted their daily lives. Summarizing their response by saying “They didn’t really understand. You’re talking about people who were privileged for the most part. They don’t even understand their own kind who don’t have, so there were always people who were friends with white friends....”¹⁰⁷

In terms of demographics, Ms. Storm said she was apart of one of the biggest incoming classes of Black freshman for her time. And notes that the Black students who came in her year they were mostly from private schools but the after many of the Black students who matriculated were largely from public schools. However, this growth in admission rates for Black students

did not continue indefinitely in Ms. Storm's understanding, eventually "Vassar reached its 'quota' of Blacks." She recalls hearing of a private conversations wherein some Black students were told that this limit had been reached for whatever reason. As an alum who had participated in outreach activities with her Vassar Club she noticed a shift in the type of Black men who would be admitted after Vassar went co-educational. It seemed the school wanted to avoid admitting anyone who might be "rabble rousers" or "too vocal"¹⁰⁸ even if they had the grades to be admitted. When asked whether this might have been some sort of backlash to the activism that had happened during her time she said: "It's about control."¹⁰⁹ Many of the Trustees were people with a lot of power which created friction when students made demands upon them to divest from economies like South Africa. By the time Kendrick House was opened to Black students Ms. Storm had graduated and was not able to closely follow the process that ensued.

Youthfully

When asked about her decision to attend Vassar, Youthfully said "I really didn't deliberately choose to attend Vassar....At that time affirmative action was at its height."¹¹⁰ As a prospective student who was a first generation Afro-Latina immigrant financial aid figured highly in her decision to come to Vassar. She had also gotten into Sarah Lawrence, Princeton, Mount Holyoke. At the time Princeton was just going co-ed, while Mount Holyoke was too far. Because of Vassar's financial aid package and relatively close distance she chose it. She did not know anyone who had gone to Vassar either so there was no clear prior alum connection. She also came from a high school which she recalls as being mostly Black with a handful of Jewish students. During the late 60's there was a big push on the part of historically white colleges to admit Black students so the context in which she came to Vassar was heavily influenced by that.

Growing up in Brooklyn during this time had a strong influence on her politics. Youthfully recalls how Afrocentric people were. This Afrocentrism also increased the militancy of parents in her community who were attempting to take more control over the ways in which their children were being taught. A notable example of this was the Brownsville protests in 1968 where tensions between the school board and of the Oceanhill-Brownsville area came at odds with the New York City United Federation of Teachers. Today, recalled as an experiment in “community control” provided a future template for the limits and extents of gradualist social change.¹¹¹

At Vassar, Youthfully gravitated to people outside of her class year citing how regional differences had a big impact on which students communicated with which students. Her politicized upbringing also leads her into activist circles at the school. When asked what activities she was involved with during her time at the school she replied “Basically the things that the Black students were doing ...would I have done maybe something a little different now? Yeah maybe I would have but that’s what I did at the time.” In her reply I sensed a slight regret that she might have felt for not branching out a little more on campus and focusing a lot on activism. She later participated in the takeover of Main Building in 1969. She was also able to see the creation of many of the student demands come to fruition most notably Kendrick House as well as the Urban Center where which she notes created a sense of community on campus for many Black students.

The opening of the Black Studies program brought people like Mildred Fierce from New York City who were people “in the struggle”.¹¹² Professor Fierce who was the Director of the Black Studies program at the time was seen as a “father-figure” to the students who made life at Vassar more manageable. Professor Fierce helped to bring in a variety of different people to

campus from New York City to enrich the experience of the students. She regarded these instructors as revolutionary thinkers who had a strong sense of what was going on in the communities.

After the takeover in the Fall she took a leave of absence in the Fall of her Sophomore year because she was uncertain of what she really wanted to do. At that point she had been participating in the Nation of Islam. What Youthfully highlights are how non-traditional her trajectory was being a freshman who took a leave of absence the first semester of her sophomore. Before Kendrick House was open there had been another attempt at creating an affinity living space which was the Black corridor in Jewett which was a multi-class year arrangement. For Youthfully, when she returned to campus Kendrick House played a big role in making Vassar more homely for her. She spent a lot of time there recalling that:

“That’s where my friends where, that’s where my social community was. That’s where I spent my time. So Kendrick, was the place to go. We had people from the community, they used to come and stay and visit Kendrick, so it was a very much a community home. It was where Poughkeepsie and Vassar College came together...I don’t think that’s ever been duplicated. It was just a place to be. We would dance and have our music and just enjoy ourselves.”¹³

Youthfully recollection of Kendrick House was very upbeat and corroborated a lot of the sentiments other Black alums had shared about their time living there. Her note that closeness that Kendrick created had probably not been duplicated ever since resonated with me given the haphazard ways in which conversations on town-gown relations occur on campus. Going further, I was unclear whether it was solely Kendrick House as a place which created this dynamic or if the nation-wide activism at the time had brought the Black community closer together across other divisions.

The community formed at Kendrick House was not something that other students from non-Black racial backgrounds participated in. To keep the House within compliance Youthfully recalls that there there was one white person who lived there who was class of '72. Towards the end of her time at Vassar Youthfully recalls that there was conversation about whether Kendrick was actually in compliance with anti-segregation laws on campus. When asked about how the prospect of Kendrick's closing impacted students she recalled:

“It was like a safe haven for us. It was off campus. It was all Black except for one. It was something that we surely didn't want to give up. It was kind of the beginning of the demise of the Black studies program to a certain extent...I know it was revived during the other years but I think that the next generation that came was just not that interested...not active, more complacent.”¹¹⁴

She qualifies her statement by noting that she is making a generalization but there was a moment in time where she was uncertain “what really was going on with the Black students on campus.”¹¹⁵ For her it was not until the class of the '90s that Black students seemed to begin to become more politically active again. When prompted about this lull in activism Youthfully concedes that this might have been due to the general climate of the country in the 80's.

Before the interview closed I allowed Youthfully opportunity to bring up or something that the interview had made her thinking about but I had not asked her about. She lingered for a bit but began to talk about how a lot of Black people who attended Vassar during the time that she was a student there had a lot of problems of the school. “There were a lot of people who left Vassar and never looked back who were very bitter about their time at Vassar. To a certain extent I would not say that I was bitter. But it took me about 10 years before I came back to campus.” Youthfully acknowledges that she wanted to make the school better for others... for future generations. Looking back,

she wished she would have put herself out there more to take advantage of all that Vassar had to offer.

Bicentennial

Bicentennial came to Vassar in the 3rd coed class. He hailed from a Catholic school in Brooklyn which is also the borough where he was born. He described living in Kendrick House as a beautiful experience. As he describes them the rooms in Kendrick were large and spacious. There was also one non-white student who identified as Asian who lived with them. He described the relationship between him and the student as a positive one. The dynamic in the house was very trusting and Bicentennial admits that students would leave their room doors unlocked. Black students from other schools would also come to visit and enjoy parties in the House. Distant from Bicentennial's recollections was any mention of racism he faced within his house. Today at Vassar it seems a historical norm for freshmen of color especially Black freshmen who are coming into their racial consciousness to have many stories about how a roommate treated them because of their raise.¹¹⁶

The Urban Center also played a memorable role in Bicentennial's relationship with the community because that is where community children would go to be mentored by Black Vassar students. He pivoted from this point and made mention to how Vassar has made the Library open to the Poughkeepsie Community. Interestingly he saw this move to make the Library open to the community as something that the Urban Center pioneered. This was because when he was a student there the campus was private and it was not open to the community. Even though the Urban Center is now closed, Bicentennial felt a sense of pride that Poughkeepsie community members could now access Vassar's Library. This was interesting for me to hear as a student who was at Vassar during the "Library Incident"¹¹⁷ when Black children from the community had the

police called on them or the unreported moment when an unnamed Black man was banned from campus after a group of white women said that his presence made them uncomfortable.

Bicentennial's optimism about Vassar's relationship with the Poughkeepsie community highlighted the strained nature of well-meaning inclusion initiatives in the dearth of intentional community spaces like the Urban Center.

Bicentennial recalled feeling a strong sense of comradery with the Black women who had been at Vassar especially the ones who had been apart of the Take-Over. "We were brothers and sisters" he noted which encapsulated his relationship to his Black classmates. Even in the face of the pathologization of Black woman leadership. As a Black man he did not feel the gender disparity harmed social life among the students. Knowing that they were a few on a campus of mostly white students brought them closer together. There was a racial incident at one point during a costume party where two white Vassar men dressed up in KKK uniforms because they thought it would be funny to do. Bicentennial and a few of his friends confronted the men. This is exemplary of how they addressed issues on campus. If they could avoid having to deal with administration they would take matters like these into their own hands.¹¹⁸ There was a prevailing distrust of white people ranging from students to administrators who often did not show Black students the courtesy so often shown to their white counterparts.

Summing Up

In conversations with alums both represented in this thesis and beyond, fond memories of Kendrick House seemed to arise more quickly than did conversations about the Urban Center. After the dust had settled around Kendrick House's desegregation, the Urban Center persisted for a time as the institutional home of the Black Studies program which would later be renamed the "Africana Studies" program to be more inclusive of the diaspora.¹¹⁹ Perhaps the Urban Center

was such a mundane part of Black student academic life at the time that its existence was not as distinct in their memories. Youthfully's mention of the shift that she noticed as an alum not only at Vassar but more broadly might point to perhaps why the community work of the Urban Center lost student interest and in the eyes of Bicentennial resituated on Vassar's campus. At the Urban Center students and faculty alike participated in classes, lectures, and cultural performances. The Center addressed what many Black students saw as the gap between Vassar and the Poughkeepsie community. It seemed this resolve to remain in close exchange with the community waned over the decade as the building faced diminished use over time. It was only in the wake of my interviews that I came understand that an active focus on the Urban Center as a distinct entity might actually be ground for a whole other research project with special attention paid to still living Vassar alums, instructors, and administrators who more heavily utilized the space.

Chapter 4: Student Resistance in The Wake

How long shall they kill our prophets while we stand aside and look?
-Bob Marley, Redemption Song

The rise of the Black Lives Matter Movement while I was at Vassar forced me to think about the linkages and contentions between Black Studies and Black student social movement today. While conversations that specifically engage the lived experiences had long been the purview of many activist groups and scholars it seemed to me in my early time at Vassar that explicit conversations on Black-related struggled to receive the national traction that they had in prior time periods which preceded my matriculation. When the time did come to think about

Black lives it seemed as if the coalitions at present could not adequately speak to what I would come to see as the constitutive nature of Anti-Black violence as a structuring force of American society. I had actively participated in some of the more well-known efforts of campus activism ranging from Campus Climate's demands¹²⁰ to the un-named organizing to respond to an April 30, 2014 incident where a group of young Black boys from the community had police called on them because they allegedly could not produce valid I.D's after an unnamed student had called Security on them while they were in the Library.

Tracing the Shift: Anti-Blackness as a Term

During the summer of 2013 when George Zimmerman had been acquitted of murder for murdering a young Black boy named Trayvon Martin. And the summer of 2014 we watched as Ferguson, Missouri had erupted in the wake of the shooting of a Black man named Michael Brown by a White officer named Darren Wilson. Or the case of Marissa Alexander the Black woman who was arrested and almost sentenced to prison for discharging a weapon during a domestic dispute. The precarious nature of Black life in and outside of the American Academy was dramatically palpable after this moment. These names, these case findings and their obvious inconsistencies stubbornly hung in the air impervious to our rigorous analytical tools. The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement started by 3 Black women: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi after the Ferguson shooting specifically impressed upon the utility of the term "AntiBlackness" to split the hair in how we talked about racism in society. There were racialized exclusions and violence that specifically targeted Black people and this moment caught many on campus unprepared.

Many people were afraid to participate in what was known as "Oppression Olympics", Oppression Olympics is a rhetorical strategy that someone may use to position the unique history

of one marginalized group's oppression to privilege it over another group's oppression. Essentially arguing "They/We suffered more than this other group." To participate in Oppression Olympics was to undermine the work of diverse multi-racial, intersectional coalition building. Still, the grammars of Anti-Blackness created small ruptures in this horizontal discourse because it called attention and gestured towards the originary histories of chattel enslavement which had created the condition of possibility for these terms and modes of being.

Thinking about Omi and Winant's racial formation theory from the vantage point of historical Anti-Black violence re-politicized me to think more about the limits and utilities of multi-racial coalitions. I was aided in this analysis by a 2003 interview titled "The Position of the Unthought" between Saidiya Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson. In the interview Wilderson starts off by talking about a text that Hartman had written prior, *Scenes of Subjection*. Especially when the text makes the strong case that there was not a big enough break from how things had been to "reposition the black body after Jubilee."¹²¹ More interestingly what the text does for Wilderson is that it resists becoming captive to multiculturalism which might place Black identity alongside all other racial identities as being targeted by the same type of racism that afflicts other racial groups.

As a scholar of educational studies whose explicit focus was on race discourse in higher education I wondered whether my political education on race and racism had done enough to address the unique histories of Black people as I began to learn more about the very unique history of Anti-Blackness in America. At once I had believed strongly in the power of multiculturalism to bring bodies into contact which might not normally have come into contact to create a synergy for social change. But on the other hand I also had to think explicitly about why there had to be a political project to do so. What had happened in history for this to be the mode

of address in the in the space of the university, how did Black people figure into these projects of inclusion in to the burgeoning new multiculturalism.

Hartman responds to Wilderson noting the difficulty one finds in trying to position the slave's body in the narrative mode. She struggles with the fact that for so long to talk about the African-derived body of the slave meant using moments of immense subjection like the whipping, sexual violence, and the public humiliation to create the space for their legibility. In facing this difficulty Hartman comes to understand that as a cultural historian she is narrating what she calls a "certain impossibility"¹²² one faces when they must speak about the lives of a multitude of people who were rendered voiceless save for a handful of narratives mediated by their free White contemporaries. This disturbed all projects of redress and atonement but made them all the more necessary.

I had to rethink the scope of the work that I had been doing as a Black student organizing and living in the wake of this impossibility. What did my push to make all students of color here and those yet-to-come feel more welcome at an institution which had excluded us for so long? Had someone not paid the price so we could come here and learn "like everybody else?" These questions pushed me to face the sheer, stubborn persistence of what bell hooks calls throughout her work "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy." Hooks mentions in a 1997 video series called "Cultural Criticism and Transformation" that she began to use the phrase to push listeners to think about how structures of domination interlocked to impact how people lived in society.¹²³ The radical revision of her time was the push to use the term white supremacy rather than racism. For hooks the employment of the term white supremacy did not signal a conversation solely about white people but rather a term that called all to think about and question the ways that we all were subsumed by the constructs of the white ideal in society. In a similar yet distinct way

Anti-Blackness served a similar purpose by way of calling us to think about the ways in which the Black body had continually been constructed as the ultimate opposite of the White contemporaries.¹²⁴

Conjuring Diversity as a Mini Administrator

What was the integrality of the diversity and inclusion labor that my friends of color and I had been so instrumental in performing? I remember joking with a friend at sometime during my early activism that I had become a “mini-administrator” fully aware of the current status of institutional policies as it pertained to issues of social identity. This was not a convergence I ever imagined as an activist who had and maintained deep critiques of the institution. Sara Ahmed offers a more formal name for this occupation in her text *To Be Included*. In her text the diversity practitioner is the administrator whose work it is to put “diversity into the organizational flow of things.”¹²⁵ The diversity practitioner is the one takes advantage of the socially reproductive aspect of the institution in a way that expands the prevailing notion of who and what ideas can be included.

As Ahmed notes “Diversity work is occupational: the aim of embedding diversity and equality requires occupying committees that structure the flow matter in organizations...”¹²⁶ It was rather challenging that I as student had come into such a role without being formally “hired” but in doing it anyways I became increasingly familiar with the function of my school’s administration. I became increasingly aware that its façade had many fractures and fault lines. In this work many of us had to become the salespeople for the vision of our inclusion or increased beyond solely our admission. We had to understand how the institution viewed itself and the work that it had already committed to doing to stretch that commitment to suit our goals. For one the Mission Statement became a strong political “supports a high standard of engagement in

teaching and learning, scholarship and artistic endeavor; a broad and deep curriculum; a community diverse in background and experience; and a residential campus that fosters a learning community.”¹²⁷ We thought if we could get the institution to better understand the gravity of its own commitment that perhaps it might learn to better appreciate the many free diversity workshops, events, lectures and informal moments of education that we often performed for the white majority of the campus.

After all this I wondered what we were demanding to be incorporated into? And for me as a Black student, was it ethical for me to encourage Black students to attend the school? Moreover as a Black student with this early interest in making the institutional space more welcoming to people of color I recall the anxieties that attended the interplay between statistics and perceptions of diversity. Or the ways in which a properly timed campus event with enough pull could convince a group of visiting students of color the perception that the school was the Black Mecca that Tanehisi Coates speaks of in *Between the World and Me*. On one side of the debate that formed some students (which I will call the *Pessimists*) thought that we should no longer encourage young Black prospective students to attend the school and if they simply had to attend we should give them the un-adulterated Truth of the institution and on the other side of the debate other students argued that it would be selfish to offer young students such a crushing accounting of racism at the school which might convince these prospective students that this institution was uniquely more racist than other predominantly white peer institutions. The latter group held up the importance and heavy social meaning of the struggles that had long been fought before us like the aforementioned 1969 Main Takeover where a group of Black women commandeered a building to make Vassar more hospitable for all Black students yet to come. Such a negative appraisal of the institution in the present they felt would turn one’s back on the

project of making Vassar more Black and hence more welcoming to students. (which I will call the Legacies) The Legacies held onto an ideal yet-to-come future Black demographic focal point which none of the activism that I could remember occurring on campus in my time had ever arisen to profoundly address. Invisible in these discussions was the cold numbers of how the amount of Black admitted students at the school had fluctuated and over time been outpaced by racial groups which would begin to attend the school in larger numbers in the wake of that fabled 1969 Takeover. Statements distinguishing affinity spaces for events like “This event is for Black students only” or “This event is open to people of all identities” took on increased usage as the *Pessimists*, the *Legacies* and all those in between passionately debated and speculatively planned their future labor for the institution as they negotiated their responsibility to past moments of uncompensated Black student labor.

There is one thing that the *Pessimists* and the *Legacies* had in common, as much as both groups held deep critiques of the institution, none of them had resigned to drop out. Many were and are for better or worse still committed to completing their education at the institution. Even in our differences we had tacitly agreed had to be “in but not of” the institution. W.E.B. Dubois experienced a similar resignation about his time at Harvard University when he says “I was in Harvard, but not of it, and realized all the irony of my singing ‘Fair Harvard.’ I sang it because I liked the music, and not from any pride in the pilgrims.”¹²⁸ This assertion of being “in but not of” put forth by many progressive academics animated my thinking of what such a space “in but not of” the institution would look like.

Politics of Refusal

In *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* analyzes the relationship of the university to matters of labor and dissent. Moten and Harney position a politics of refusing the “call to order”¹²⁹ as an ethical mode of address to the everyday issues of the university. The authors argue that today academics are called to “worry about the university”¹³⁰ and to concern themselves with revising the university form. All of these discussions pertaining revision occur out in the open above the undercommons, they say. I understand inhabiting the undercommons as a means of truly being “in but not of” the university. The undercommons of the university is beneath official recognition is where the transgressing intellectual is destined to be in the “maroon community of the university, into the undercommons of enlightenment, where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong.”¹³¹ The undercommons is the ever-present space which exists beneath or above the recognized university form in a metaphysical space of exchange. Moten and Harney argue that the only ethical relationship to those undercommoners oriented towards interacting with the institution is a relationship in which one takes what one can get to generate what the university will not because it is solely interested in its own perpetuation. The university can be both staging ground and obstruction to address the predicaments of society like racism or the alienation from true social meaning. The doubleness of the space relates to the ever-present ambiguity of the Black student’s place within the institutional form. Black life as it is lived exceeds the frame which it is relegated to as “the diversity” or as the appropriate “token.” This is absolutely necessary to the continuation of the university but it is the labor which is most under recognized. It is because of this fact that the subversive intellectual in collective work “with and for” others holds the key to completely reimagining nature of study even against the better judgment of those responsible for the maintenance of the status quo.

Bell hooks explores the capacity of the intellectual to transgress and be subversive in her text *Teaching to Transgress* to study with and for one another. The text she recalls that before desegregation she often attended schools where the educators and administrators were Black people who saw teaching as a duty. After desegregation, the schools she attended were often places that did not allow students of marginal groups to actually develop a pride in their own histories and to think freely about concepts.¹³² Hooks argues that the teacher must actually value their students and their students must actually feel valued by those they are participating in study with.¹³³ To teach and learn to transgress means take seriously the capacity of education to be a place for freedom to be practiced even if that was not its original or ongoing mandate.

The expectation of the transgressing intellectual is that they must answer this call to critique and demand of the university in manageable and always intelligible ways. This is the call to order that they suggest the intellectual refuse.¹³⁴ They use the example of the teacher who enters a classroom filled with students mingling and as he/she/they do so it causes the room to hush to prepare for the instruction. Without knowing it or not his/her/their have operated as a tool of governance interdicting upon the organizing and studying that students were doing before his/her/their class even began.¹³⁵ Communities of transgressive intellectuals should approach academic study and the generation of knowledge with an orientation that is “with and for one another.” For the designated teacher, teaching “with and for” actually means studying with the students rather than presenting what you know as the Knowledge.

In my study I struggled with the hope inherent to studying “with and for” as an ethical affirmative orientation to academic labor. In many conversations about Anti-Blackness and historical exclusion I have noticed two tendencies 1. To get so caught up recounting how bad a situation is that the possibility of a shift is occluded by pessimism. 2. To get so caught up in the

hope for change that one does not allow themselves to fully apprehend the severity of a problem. In a discussion with a Black woman peer of mine who attends Princeton University on a similar conversation about institutional change, she said abruptly in the conversation “Sometimes you have to move in silence.” Without knowing it, she was suggesting a way of moving between those 2 tensions I raise. Addressing both in a clandestine if not fugitive way. Refusing to be called into a recognizable Manichean clash between Good vs. Evil. She wanted to survive the struggle and her chosen modality was patient activity in silence.

Chapter 5: Afterlives in Academia

When you come here, you have to know who you are and where you are first.
–Unnamed Colleague

Throughout my study I was internally guided by the question of what impact the legacy of slavery had on the higher education of free Black people who found themselves in spaces like Vassar College as they tried to answer the biggest questions that face society. I kept coming back to the image of the Maroon, the fugitive or better phrased the re-instantiation of what Claudia Rankine calls the “ ‘historical-self’ and the ‘self-self’ ” in *Citizen: An American Lyric*.¹³⁶ I understand the historical self as the self borne out of historical entanglement and the self-self as the subjectivity one crafts based on their present situation. Sometimes one can live as if one self does not exist but both make the other possible. My self-self was an upwardly mobile Black student while my historical self could be any permutation of the unfreedom that my ancestors had experienced. Whether I wanted to or not I was confronted time and time again by these themes as I became increasingly aware of the expectations that history presented to me as a Black body working and studying in the college space even more so as a student of Black

Studies also known as Africana Studies.¹³⁷ In this chapter I will consider the certain aspects of the politics of Black study in the afterlife of slavery and the place of the maroon in the institutional form.

inDebtedness

I began thinking about debt's intelligibility and its impact on one's speculative imagination after a trip to Berlin, Germany, I had just seen the glistening Reichstag, which is the capital building of the city and my host, Mike. He and I were walking towards a notable piece of the Berlin Wall which was still intact. We had seen something which had prompted us to have a short haphazard conversation about debt. My host performed the usual and expected hand-wringing stating his concerns about debt and how lots of debt made him feel. Anxious, bogged down, hopeless. I listened and nodded empathizing with his description as well as what his words made me think about. In the West we are taught from an early age to feel anxiety about debts and to feel anxiety until we have paid debts. I asked Mike to consider the United State's national debt which hovers around \$ 19.2 trillion. I asked him if he could fathom how much a trillion of anything was. He hesitated. I used the unintelligibility of a trillion things as a symbol to say that after a point debt, which today I would call a "call to order" to be anxious and to perform austerity. Yet there were things that big governments like the United States and prestigious colleges and universities perpetually spent money on in the face of debt to plan for a future which they believed lay before them. Similarly, Black students who enter HWIs are made to feel indebted to the institution for including them and the austerity they perform is often by way of being silent and compliant in the face of ongoing institutional discrimination and microaggression. In its grandiose nature, debt loses value because it can no longer be fathomed

by anyone, not even those who are tasked with tracking it.

Harney ponders whether debt which they define as the unpaid price could be a principle of elaboration.¹³⁸ For him, debt is something which one “remembers and forgets.”¹³⁹ It’s the unofficial indebtedness you might owe to someone or something which is now inseparable from who you are. Can debt rest within the imprecise grey area of mutual repayment? I think so, I imagine managing debt as showing the willingness to spot someone in the hopes that they will spot you later and then allow you to spot them so on and so forth. There’s an inherent sociality to thinking about debt in this way. Still, Moten recognizes that there are some debts that simply “must be paid” in the reparatory sense of historical inequality. What of the debt that many elite white universities of higher education owe to Black people whose enslavement they historically depended on in the form of acknowledgement and reparation? Still, Moten takes issue with the use of the notion of reparation as a way to renegotiate debt because he believes what is being repaired is beyond fixing. Ultimately, “These debts can’t be repaired. The only thing we can do is tear this shit down completely and build something new” Moten states. For him, a complete transformation of the system is needed to address the question of historical reparation.¹⁴⁰

Today conversations on reparations are as lively as ever. In Tanehisi Coates’ 2014 piece called “The Case for Reparations” is the most recent and most well-known into the politics of reparations which offers a historical overview of the challenges that Black people in the United States have faced as they attempted to build wealth after the end of the Civil War which ended in 1865. He details the ways in which Black people who stayed in the South were forced into sharecropping to make a living and had little say over how much they actually received from the harvest of the land. On the other hand, Black people who moved up North where those who could find work were barred from receiving affordable mortgages to buy homes and raise their

families in new neighborhoods. There were also attempts to bar Black families who sought to send their children to college as a 1943 National Association of Real Estate Boards brochure orders that an undesirable might be “undesirables might include madams, bootleggers, gangsters—and ‘a colored man of means who was giving his children a college education and thought they were entitled to live among whites.’” At every turn in American history there was a unique way in which Black people were barred from benefiting from social mobility. The debt owed to Black people Coates says haunts us and thus it is something we must address.

Professor of Political Science, Adolph Reed thinks contrarily and has critiqued the call for reparations multiple times throughout his work. The demands or reparations put forth by Black Lives Matter are contrary to what should be the attempts to create solidarity among people fighting for redistribution of wealth. Reparations on these terms would become more about catharsis than actual concrete change. The call for reparations must be read as a “class program.”¹⁴¹ Reparations for Black people would in Reed’s estimation essentially go the way affirmative action has towards ineffectuality. He also takes issue with what has been called the “damage thesis”¹⁴² which argues that slavery has left such an indelible pathological mark on Black people that their notion of being a people must be restored by a variety of projects such as the public acknowledgement of the impact of slavery which he thinks would only go so far. And further Reed questions who of the Black diaspora would be eligible for this package of reparations, victims from other tragedies like Holocaust as well as Nazi internment were identifiable. If anything perhaps, the call for reparations which gave birth to Western modernity raises a more fundamental question about the workings of capitalism and the ways in which it has historically been built on enslaved or undercompensated labor.¹⁴³ This more broad analysis, in my opinion, more or less side-steps the theoretical and practical difficulties of addressing the harms of slavery

in favor of a more pragmatic outlook on redressing the nature of capitalism.

Trauma-based Politics

Robyn D.G. Kelley a debate on the Boston Review website entitled “Black Study, Black Struggle” opening with the assertion that “ The university is not an engine of social transformation. Activism is.” In 2015 college campuses around the country were in an uproar for a variety of different issues relating to how their institutions had or had not addressed institutional racism. Most notably at University of Missouri (Mizzou for short) where according to Jamil Smith in his piece “Black Protesters Have Reinvigorated Campus Activism” the Mizzou’s football team went on strike to force the University’s system president Tom Wolfe’s resignation from the position due to to his “lackadaisical response to racism, sexism, and other bigotry on campus.” The strike of these football players compounded upon the hunger strike that a Black graduate student had embarked on after the University’s weak response to a history of racism on campus including the insufficient response to a swastika being drawn in human feces on the side of a residential building.¹⁴⁴

I argue that racial battle fatigue especially when experienced by Black students is the embodiment of the afterlife of slavery. There are times at Vassar where you may suddenly be struck by the school’s history and age as you walk through campus and find that in every direction you look the buildings you see are all from the 19th century built or that a room looks as if it has not been touched in over 100 years with faces of wealthy White benefactors on every wall regardless of their histories of perpetuating Anti-Black violence. Every where you look you are reminded who paid to make the school possible. Today, many historically white institutions of higher education are written extensively about as spaces of subjection and daily micro-aggression. Mark S. Giles refers to professional life within the American institution of higher

education as working “behind enemy lines.”¹⁴⁵ According to Giles, these institutions constitute sites where students of color and African American students more broadly must always be “on-guard” and prepared for the next racially discriminatory slight which may come at any moment.¹⁴⁶ While others might rightfully question their institution of higher education being called sites of the “enemy” there is still a rich archive of testimony today which employs the term “race battle fatigue” to talk about the exhaustion one feels from the everyday matter of being a target of racism. As Giles defines according to William A. Smith, race battle fatigue is a “useful framework for analyzing the constant stress from daily racism that people of color face, on and off campus.” RBF as it is referred to in shorthand by Giles also can be used as a framework to understanding collective trauma inflicted upon multiple racialized individuals.¹⁴⁷ Unsurprisingly the tension placed on multiple racialized individuals also weighs heavily on institutional entities like Black Studies programs as well as program houses like Kendrick House.¹⁴⁸

With this vexation at the fore front of the minds of many Black students who come into their political consciousness on college campuses, it seems that the technological uniqueness of the moment has created a political activism organized around “personal trauma.”¹⁴⁹ He blames this formation on the fact that today, images and materials displaying the rupturing and abuse of Black bodies are so widely accessible and repeatedly accounted. I was struck by the milieu of these moments as I spoke to a friend after a lecture given by Claudia Rankine at my school on April 26, 2016. Towards the end of the lecture she shared a video entitled Situation 8 that she narrated. Throughout the video iconic moments of the aforementioned and widely publicized instances of violence are shown interspersed with images of crowds of people of all races.¹⁵⁰ As I retold the reactions to the video by the audience I realize I have slowly forgotten the names of the victims because so many more have happened after them. I am caught off guard by this

forgetfulness and I must revert to explaining what happens in each event of violence, my voice trails off with the images still flashing in my head. In this moment I am struck by a Hartman-esque failure to fully narrate the scenes of subjection that had saturated the media only months before. In the first page of *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman positions a now-famous refusal to reproduce Frederick Douglass' account of the beating of his Aunt Hester because Hartman seeks to:

call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's savaged body. Rather than inciting indignation, too often they immure us to pain by the virtue of their familiarity.¹⁵¹

While Kelley cites Henry Giroux who calls this consumption of violence “an addiction,” to stage a similar refusal to accept trauma as the political center of activism, I look to Hartman because her framing captures not only the addictive nature of recounting moments of violence but even more importantly she models an ethical management of Anti-Black spectacles of violence. Still, I think Rankine's sharing of the film in all its horror operates with the unique awareness that such violence immures us but still incites something within many of us who are the onlookers. That something is what she calls “recognition” that even as society has so often reduced Black people to superfluous, there is still some sort of empathic recognition of these high crimes against Black flesh. This is the challenges forwarded by trauma in activism. As a remedy or a means of addressing this ethical and political quagmire, Kelley suggests understanding the ways in which trauma-focused politics can be used to manage bodies while side-stepping the responsibility to participate in structural changes which actually address the ways in

which that university participates in traumatizing its students.¹⁵²

Today on spaces of social media exchange like Facebook and Tumblr which are host to a vast array of conversations there has been a growing sentiment that perhaps, yes the confessional mode that activists have turned to over time may actually have its limits. Whenever a Black person is shot and it receives media attention these social media outlets are flooded with videos, think pieces, and musings on the topic which almost numbs the senses in their magnitude. Such moments often compel people with histories of trauma to share their narratives for the sake of pushing forward a conversation on the persistence of Anti-Black violence. This raises the question of whether such autoethnographic modes like the ones raised above and even the one that I have used obscure rather than elucidate the nature of the very issue they seek to address.

Alternate Institutionalisms

After 4 years I think the most liberating thing that I learned was that there were demands that I staged of the institution which it simply could never adequately respond to. Thus my expectations of what could be possible could not end at what they were capable of doing for me and other students of historically marginalized identities. After demanding so much from the institution for so long I had to, much like Kelley argues for, had to conceptualize myself as simply more than someone who perhaps may have been harmed by institutional racism and to understand the complexity of my own agency. I knew that I could not turn to a boot-straps individualistic mode of being but there were imaginative ways which I could transgress in and through my study with others.¹⁵³

Over 50 years after my ancestors had entered places like Vassar I had to use my

scholarship to chart beyond thinking of the institutional form beyond the physicality of the HWIs that many of Black students live and learn in. I think the conundrums of diversity and inclusion call for a new type of post-institutional formation which channels the logics of the Undercommons. A type of formation which includes the unrecognized and informal Black institutions which can and do both inhabit HWIs but simply do not end at their physical nor intellectual borders. Formalization is not always the goal of these institutions, which Ashon Crawley by way of Walter D. Mignolo's notion of the "otherwise" are inherently "otherwise" institutions. According to Crawley the otherwise is the site of what he calls "irreducible possibility."¹⁵⁴ These otherwise institutions do not need nor do they demand a charter to colonize a new space but they live and are rooted in the silence and the activity of the study of the transgressive intellectual. On the contrary they sporadically reclaim space because they know the price has long been paid.

Neil Roberts argues that marronage "provides a critique of the operations of the state form."¹⁵⁵ Marronage lived out in the otherwise institution enables a critique of the institutional form par excellence. The otherwise institution doesn't aim to fix the institution it has erupted from or existed alongside even if fixes may occur. It's that spooky learning at a distance. It's the pocket of people who realize the limits of the formal space and are creating and imagining beyond, proclaiming things which don't seem possible but things which must be done. The kind of institutionalism that I am thinking about coalesces, congeals, disappears and reappears under sustained observation which may point to an even more radical mode of *being in but not of* of the University.

Conclusion

“In any given year we are living in all the years.”-Hortense Spillers

As I have explored throughout the prior five chapters, the historical relationship of Black people at American institutions of higher education has been and will continue to be a long, complicated saga. Specifically, at Vassar where the focus of my study was on how Black students responded to the rise of the Black Studies Movement and inhabited the space in varying and enlightening ways. In Chapter 1, I performed a historical accounting of 3 key moments which expressed distinct shifts in the ways institutions of higher education approached Black people. This exercise of going back and re-reading histories which I thought I knew allowed me to understand certain historical dynamics like accommodationism in a greater context. In Chapter 2, I zoomed in and looked specifically at how Vassar historically addressed the integration of Black people and traced that moment all the way to the creation of Kendrick House--the Afro-American Cultural Center, Black Studies as well as the Urban Center. In Chapter 3, I analyzed three interviews of alums who attended Vassar around or near 1969, during the window of time that the Main Takeover occurred. This allowed me to see how Black students at the time were thinking about their place at Vassar and the greater political forces which had led them to the school. In Chapter 4, I shifted towards looking at the challenges of student resistance today in the wake of the Black Studies Movement and the activism of students like the alums I interviewed and their counterparts. In this space I thought about and analyzed the limitations of the ways that student activists have come to organize around and against Anti-Blackness. And lastly in Chapter 5 I positioned an analysis heavily influenced by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's text *The Undercommons* to think and move towards an institutional formation which

diverges from the trajectory of diversity and inclusion efforts of the last century. In this space I acknowledge that the distinct historical context, while heavily influenced by the past which we are always living, demands a distinct way of thinking about how to be apart of a community of study that is not solely dedicated to fixing the prevailing institutional form.

As I looked back at actual historical texts about the moment, I realized how historical legacy and myth oscillated within memory. The almost larger-than-life braggadocio way in which students today remembered the Main Takeover of 1969 almost always occluded the nuance of the women who actually participated in it. Another aspect that I realized that students today lose in conversations about the Takeover is that Vassar women weren't the only Black students in 1969 taking over buildings and making radical demands. This was apart of the Black Studies Movement. From my reading these women were not trying to destroy the school, they were making important demands of the school to rethink who it had committed to serve. In their fight for a Black residential space, they understood that total and unconditional inclusion was not the extent of their activism. In many ways it was imaginative and transgressive.

Often the more I read into the historical record, the more it seemed like all the possible paths I could have taken multiplied before me which showed the rich possibility of researching these moments along side the conundrums of the present. What I think matters is that these moments did happen and were formative to these institutions with troubling pasts that many of us still place so much value on for access to higher paying jobs, better second chances, and opportunities to live the life of the mind if only for an instant. A majority of us (Black students) will undoubtedly go off into the world with the indelible mark left on us by places like Vassar and when a student emails us out of the blue asking for an interview we will have to reconfigure

the sliver of Vassar that we experienced. We will have to narrate the movements that mattered to us and confront the histories which entangle us all at once.

Interview Questions varied depending on the discussion that I had with the alum and how responsive they were to earlier prompts in the session, still these were the most common questions asked among the interviews:

State your Name, major, and graduation year

Why did you choose to attend Vassar?

What organizations were you involved with on campus during your time here?

What was the campus' political scene like?

What was your experience with Kendrick House?

What was the role of White and nonBlack Allies in your experience at Vassar?

Vassar's impact on you?

VASSAR COLLEGE
Institutional Review Board

Audio/Video Recording Release Form

Research title Stealing a Way: Exploring Liminal Institutionalism

Primary Investigator Prof. Tyrone Simpson

Student Researcher(s) Alejandro

McGhee

As part of this project, I will be making audio or video recordings of you during your participation in the research. Please indicate what uses of these audio/video recordings you are willing to permit, by putting your initials next to the uses you agree to, and signing the form at the end. This choice is completely up to you. I will only use the audio/videotapes in ways that you agree to. In any use of the tapes, you will not be identified by name.

1. _____ The audio/video recordings can be studied by the research team for use in the research project.

I have read the above descriptions and give my consent for the use of the audio/video recordings of me [my child] as indicated by my initials above. (You must be at least 18 years old to sign this form for yourself or your child.)

Printed Name _____

Address _____

Signature _____

Date

¹ From this point on I will use historically white institution and HWI as a shorthand to speak to acknowledge the historical dimension of the majority white racial make-up that these institutions have had. Histories based on racial exclusion and discrimination to the benefit of white students.

² Tatum, Beverly Daniel. " *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?": and other conversations about race*. Basic Books, 2003.

³ Ibid., 55.

⁴ Ibid., 55.

⁵ I understand universalism as a philosophy which presumes an ideal that all others are expected to conform to.

⁶ Roberts, Neil. *Freedom as Marronage*. University of Chicago Press, 2015,4.

⁷ Ibid., 163.

⁸ I would be somewhat inaccurate if I said that Black intellectuals and their enslaved ancestors experience the same material or societal conditions, however the experiences of both groups as they pressed against the dominant social order of their time offers useful and generative ways of thinking of about the limits of freedom as it were. Yes, slavery as it had been known up until 1863 died, but its ghost lived on. The afterlife of slavery is the specter that pervades every moment of the Black intellectual's time in Academia whether they have the language to speak about it or not.

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¹¹ Geiger, Roger G. *The History of American Higher Education*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 2015, xv.

¹² Wilder, Craig Steven. *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*. Vol. 1st. New York, New York, 2013.

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¹⁴ Wilder, Craig Steven. *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*. Vol. 1st. New York, New York, 2013. 182

¹⁵ Ibid.,189.

¹⁶ Ibid., 189.

¹⁷ Ibid., 192.

¹⁸ Ibid., 192.

¹⁹ Ibid., 142-143.

²⁰ Ibid., 200.

²¹ Ibid., 201.

²² Fleming, John. *The Lengthening Shadow of Slavery: A Historical Justification for Affirmative Action for Blacks in Higher Education*. Washington, D.C.: Published for ISEP by Howard University Press, 1976. 1

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²⁶ Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of subjection: Terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America*. Oxford University Press, 1997, 66.

²⁷ Fleming, John. *The Lengthening Shadow of Slavery: A Historical Justification for Affirmative Action for Blacks in Higher Education*. Washington, D.C.: Published for ISEP by Howard University Press, 1976, 20/

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²⁹ Fleming, John. *The Lengthening Shadow of Slavery: A Historical Justification for Affirmative Action for Blacks in Higher Education*. Washington, D.C.: Published for ISEP by Howard University Press, 1976, 23.

³⁰ Banks, William M. *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996, 37.

³¹ Banks, William M. *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996. 38

³² Ibid., 42.

³³ Ibid., 42.

³⁴ Croom, Dan, and Antione Alston. "The Problem of Agricultural and Industrial Education for African Americans: A Historical Inquiry." *Journal of Agricultural Education JAE* 50, no. 3 (2009): 1-10

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- ³⁹ Dubois, W.E.B. "The Talented Tenth | Teaching American History." *Teaching American History*. September 1, 1903. Accessed October 18, 2015.
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- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 110.
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⁸⁰ Ibid.

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⁹⁰ Ibid,xx.

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- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 211.
- ¹⁰² In the article Seiter reconfigured the viral Twitter hashtag #OscarsoWhite which was started by a Black Twitter user named April Reign(@ReignOfApril). What started out as tongue-in-cheek reaction to the historical underrepresentation of people of color nominees exploded into a massive dialogue both online and offline about entertainment policies. This hashtag ignited an viewing boycott against the Oscars which created a space of dialogue within and beyond Black Twitter about how tokenizing the entertainment industry is.
- ¹⁰³ Seiter, Alessandra. "#FerryHouseSoWhite: An In-Depth Look at Whiteness in Ferry House." *Boilerplate Magazine*. September 06, 2015. Accessed January 18, 2016. <http://boilerplatemagazine.com/?p=1334>.
- ¹⁰⁴ Seiter's re-counting of Ferry's history allows us to situate Kendrick House within a constellation by the virtue of its negation from campus as the first and last officially sanctioned "Black House" at Vassar
- ¹⁰⁶ To maintain the privacy of all those interviewed, all were asked to provide a pseudonym.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ms.Storm. Interview by Alejandro McGhee. Personal Interview. March 29, 2016
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*,
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*,
- ¹¹⁰ Personal Interview with Youthfully, 2015.
- ¹¹¹ Gittell, Marilyn. "Decentralization and citizen participation in education." *Public Administration Review* 32 (1972): 675-676.

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- ¹¹² Youthfully. Interview by Alejandro McGhee. Personal Interview. March 29, 2016.
- ¹¹³ Youthfully. Interview by Alejandro McGhee. Personal Interview. March 29, 2016.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁶ Bicentennial, Interview by Alejandro McGhee. Personal Interview. March 10, 2016.
- ¹¹⁷ Davé, Shivani, and Priya Nair. "Walking While Not Black: An Account of Vassar's Approval of Violent Silencing." *The Miscellany News RSS*. December 03, 2014. Accessed April 28, 2016.
- ¹¹⁸ Bicentennial. Interview by Alejandro McGhee. Personal Interview. March 10, 2016.
- ¹¹⁹ Throughout this text I use Black Studies and Africana Studies interchangeably. I am cognizant of the distinctions made between them throughout time but for the purpose of the discussion I think of them as similar enough disciplinary traditions that this conflation may hopefully be permissible.
- ¹²⁰ "Our Demands." *Campus Climate* (blog), April 2, 2013. Accessed April 19, 2016. <https://vccampusclimate.wordpress.com/our-demands/>.
- ¹²¹ Hartman, Saidiya V., and Frank B. Wilderson. "The position of the unthought." *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003), 183.
- ¹²² Hartman, Saidiya V., and Frank B. Wilderson. "The position of the unthought." *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003), 184.
- ¹²³ Hooks, Bell. "Bell Hooks: Cultural Criticism & Transformation." YouTube. October 03, 2006. Accessed April 19, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQUuHFKP-9s>.
- ¹²⁴ Hartman, Saidiya V., and Frank B. Wilderson. "The position of the unthought." *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003), 183-184.
- ¹²⁵ Ahmed, Sara. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012, 28.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid.
- ¹²⁷ "Mission Statement." Mission Statement. May 2012. Accessed April 19, 2016. <http://collegerelations.vassar.edu/missionstatement/>.
- ¹²⁸ DuBois, William Edward Burghardt. "A Negro Student at Harvard at the End of the 19th Century." *The Massachusetts Review* 1, no. 3 (1960), 439-458.
- ¹²⁹ Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The undercommons: Fugitive planning & black study*. 2013,26.
- ¹³⁰ Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The undercommons: Fugitive planning & black study*. 2013,26.
- ¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 125-148

¹³³ Hooks, Bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994.8

¹³⁴ Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The undercommons: Fugitive planning & black study*. 2013.125-126,

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press,2014, 14.

¹³⁷ In this discussion I have intentionally conflated the terms “University” and “college” to talk about the same institutional forms of post-secondary education.

¹³⁸ Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The undercommons: Fugitive planning & black study*. 2013.150

¹³⁹ Ibid., 65-66.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.,152.

¹⁴¹ Reed, Adolph. "Adolph Reed on Sanders, Coates, and Reparations." Interview by Doug Henwood. *Naked Capitalism*. January 21, 2016. Accessed April 27, 2016.

¹⁴² Ibid.,

¹⁴³ Reed, Adolph. "The Case Against Reparations." *Nonsiteorg* RSS. February 11, 2016. Accessed April 27, 2016.

¹⁴⁴ Miller, Michael E. "Black Grad Student on Hunger Strike in Mo. after Swastika Drawn with Human Feces." *Washington Post*. November 6, 2015. Accessed April 26, 2016.

¹⁴⁵ Smith, William A. *Racial battle fatigue in higher education: Exposing the myth of post-racial America*. Edited by Kenneth Fasching-Varner, Katrice A. Albert, Roland W. Mitchell, and Chaunda Allen. Rowman & Littlefield. 2014, 169, 173.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 170

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 169-170

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 176

¹⁴⁹ Kelley, Robyn D.G. "Black Study, Black Struggle." *The Boston Review*. March 7, 2016. Accessed April 26, 2016. <http://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle>.

¹⁵⁰ Rankine, Claudia, and John Lucas. "Situation 8." *Vimeo*. Accessed April 27, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/152362755>.

¹⁵¹ Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of subjection: Terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America*. Oxford University Press, 1997, 66.

¹⁵² Kelley, Robyn D.G. "Black Study, Black Struggle." *The Boston Review*. March 7, 2016. Accessed April 26, 2016. <http://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle>.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Crawley, Ashon. "Against the Normative World." Interview by Sofia Samatar. *The New Inquiry*. April 9, 2015. Accessed April 28, 2016.

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