

# Black Studies Journal Assessment: Two Possibilities

by

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## Abstract

A problem in Black Studies research is that important journals in the field are not evaluated by standard journal ranking systems. Because the opportunity is limited in being able to publish in the field of Black Studies, there has always been an effort on the part of Blacks to start their own journals. Therefore the ideas of credibility and trustworthiness are inextricably linked to Black Studies journals. This article focuses on two approaches for creating evaluative systems for these journals. The first approach takes “academic excellence and social responsibility,” the defining tenets of the 1970s Black Studies movement, as the basis for investigating the academic journals in Black Studies. The second approach proposes to measure Black Studies journals impact in a manner comparable to the assessments used to rank mainstream disciplinary journals.

## Introduction

Because researchers are often advised to publish in high quality journals, it is not surprising that prospective authors would inquire about the relative importance of particular Black Studies journals. The reputational value ascribed to a given scholarly journal is transferable. Such prestige is transferable to individuals, particularly when under tenure review by tenure committees. They are transferable as well to universities and colleges when comparative rankings among peer institutions are at issue.<sup>1</sup> A mainstay for data about the impact and prestige of scholarship is the Web of Science, a highly respected citation research tool available from the Thomson Reuters Company. It is used to search scholarly articles in over 10,000 of the highest impact, well-regarded journals worldwide. Included within the Web of Science are the *Journal Citation Reports*.<sup>2</sup> By compiling an articles' cited references, the *Journal Citation Reports* help to measure research influence and impact and shows the relationship between citing and cited journals.

A problem confronting Black Studies researchers is that many of the relevant journals in the field are omitted from the standard journal ranking systems. As concluded in a recent study on the issue, “When librarians assist black studies faculty in collecting data from *Web of Science* to support promotion or tenure review, they should caution faculty that if they have not published in *Journal of Black Studies*, *The Black Scholar*, *Race & Class*, or some other journal in a related field that is covered by *Web of Science*, it will be difficult to show impact in their field using *Web of Science*.”<sup>3</sup> The focus of this article is on two unique avenues that can be followed to create a journal ranking system for Black Studies.

Before proceeding a word about terminology is in order. Throughout this article the term “Black Studies” is used. More than 80% of institutions that grant degrees in Black Studies (258 of 311) have names that connect with the African Diaspora. These include African American or Afro-American (32%), Africana (20%), African and African American (14%), Black (12%), Pan African (2%), African (2%), Africology (1%).<sup>4</sup> The terms are used here interchangeably. The Black Studies journals considered in this article are primarily about the African American experience or Africans in the diaspora. The latter are limited to journals such as the *International Journal of Africana Studies*, *Journal of Pan African Studies*, *Palara*, *Race & Class*, *Transition*, and so on.

The first of the two proposals is an unpublished report written by Abdul Alkalimat for the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The report is called “The Academic Journals of Black Studies: A Preliminary Report,” hereafter referred to as the *Alkalimat report*. Its validation is based on previous work conducted by Alkalimat to determine valued journals in the field, *the expert opinion* of other Black Studies scholars requested to make recommendations, and library holdings at the Afro-American Bibliographic Unit of the University Library. The report also offers a rudimentary outline of Black Studies journal evaluation based on various features of the journals themselves. Its purpose is to identify the most important and current Black Studies journals available. The report directs one to specific Black Studies journals for the sole purpose of helping people in the field decide where to publish. It serves to channel research and publication in the same direction so that everyone in the field can literally be on the same page.

The second proposal is an email memorandum distributed to the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Pan African Studies*. It is entitled “JPAS: Cited Half-Life, Impact Factor, Article Influence, Eigenfactor Score, Afrofactor/Afrifactor” and was written by Itibari M. Zulu, the journal’s Senior Editor. Hereafter the email will be referred to as the *Zulu memorandum*. The upshot of the memorandum is that there should be journal assessment tools for Black Studies comparable to the standard tools used to produce the *Journal Citation Reports*.<sup>4</sup> The latter use standard journal measures, the Impact Factor and Eigenfactor. In the memorandum Zulu coins the phrase Afrofactor/Afrifactor to place an emphasis on the centrality of Black Studies journals in the work of Black Studies scholars. He construes the Afrofactor/Afrifactor as a robust measure of a journal’s impact that reflects how frequently the average Black Studies researcher makes use of particular Black Studies journals.

## Background

### The Alkalimat Report

Rather than select all relevant journals used for Black Studies research and publication, which includes disciplinary journals from other fields, the selection of journals in the *Alkalimat report* are limited to Black Studies journals. This accords with a principle first presented at a 1977 Black Studies conference held at the University of California at Santa Barbara “academic excellence and social responsibility” or, alternatively, “scholarship and activism.” The principle defines the Black Studies movement of the 1960s as well as provides the necessary groundwork for investigating the “current state of academic journals in Black Studies.” As stated in the *Alkalimat report*, “This slogan is the framework for the analysis of the 31 journals. It examines Black Studies academic journals relative to meritocracy (academic excellence) and to democracy (social responsibility).”<sup>5</sup>

Among the selection criteria employed to identify Black Studies journals are previous lists compiled by Alkalimat, journals housed at the office of the Afro-American bibliographer at the University Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and an assessment of journal importance based on the expert opinion of select Black Studies scholars. A tentative list was circulated to faculty affiliated with the African American Studies Program at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) to determine which journals were most important for Black Studies research. Other considerations for inclusion on the final list concerned whether the journals were staffed by or served an academic community, whether the focus was primarily on the African American experience, or whether the journal was published in the last two years. As of the December 2008 publication date of the *report* a total of 30 important Black Studies journals were identified.<sup>6</sup>

The 30 journals selected are grouped into three categories: disciplinary journals, cross-disciplinary journals, and special thematic journals. By definition disciplinary journals represent the academic field of Black Studies or the discipline itself. Seven of the 30 journals are disciplinary. As explained below, an eighth title has been shifted to another category. Cross-disciplinary journals focus on the field of Black Studies plus an additional academic discipline.<sup>7</sup> Seventeen of the 30 journals are cross-disciplinary. Special thematic journals are broader than any one discipline focus either thematically on the humanities or the social sciences. There are 6 journals in this group. Seventeen of the 30 journals are cross-disciplinary. The *Alkalimat report* includes the *African American Review* with seven other journals representing disciplinary journals. With a title change in 1992 from the *Black American Literature Forum*, however, the journal’s content is essentially unchanged. Its mission is to include literature, theatre, film, the visual arts, culture, poetry and fiction. So, the present study modifies Alkalimat’s classification slightly, shifting this one title from the group of disciplinary journals to the cross-disciplinary group.

In classifying and sorting out the 30 journals there are tacit indications that the rank and status of these journals may vary. There is some equivocation on this point. On the one hand, data that would help one to decide which journals are more prestigious are purposely omitted. By definition top-tier journals are widely read, highly regarded, and have relatively high manuscript rejection rates. However, a caveat in the report is that it “does not present data on the details of the peer review process, specifically rates of submission and acceptance.”<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, in a section of the report discussing the editors and editorial boards of Black Studies journals, three journals are singled out as among the top-tier in Black Studies. These are the *Black Scholar* edited by Robert Chrisman and Robert Allen, Molefi Asante’s *Journal of Black Studies*, and Charles Rowell’s *Callaloo: a Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters*. Thus, the report reads “We have to begin this section by calling attention to the three most senior editors of Black Studies academic journals. Each of these editorial giants has guided their respective journal from social movement to the top-tier of Black Studies academic journals: Robert Chrisman, Molefi Asante, and Charles Rowell.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition to linking “the most senior editors of Black Studies academic journals” with the “top-tier of Black Studies academic journals,” the report equates differences in journal quality with differences in the quality of the editorial staff. As asserted in the report: “Each editorial staff and board of editors has an academic identity, and we are arguing that who they are is what the journals are. They stand collectively as a definition of their respective journal.”<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, other than the three serials mentioned above, nothing more is said top-tier journals or second-tier Black Studies journals.

### **The Zulu Memorandum**

The *Zulu memorandum* offers an alternative vision for assessing the value of Black Studies journals. Beginning from an assumption that Black Studies journals and their assessment are marginalized by standard journal assessment tools, the memorandum proposes a way to measure Black Studies scholarly impact commensurate with the assessments of mainstream disciplinary journals. The memorandum itself is relatively brief and cursory in nature as email communiques often are. Accordingly, the procedure followed in this section will introduce significant excerpts from the memorandum and explicate the text.

*Should you or anyone wish to determine the ‘Impact Factor’ of JPAS, it is based on the ratio of the number of citations to the previous 2 years of the journal, divided by the number of articles in those years which essentially provides the average number of recent citations per article. An ‘Impact Factor’ is often used as a proxy for the relative importance of a journal within its field, and in theory, journals with higher impact factors are deemed to be more important than those with lower ‘Impact Factors’.*

*Now for those who may want to get detailed about the total importance of journals in Africology, I suggest that [you] use the 'Eigenfactor' as a model which rates journals by the number of incoming citations, with citations from highly ranked journals weighted to make a larger contribution than those from poorly ranked journals. (italics are mine, TW)*

Two passages are italicized above. The phrases “should you or anyone” and “for those who may want to get detailed” are references to Black Studies as a field and not to individual scholars. Interpreting them as references to individuals is misleading, leaving one with the impression that the two kinds of journal assessment for Black Studies journals, Impact Factor and Eigenfactor, are easily accessible. Nothing is further from the truth. To reiterate a point, Itibari M. Zulu is the Senior Editor of *JPAS, the Journal of Pan African Studies*. If obtaining the rankings for Black Studies journals were an easy matter, one expects that he simply would have presented them for *JPAS*. Instead he takes pains to explain the basis for such rankings.

Both the Impact Factor and Eigenfactor journal rankings are published annually in the *Journal Citation Reports*. Although Thomson Reuters publishes a yearly Science Edition and a Social Sciences Edition, tracking 8,539 and 3,080 journals, respectively, no edition is published for the arts and humanities. Subsequently, with the exception of a few journals, mostly cross-disciplinary ones in the social sciences, journal assessment metrics for Black Studies are non-existent.<sup>11</sup> The seven Black Studies journals currently covered by the *Journal Citation Reports* are the *Black Scholar*, *Journal of Black Psychology*, *Journal of Black Studies*, *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, *Journal of Negro Education*, *Review of Black Political Economy*, and *Souls*.

By way of further explanation, the word ‘Eigenfactor’ was first coined in 2008. According to one expert, at the “core of the Eigenfactor algorithm is eigenvector centrality and the impetus for developing the algorithm was impact factor. Together, these two terms began what I call Eigenfactor, the project.”<sup>12</sup> Eigenvector centrality makes use of citation networks to measure the importance of journals. The more citations a journal receives, especially from other well-connected journals, the more central the journal is in the network.<sup>13</sup>

Impact Factors and Eigenfactors are similar insofar as both calculate the number of citations a journal receives. Yet, there are distinctions. Impact Factor is calculated over a 2-year period while, given Eigenfactor’s 5-year time span, the average age of cited papers can be older. There is an advantage in this for disciplines whose articles take longer to begin receiving citations. While Impact Factor only counts citations received, Eigenfactor also takes account of the source of incoming citations. The total importance of a journal is measured in terms of its influence within a given citation network.

In addition, calculation of the Eigenfactor is more complicated than the simple one-to-one citing and cited links of Impact Factors.<sup>14</sup> The recursiveness of the Eigenfactor algorithm is described non-mathematically in terms of the frequency that an average researcher accesses a journal. There are a number of ways to think about the recursive calculations by which importance scores are determined. For our purposes, it is particularly useful to think about the importance scores coming from the result of a simple random process. ...How often does the researcher visit each journal? The researcher will frequently visit journals that are highly cited. The Eigenfactor score of a journal is the percentage of the time that the model researcher visits that journal in her walk through the library. So when we report that *Nature* had an Eigenfactor score of 2.0 in 2006, that means that two percent of the time, the model researcher would have been directed to *Nature*.<sup>15</sup>

It was mentioned earlier that the *Zulu memorandum* proposes an alternative to the *Journal Citation Reports*. The idea is to create an autonomous tool for determining the Impact factor and Eigenfactor scores of Black Studies journals. The concept of an Afrofactor/Afrifactor metric of journal assessment is introduced for this purpose. Pertinent excerpts from the *memorandum* that introduce this concept and its importance to the Black Studies community follow.

As a measure of importance, this Afrofactor or Afrifactor (terms I coined today, hence we would have to decide which term would be most appropriate) can score the total impact of a journal, and with all else equal, journals generating higher impact in Africology would have a larger Afrofactor or Afrifactor score.

Hence, the intent is to measure the importance to the community, by considering the origin or the incoming citations, and is thought to reflect how frequently an average researcher would access the content from a journal. ...In this way, an Afrofactor or Afrifactor can be thought of as being more robust than an 'Impact Factor' metric because [the Impact Factor] simply counts incoming citations without considering the significance of those citations, while an Afrofactor or Afrifactor score would be linked with the total citation count for journals in Africology.

Implicit in the phrase "to measure the importance to the community" is the idea that an annual Journal Black Studies Report would have a Black Studies organization as its host comparable to the Thomson Reuters organization hosting the *Journal Citation Reports*.

## Study Procedure

A subject search of four Black Studies scholarly journals published between 1990 and 2010 was performed in *Academic Search Complete*, a bibliographic and full-text periodicals database.<sup>16</sup> The four journals are the *Black Scholar*, the *Journal of Black Studies*, the *Western Journal of Black Studies*, and the *Journal of African American History*. The search resulted in 609 total article citations. Only the *Black Scholar* and the *Journal of Black Studies* had citations in the database for the full 20-year period. Citations for the *Western Journal of Black Studies* are from 1996 to 2010 and those for the *Journal of African American History* from 2002-2010. The *Black Scholar* accounted for 119 citations, the *Western Journal of Black Studies* accounted for 142, the *Journal of Black Studies* for 278, and the *Journal of African American History* for 70.

Two subsets of the above results were used for Table 2 and Table 3. For Table 2 fourteen percent (87 of 609) of the citations identified in the database search represent articles by authors who publish exclusively in Black Studies journals. Only the articles of authors who published two or more Black Studies articles are included. *Gephi*, an open-source network analysis and visualization software package, is used to develop a citation network in order to determine the eigenvector centrality scores of Black Studies journals. The resulting network graph comprised of 29 journals. For Table 3 thirteen percent (79 of 602) of the citations identified in the database search represent articles by authors who publish articles on the same topic in both Black Studies and non-Black Studies journals were selected. To identify this group of authors a second search limited to just the authors of our 609 citations was required. The second search yielded 79 authors who published comparable Black Studies material in 74 non-Black Studies journals.

To supplement the list of 30 journals identified in the *Alkalimat report*, several reference sources were searched to obtain subscription or circulation rates for journals. This data was used to ascribe numerical rankings to the journals. The particular reference sources consulted are the *Ulrich's Periodicals Directory 2005*. 43<sup>rd</sup> ed., *Standard Periodical Directory*. 32<sup>nd</sup> ed., and *Magazines for Libraries*. 19<sup>th</sup> ed.

## Results

Table 1 displays the three Black Studies journal categories of the *Alkalimat report*. These are supplemented with circulation/subscription data. Note that 23% (7 of 30 journals) do not have subscription data. It is unknown why the data was not reported to the relevant publisher trade organizations. Cross-disciplinary journals have higher circulation rates with 5 of 17 journals having 2,000 or more subscriptions. The circulation figures for disciplinary and special thematic journals are lower.

**Table 1. *Alkalimat report* Journals Ranked by Circulation**

<u>Disciplinary</u>	<u>Subscriptions</u>
1. Black Scholar	10,000 <sup>U</sup>
2. Phylon	2,200 <sup>U</sup>
3. Journal of Black Studies	900 <sup>U</sup>
4. Western Journal of Black Studies	600 <sup>U</sup>
5. Journal of African American Studies (Journal of African American Men)	400 <sup>M</sup>
6. International Journal of Africana Studies	No circ data
<u>Cross-disciplinary</u>	
7. Journal of African American History	7,000 <sup>S</sup>
8. International Review of African American Art	5,000 <sup>U</sup>
9. Journal of Black Psychology	2,600 <sup>U</sup>
10. CLA Journal	2,500 <sup>U</sup>
11. Journal of Negro Education	2,300 <sup>U</sup>
12. Transforming Anthropology	1,200 <sup>U</sup>
13. Negro Educational Review	1,000 <sup>U</sup>
14. Black Music Research Journal	808 <sup>U</sup>
15. Review of Black Political Economy	700 <sup>U</sup>
16. Afro-Americans in New York Life and History	700 <sup>U</sup>
17. National Black Law Journal	650 <sup>U</sup>
18. Afro-Hispanic Review	500 <sup>U</sup>
19. Obsidian III	500 <sup>U</sup>
20. Black Women, Gender & Families	400 <sup>S</sup>
21. Afro-Latin/American Research Association. PALARA	No circ data
22. Philosophia Africana	No circ data
23. National Political Science Review	No circ data
<u>Special Thematic</u>	
24. African American Review	3,770 <sup>U</sup>
25. Trotter Review	2,500 <sup>U</sup>
26. Du Bois Review	800 <sup>S</sup>
27. Callaloo: a Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters	719 <sup>S</sup>
28. Langston Hughes Review	300 <sup>U</sup>
29. Drumvoices Review	No circ data
30. Black Renaissance/Renaissance Noire	No circ data
31. Souls: a Critical Journal of Black Politics	No circ data



The figures listed above were taken from *Ulrich's Periodicals Directory 2005*. 43<sup>rd</sup> ed.; *The Standard Periodical Directory*. 32<sup>nd</sup> ed.; and Cheryl LaGuardia, ed. *Magazines for Libraries*. 19<sup>th</sup> ed. New Providence, NJ: ProQuest, 2010. All circulation figures used are approximate. Circulation is given only if provided by the publisher. The superscript <sup>U</sup> that follows circulation/subscription data indicates data found in *Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory*. The superscript <sup>S</sup> indicates subscription data found in the *Standard Periodical Directory*. Superscript <sup>M</sup> indicates data from Cheryl LaGuardia's *Magazines for Libraries*.

Table 2 lists 29 journals derived from 14% (87 of 609) of citations identified in the *Academic Search Complete* database. The authors of these articles published exclusively in Black Studies journals. Altogether the group of articles account for 284 citations to Black Studies journals. The journals are ranked according to their importance within the citation network. The higher the eigenvector centrality score, the more important the journal. Comparable to results from the *Alkalimat report* in Table 1, 43% (12 of 28) of the journals are cross-disciplinary. These are the *Journal of African American History*, *Journal of Black Psychology*, *Souls*, *African American Review*, *National Political Science Review*, *Black Perspective in Music*, *Du Bois Review*, *Callaloo*, *Afro-Hispanic Review*, *Afro-American Journal of Philosophy*, *Trotter Review*, and the *Review of Black Political Economy*.

**Table 2. Afrofactor/Afrifactor Rankings**

<u>Journals</u>	<u>Eigenvector Centrality</u>
1. Western Journal of Black Studies	1.0
2. Black Scholar	1.0
3. Journal of African American History	1.0
4. Journal of Black Studies	1.0
5. Phylon	1.0
6. Afro-American Studies	0.75
7. Journal of Black Psychology	0.75
8. Black World	0.75
9. Afrocentric Scholar	0.5
10. Journal of Pan African Studies	0.5
11. Souls: a Critical Journal of Black Politics	0.5
12. International Journal of Africana Studies	0.5
13. Journal of African American Studies	0.5
14. African American Review	0.5
15. National Political Science Review	0.5
16. Black Perspective in Music	0.5
17. Pan-African Journal	0.25
18. Du Bois Review	0.25
19. Callaloo	0.25
20. Contributions in Black Studies	0.25
21. Afro-Hispanic Review	0.25
22. Afro-American Journal of Philosophy	0.25
23. New England Journal of Black Studies	0.25
24. Trotter Institute Review	0.25
25. Griot	0.25
26. PASS: a Journal of the Black Experience and Pan-African Issues	0.25
27. First World	0.25
28. Review of Black Political Economy	0.25

Both the *Alkalimat report* and the *Zulu memorandum* focus on Black Studies journals. The documents suppose that only journals under the control of individuals and institutions associated with Black Studies are central to the study and teaching of Black Studies. As such the *Zulu memorandum* does not mention journals in other fields (History, Literature, Sociology, etc.) that publish relevant Black Studies content. In contrast, the *Alkalimat report* offers a caveat stating that while it “does not compare [Black Studies] journals with other mainstream journals,” other researchers are encouraged to pick up this thread.

Table 3 depicts 13% (79 of 609) of the citations from the Academic Search Complete database search. These represent articles by authors who have published on the same topic in both Black Studies and non-Black Studies journals. Representative titles from the non-Black Studies journals are *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, *Howard Journal of Communications*, *Journal of Social Psychology*, *Journal of Southern History*, *Journal of Women's History*, *Social Justice*, *Socialism & Democracy*, and *Urban Education*. Seventy nine (79) authors published comparable Black Studies material in four Black Studies journals and 74 non-Black Studies journals. The 74 non-Black Studies journals are condensed into 21 broad subject areas in the "Non-Black Studies Disciplinary Journal Authors" column.

**Table 3: Authors Who Publish on the Same Topic in Both Black Studies and Non-Black Studies journals**

Note that this is not a one-to-one match between articles published in Black Studies journals and those published in non-Black Studies journals. Some of the authors published on the same topic in a Black Studies journal and more than one non-Black Studies journal, Table 3 reflects a the total number 94 citations.

Non-Black Studies Disciplinary Journal Authors	Black Scholar Authors	Journal of Black Studies Authors	Western Journal of Black Studies Authors	Journal of African American History Authors	TOTAL
1. American studies			1	2	3
2. Anthropology	1				1
3. Criminal Justice		6	2		8
4. Drug abuse		1			1
5. Education		4	3	1	8
6. Ethnic groups		4	1		5
7. Families		5			5
8. Gender identity		1	2	1	4
9. Health care		1			1
10. History	2	1		6	9
11. Human ecology	1	2	1		4
12. Language & literature	3	1		1	5
13. Mass media		5	1		6
14. Music		1			1
15. Psychology		11	1		12
16. Social policy	2	2		1	5
17. Social science		2		1	3
18. Social work		4			4
19. Sociology		2	1		3
20. Urban affairs		2	1		3
21. Women's studies	1		1	1	3
TOTAL	10	55	15	14	94

The 79 authors represented in Table 3 publish articles in the humanities, social sciences, and interdisciplinary areas. Most material published by *Black Scholar* and *Journal of African American History* authors are in humanities and special thematic areas. While *Western Journal of Black Studies* authors publish largely in social science and special thematic areas; and *Journal of Black Studies* authors mostly publish in the social sciences.

The special thematic areas include American Studies, ethnic groups, families, gender identity, social policy, urban affairs, and Women's Studies. It is noteworthy that the boundary crossing between Black Studies and non-Black Studies disciplines is analogous to the publication by these scholars in Black Studies cross-disciplinary journals. For example in Table 1, representing results of the *Alkalimat report*, 57% (17 of 30) of Black Studies journals are cross-disciplinary, while another 23% (7 of 30) are special thematic journals.

## Discussion

It was mentioned earlier that the *Alkalimat report* does not treat several important aspects of journal publishing in Black Studies. To an extent this begs the question as two of these aspects have bearing on how the value of these journals may be assessed. The report purposefully 1) does not present data on the details of the peer review process, specifically rates of submission and acceptance (rejection rates) and 2) does not investigate the substantive threads and intertextuality of these journals and their articles (citation analysis). However, because the report does make certain assessment claims we can only assume that the scholarly impact of these journals is contingent on their subscriptions and readership.

As noted earlier a handful of journals are considered top-tier largely because of the leadership and direction provided over the years by their senior editors. Other criteria of an evaluative nature are outlined as a journal's sponsors, geographic location, and their editorial staffs. The latter differ in terms of gender, academic ranks, academic disciplines, the academic institutions represented, and leading individuals (as regards the number of editorial positions a person holds). The idea seems to be that the importance of a Black Studies journal hinges on its strengths in the above areas. For convenience we are substituting subscription and readership figures as proxies to the various evaluative criteria.

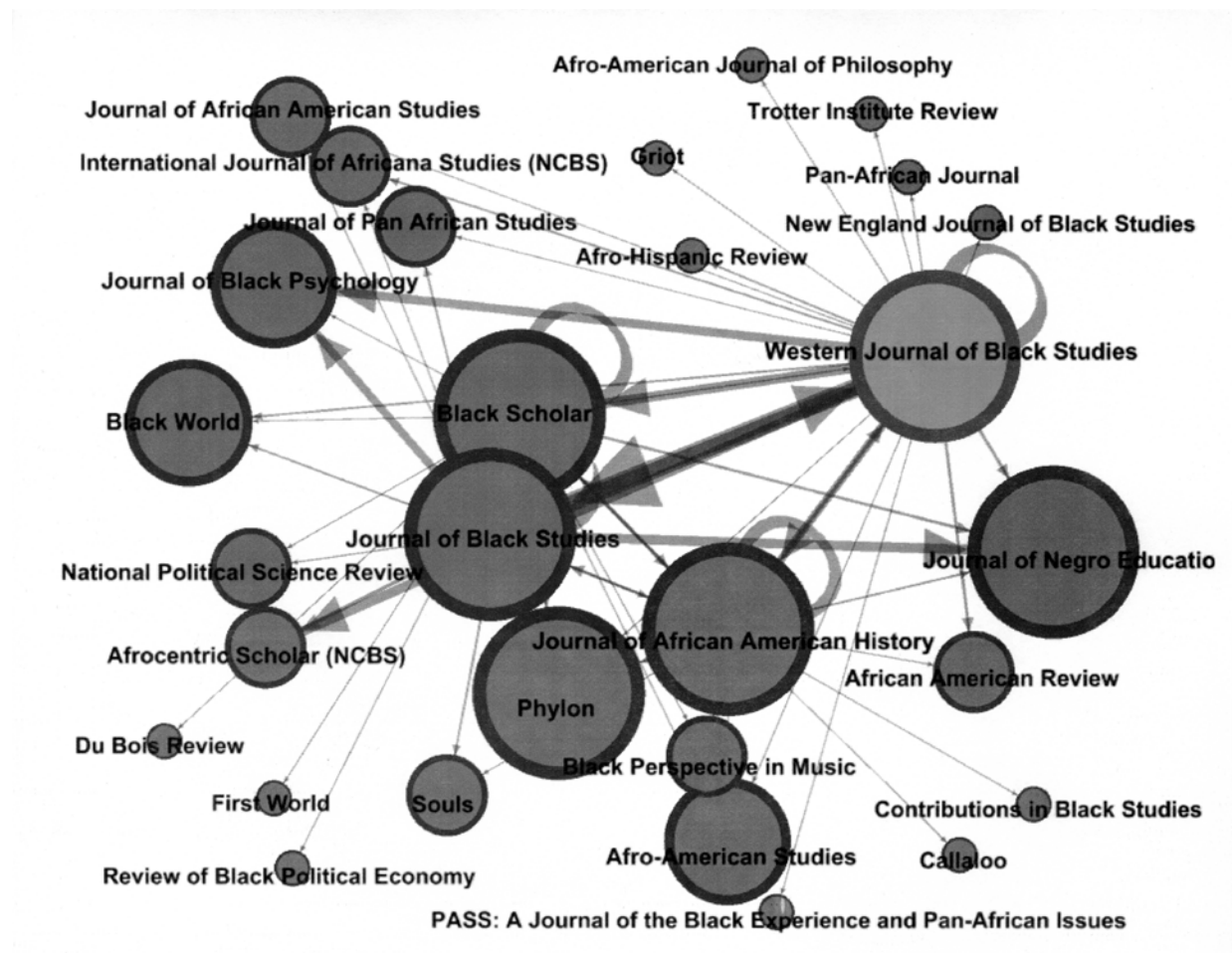
It is assumed here that the evaluative elements themselves, either separately or in combination, count as reasons why individuals, universities, or other institutions, subscribe to the journals. Black Studies journal importance indirectly relates to a journal's circulation or subscription data. The readership of Black Studies journals is composed of individual scholars and students who read articles because they have personal subscriptions, who receive journals because of their membership in professional associations (such as the National Council of Black Studies, Association for the Study of African American Life and History), or who access the journals through institutional subscriptions held by libraries.

If the *Black Scholar*, *Journal of Black Studies*, and *Callaloo* are top-tier journals, then, taking circulation/subscription figures across all three categories of the Black Studies journal, there are 15 other journals that are within the top-tier. The 15 top tier journals represented in Table 1 above table are the *Black Scholar*, (10,000), *Journal of African American History* (7,000), *International Journal of African American Art* (5,000), *African American Review* (3,770), *Journal of Black Psychology* (2,600), *CLA Journal* (2,500), *Trotter Review* (2,500), *Journal of Negro Education* (2,300), *Phylon* (2,200), *Transforming Anthropology* (1,200), *Negro Education Review* (1,000), *Journal of Black Studies* (900), *Black Music Research Journal* (808), and the *Du Bois Review* (800). Because the *Alkalimat report* ascribes top-tier status to *Callaloo*, which has a circulation rate of 719, all journals with higher circulation rates are assigned this status as well. Presumably, the remaining journals are second-tier, although it is possible some of the ones with unreported circulation data may have top-tier status.

As discussed earlier a core element of the Eigenfactor score is eigenvector centrality in a network. Because the Afrofactor/Afrifactor is modeled after the former, eigenvector centrality is also at its core. Unlike a true Afrofactor/Afrifactor model, a citation network of all articles and citations in Black Studies journals for a given time period is beyond the scope of the present work. However, eigenvector centrality within a more limited network gives us an idea of what counts as first, second, or third tier Black Studies journals. The strategy is that a few key journals are identified in a field and then citation data based on articles in those journals are used to identify other core journals. Several recent citation studies have used this strategy.<sup>17</sup> The articles of four Black Studies journals published between 1990 and 2010 were selected. A point the *Zulu memorandum* fails to address is that Black Studies and humanities disciplines require a longer time span than the 5-year average age of cited papers associated with Eigenfactor scores, because African American Studies is citing older materials more compared to other disciplines.<sup>18</sup>

In the following network graph the 29 journals are represented by appropriately labelled nodes (variously sized spheres). Each node in the network represents an individual journal. The size of the nodes indicate their centrality in the network. The arrows are links indicating outgoing citations from one journal to another. The links are weighted and directed: strong weights represent large numbers of citations, and the direction of the link indicates the direction of the citations. Eigenvector centrality is an algorithmic tool for analyzing the importance of nodes in a network. In this study a statistical module within the Gephi visualization and data analysis software does the calculations.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 1: Citation Network Graph



Interestingly, there are similarities between the titles vetted by Alkalimat’s community of experts and those measured in terms of their eigenvector centrality scores within the journal citation network. Eight journals rank high on both measures. These are *Black Scholar* (1.0), *Journal of African American History* (1.0), *Journal of Black Studies* (1.0), *Phylon* (1.0), *Journal of Black Psychology* (.75), *African American Review* (0.5), *Du Bois Review* (.25), *Callaloo* (.25), and the *Trotter Institute Review* (.25). Also, we can now place within the top tier three additional journals that were on the Alkalimat list, but which did not report circulation data. These are *International Journal of Africana Studies* (0.5), until 1996 former’s title was the *Afrocentric Scholar* (0.5), *National Political Science Review* (0.5), and *Souls: a Critical Journal of Black Politics* (0.5).

Some of the differences derive from the assumption that subscription data can serve as proxies for the evaluative criteria proposed by Alkalimat (e.g., sponsors, geographic location, editorial boards, etc.). For instance, several journals on the Alkalimat list with low subscription rates have relatively high eigenvector centrality scores. These are the *Western Journal of Black Studies* (1.0), *Journal of African American Studies*, formerly *Journal of African American Men* (0.5), *Review of Black Political Economy* (0.25), and the *Afro-Hispanic Review* (0.25).

A second group of titles have relatively high eigenvector centrality scores but are excluded from the Alkalimat list because they do not meet the currency criterion, not having been published within the two years preceding the *Alkalimat report*. These are *Afro-American Studies* (.75), *Black World* (.75), *Black Perspective in Music* (0.5), *Pan-African Journal* (0.25), *Contributions in Black Studies* (0.25), *Afro-American Journal of Philosophy* (0.25), *New England Journal of Black Studies* (0.25), *PASS* (0.25), and *First World* (0.25).

A major journal meeting the currency criterion but omitted from the list of journals vetted by the *Alkalimat report* experts is *JPAS: the Journal of Pan African Studies* (0.5). The report explains the omission acknowledging that its focus only on the U.S. experience is a very narrow approach given the global African diaspora. Among the African diaspora journals the report suggests others can explore more broadly are *Race & Class*, *New Dawn*, *Transition*, *Third World Review*, and *Presence Africaine*.<sup>20</sup> It is unclear why *JPAS* is excluded from the list of titles deserving further exploration.

## Conclusion

It has been argued that the two kinds of Black Studies journal assessment are comparable. By and large the two methods recognize the same journals as important. The essential difference between them appears to be a matter of perspective. The *Alkalimat report* is steeped in attitudes prevalent during the Black Studies movement of the 1970s. The *Zulu memorandum* is more contemporary in outlook. Both documents inextricably link the ideas of credibility and trustworthiness to Black Studies journals and their assessment. They want to ensure Black scholars can find suitable outlets for their research. The problem is an historical one necessitating the creation of a Black press open to scholarship about the Black experience. The late Talmadge Anderson (1932-2011), founder of the *Western Journal of Black Studies*, observed that because “the opportunity is limited in being able to publish in the field of Black Studies, there has always been an unceasing effort on the part of Blacks to create or to start their own journals and periodicals.”<sup>21</sup> The result for both the Alkalimat and Zulu documents is that this also creates dichotomy between “our” journals and “theirs.”



Alkalimat has confidence in journal selections made by a group of experts in Black Studies. He also evokes evaluative criteria including the leadership of senior editors, overall editorial staff, affiliation with Black Studies departments, and the like, to help delineate what counts as “our journals.” Deferring to the preferences of a Black community of scholars Zulu takes a similar same path. In this case the evaluation of journals is based on the references these scholars make to articles in Black Studies journals. To be sure, Black Studies scholars both publish and cite articles appearing in non-Black Studies journals as well, but neither method of journal assessment is prepared to capture this result.<sup>22</sup>

From the *Alkalimat report* perspective journal assessment places a premium on recognized leadership in the field, whether individual or institutional. To this end recall the *Alkalimat report* quotation about the leadership of senior editors who transitioned their journals from the Black Power movement to present. To assess the value of a Black Studies journal one has to know the people responsible for it. Accordingly the report affirms that “Journals are known by the company they keep like everything else.”<sup>23</sup> It is also assumed that the body of scholars is relatively small and cohesive in terms of its ideas and practices as its members are fairly well acquainted. We know, however, that conditions have changed and different schools of thought about Black Studies have arisen since the 1970s.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the *Zulu memorandum* is citation based. Here the recognition of leadership and institutional authority are not integral features for measuring a journal’s importance. Rather, there is a recognized corpus of scholarship and journals important to the field. These are denoted by the frequency that articles in these journals are referenced by Black Studies scholars.

However, the *Zulu memorandum* does not make a clean break with the Black Power movement perspective on journal assessment, holding to the tenet that only the references between Black Studies journals are candidates for citation analysis. As noted earlier in Table 3 Black Studies scholars are writing on the same topics in both Black Studies and non-Black Studies journals. There is boundary crossing and the barrier to publishing Black Studies content in mainstream disciplinary journals is not comprehensive. The challenge is to find a way to keep such articles and citations within the Black Studies genus rather than treat them as outliers. A clean break with the old model would include all cited references in Black Studies journal articles (irrespective of whether they are from Black Studies or non-Black Studies journals) in the citation analyses. As such, all articles relevant to the Black Studies community will be documented, and the journals having most impact in Black Studies identified.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Rousseau, Ronald and Guido Van Hooydonk. 1996. "Journal Production and Journal Impact Factors." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 47 (10): 775; and Bergstrom, Carl. "Eigenfactor: Measuring the Value and Prestige of Scholarly Journals." *C&RL News*, May 2007, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> The URLs for the Web of Science and the *Journal Citation Reports* are <http://webofknowledge.com/> and <http://thomsonreuters.com/en/products-services/scholarly-scientific-research/research-management-and-evaluation/journal-citation-reports.html>, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Pickett, Carmelita. 2009. "Black Studies Scholarship and Its Coverage in Thomson Reuters' Web of Science," *Collection Management* 34 (4): 260-275.

<sup>4</sup> Alkalimat, Abdul. "Africana Studies in the US." Accessed September 1, 2015, <http://eblackstudies.org/su/complete.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Alkalimat, Abdul. "The Academic Journals of Black Studies: A Preliminary Report." Accessed July 17, 2015, [http://eblackstudies.org/may2009/draft\\_report\\_black\\_studies\\_journals\\_dec\\_2008.pdf](http://eblackstudies.org/may2009/draft_report_black_studies_journals_dec_2008.pdf); and Zulu, Itibari M. "JPAS: Cited Half-Life, Impact Factor, Article Influence, Eigenfactor Score, Afrofactor/Afrifactor." E-mail message to Board of Editors, *Journal of Pan African Studies*, November 20, 2014. For brevity, the two documents will be referred throughout this article as the *Alkalimat report* and the *Zulu memorandum*.

<sup>6</sup> "Meritocracy refers to a journals' sponsorship and affiliation with nonprofit organizations, commercial operations, institutions of higher education, professional associations, and the like. "Democracy" refers to the location of a journal relative to the distribution of Black people and degree granting Black Studies programs across the country. Also built into the concept of meritocracy is a notion about the quality of a journal's editorial staff. According to the report, editorial staff members "stand collectively as a definition of their respective journal. The example offered of a strong editorial board is the *Black Scholar* led by *senior scholar-activists of the founding generation of Black Studies*. For discussion of "meritocracy" and "democracy," see the *Alkalimat report*, p. 3; for discussion of editorial staffs, see pages 8-11.

<sup>7</sup> The *Alkalimat report* purports to focus on 31 journals. In fact it only covers 30 since the Afro-Hispanic Review is listed twice. The journal is listed as a disciplinary journal and repeated later as a cross-disciplinary journal. See pages 3 and 7 of the report.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8; See also Davis, Gerald F. 2014. "Editorial Essay: Why Do We Still Have Journals?" *Administrative Science Quarterly* 59 (2): 193-201. Davis argues that the core technology of journals is the review process. The organization of the review process reflects assumptions about what a contribution is and how it should be evaluated. Through their review processes, journals can certify contributions, convene scholarly communities, and curate works that are worth reading."

<sup>12</sup> See "eReviews: Scholarly Metrics." *Library Journal*, January, 2015, vol. 1, issue 1; and Pickett, Carmelita. 2009. "Black Studies Scholarship and Its Coverage in Thomson Reuters' Web of Science," *Collection Management* 34 (4): 260-275.

<sup>13</sup> West, Jevin D. "Eigenfactor: Ranking and Mapping Scientific Knowledge." PhD. diss., University of Washington, 2010, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> West, Jevin D., Theodore C. Bergstrom and Carl T. Bergstrom. 2010. "The Eigenfactor Metrics: A Network Approach to Assessing Scholarly Journals." *College & Research Libraries* 71 (3): 237.

<sup>15</sup> West, Jevin D., Moritz Stefaner and Carl T. Bergstrom. "The Eigenfactor Metrics: How Does the Journal of Biological Chemistry Stack Up?" *ASBMB Today*, April 2009, p. 20; and Crisp, Michael G. 2004. "Eigenfactor." *Collection Management* 34, pp. 54.

<sup>16</sup> Crisp, Michael G. 2004. "Eigenfactor." *Collection Management* 34, p. 55; and Bergstrom, Carl. "Eigenfactor: Measuring the Value and Prestige of Scholarly Journals," *C&RL News*, May 2007, P. 315; and West, Jevin D., Theodore C. Bergstrom and Carl T. Bergstrom. 2010. "The Eigenfactor Metrics: A Network Approach to Assessing Scholarly Journals." *College & Research Libraries* 71 (3): 243.

<sup>17</sup> The URL for *Academic Search Complete* is <https://www.ebscohost.com/academic/academic-search-complete>.

<sup>18</sup> Budd, John M. "Higher Education Literature: Characteristics of Citation Patterns," *Journal of Higher Education* 61, no. 2 (1990): 84–97; Weissinger, Thomas. 2010. "The Core Journal Concept in Black Studies," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 36 (2): 119–124; and Bullis, Daryl R. and Richard D. Irving. 2013. "Journals Supporting Terrorism Research: Identification and Investigation into Their Impact on the Social Sciences." *College & Research Libraries* 74 (2): 121.

<sup>19</sup> Carmelita Pickett makes mention of the arbitrariness of limiting the Impact Factor to a 2-year period. See Pickett, Carmelita. 2009. "Black Studies Scholarship and Its Coverage in Thomson Reuters' Web of Science," *Collection Management* 34 (4): 270. Nyana, Sylvia A. 2010. "Information Use in African American Studies Doctoral Dissertations at Pennsylvania State University, 2000-2007." *Journal of Pan African Studies* 3 (10): 38. "The average age of all citations in the study was 16.6 years, and between academic divisions, humanities leading with 26.9, followed by the social sciences (12.7), and the youngest sciences (8.6) years old.

<sup>20</sup> The Gephi software program is available at <http://gephi.github.io/>.

<sup>21</sup> *Alkalimat report*, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson, Talmadge. 1984. "An Ideological Treatise on Black Publications and Black Writers: The Evolvement of the Western Journal of Black Studies," *Serials Librarian* 9 (1): 10–11.

<sup>23</sup> Weissinger, Thomas. 2010. "The Core Journal Concept in Black Studies." *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 36(2): 119-124.

<sup>24</sup> *Alkalimat report*, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Conyers, James L., ed. 2005. *Afrocentric Traditions*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, pp. 105-108.