

STATEMENT OF SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY AND RESEARCH

The following is a statement of my scholarly activity and trajectory. The statement begins with a brief narrative on my positionality as an engaged scholar and researcher to situate the major strands of my research program. I then discuss each strand individually, including noteworthy publications, presentations, and other scholarly products organized by topic and their various contributions empirically, theoretically, methodologically, and to the public discourse. I conclude with a discussion of forthcoming projects that further my research program and its contributions to the study of higher and postsecondary education.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

As a Black person concerned with dismantling and reimagining the often violent contexts within which we live, work, and learn, my engaged research program and its focus on issues of systemic oppression is a direct reflection of my intellectual and political commitments to improve the material conditions of everyday Black people. This includes my commitment to critically examining the consequences for, and resistance strategies undertaken by, minoritized stakeholders within higher education and civil society.¹ As a scholar who embraces an existential and ontological position of critical hope (Quaye, 2007), I am rooted in the belief that activist scholarship (Davis, et. al, 2019) generally, and my work specifically, has the ability to challenge racialized and other inequities within and produced by postsecondary institutions. I also believe my work demonstrates the ability of scholarship to employ research evidence to improve current and future circumstances for minoritized communities impacted by systemic and structural forms of oppression, marginalization, and institutional disregard.

Furthermore, my early-career experiences working as a digital media strategist for a large advertising agency, as a student affairs professional in Black cultural centers, and as a former

¹I use the term civil society to distinguish individuals and institutions (and their relations) that are largely independent from sectors of government and private industry.

researcher and director at two national racial equity research centers have all informed my scholarly interests and multimodal approach to knowledge production for multiple audiences. As an publicly-engaged scholar, my participation within and in support of racial justice movement work as an organizer has been deeply instructive to my employment of interdisciplinary frames (e.g., critical theory, racialized organizations, and new social movement theories), innovative methodological approaches (e.g., digital and visual ethnography), and the pursuit of critical questions in my scholarship. In these ways my work benefits from a particular relationship in which my community engagement and scholarship work in symbiosis to provide meaningful relationships, information access, and legitimacy at field sites and throughout the inquiry process. Additionally, my approach is answers the call for higher education (and the knowledge it produces) as a public good that advances its espoused commitments to diversity, inclusion, justice and equity (Sdvizhkov, et. al, 2022).

Altogether, my position reflects an abiding demonstration of my commitment to an intellectual tradition of Black study and struggle (Harney & Moten, 2013; Kelley, 2018), one that recognizes the inexorable, sometimes dissonant link between my professional and political worlds. Consequently, my agenda contributes to three interrelated and interdisciplinary areas of postsecondary study: race and racism in higher education; activism and social movements in college; and critical university studies. Below, I provide an overview of each area of study, my contributions, and the various projects my scholarship has produced through an integration of academic and public scholarship.

OVERVIEW OF AREAS OF STUDY

Race and Racism in Higher Education

Issues of race and racism, systemic oppression, and structures of domination serve as an entry point for my contributions to the study of higher and postsecondary education. This has

since served as the broadest banner under which my scholarly agenda has taken shape across various domains within and beyond the field of higher education and student affairs. To be more specific, the breadth of my scholarship on race and racism has directly addressed principle areas in the study of higher education to include campus climate (Davis, 2016, Harper & Davis, 2017; Harper, Smith, & Davis, 2018), higher education finance (i.e., student debt, see Davis, Mustaffa, King, and Jama, 2020), higher education policy (Davis, 2017; Davis, 2019c; Rodriguez, Deane, & Davis, 2022), higher education research (Davis, Harper, & Christian, 2019; Davis, Harris, Stokes, & Harper, 2019), Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) (Davis, Forthcoming; Davis & Jones, In Production; Davis, Commodore, & King, 2020), intercollegiate athletics (Ferguson & Davis, 2019), postsecondary teaching and learning (Harper & Davis, 2016), sense of belonging, and student engagement (Davis, 2019a; Davis, Stokes, & Morgan, 2018; Morgan & Davis, 2019).

My work on campus climate has directly contributed to the institutional advancement of inclusive campus environments. For instance, prior to joining the faculty at the University of Michigan, my scholarship and field research directly contributed to the development of the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates at the University of Southern California, a trio of national survey instruments used to collect data on 1) institutional commitments to racial equity and diversity, 2) interactional diversity between students across difference, 3) racial learning and literacy, and 4) citizenship readiness for a participating in a racially diverse democracy. The survey is currently in operation at 63 two-year colleges and 98 four-year postsecondary institutions to regularly assess and evaluate campus racial and workplace climate. Since arriving at the university, my work on campus climate has extended to the procurement of research contracts and internal learning partnerships with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Postsecondary Success Team. Specifically, through the *Campus Climate and Institutional Transformation Project* (CCITP), I co-led a team of researchers in the synthesis of

three decades of campus climate literature, convened a three national panels of climate and transformation experts, and conducted a comprehensive landscape analysis of campus climate surveys and equity audit service providers. This project directly informs the foundation's strategic priorities and investments in assessing campus climates and developing interventions for institutional transformation across its portfolio of 29 colleges and universities and two state systems of higher education a part of its Frontier Set.

My scholarship on racism in higher education finance and policy includes two noteworthy publications, "[Legislation, Policy, and the Black Student Debt Crisis](#)" (Davis, et. al, 2020) and "Toward a Framework of Racialized Policymaking in Higher Education" (Rodriguez, Deane, & Davis, 2022). The former was a national report produced in partnership with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples, the oldest and largest civil rights organization mobilizing to advance racial justice for Black Americans. The report provided a first-of-its kind analysis of longitudinal data from the National Council of Education Statistics on the racial (and gender) disparities in student debt as well as a critical historical analysis of higher education policy that has contributed to the racialized debt crisis and persistent underfunding of students and institutions that disproportionately serve Black communities. The report has served as a reference document in the NAACP's campaign efforts for the cancellation of student debt, for which the report explicitly advocates, including its representation in the congressional record during preliminary hearings on federal debt cancellation in 2022. The latter was an invited chapter in the 37th volume of the highly-regarded compendium *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*. An contribution of equal authorship, the 81-page chapter offers a necessary conceptualization of racialized power in higher education policymaking processes and policy arenas (e.g., racialized network of policy elites and their core beliefs). Although numerous studies of higher education policy have explicitly engaged race as a variable for analysis (and racial disparities as outcomes), systemic

racism as an explanatory factor has remained largely under theorized, especially in the higher education policy literature. Therefore, our contribution to the developing body of scholarship on racialized organizations (Ray, 2019) and emerging, but incomplete, perspectives on critical policy analysis in higher education offers a meaningful addition by explaining how race and racism within policymaking structures are mediating factors in policy development, implementation, and effectiveness.

Additionally, my contributions the race scholarship in higher education include the production of several opinion essays, films, and visual scholarship projects for public audiences. More specifically, these contributions include op-eds in national news outlets, most notably the *Los Angeles Times*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. Collectively, these essays address real-time racial issues higher education and include critical analyses of incidents of classroom racism (Davis, 2016), institutional responses to campus racism (Harper & Davis, 2017) and campus protests (Davis, 2017), and racialized policing on college and university campuses (Davis, 2020; Davis & Dizon, 2020). Further, I also wrote, produced, and hosted a 22-minute documentary with Lighthouse Films entitled “[Saving Tomorrow, Today: The Curriculum of New America](#).” The film wrestles with the material challenges faced by Black students across the education pipeline in the United States and identifies several innovative solutions being undertaken in education research, policy, and practice. In particular, the film broadly explores the roles of racism and racial bias in the educational experiences and outcomes (e.g., degree attainment) of Black students in the cities of Miami, Philadelphia, and New York. Using several themes across geographical context, I engage a professional network of community educators, education researchers, school leaders, and teachers around evidence-based interventions that could be scaled to improve Black student success. Together, we identify a set of culturally-sustaining provisions regarding school access, curriculum and instruction, counseling, and reimagining school discipline in ways that

would better support Black student success, and ultimately their successful matriculation to college.

Activism and Social Movements in College

Given much of the focus on systemic oppression in higher education scholarship has been about problem identification and attribution of institutional responsibility, my research program has meaningfully attended to the ways racially minoritized postsecondary stakeholders demonstrate agency and take action against various forms of institutional violence. This has primarily focused my work on student activism and social movements in college through prolonged ethnographic study across multiple sites and institutional contexts to include two- and four-year institutions, Historically Black Colleges & Universities, and student participation in activism off-campus and through alternative and activist new media tools (Lievrouw, 2011). A unique contribution of my research on student activism has been understanding the role of new media technologies as a part of student activists' tactical repertoires (i.e., organizing tactics and strategies), including social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram. More specifically, I employ critical media studies frameworks to understand how student activists leverage new and digital media tools to facilitate mobilization, cultivate public legitimacy, build political power, and navigate opportunities and threats to achieve their sociopolitical goals. While other higher research has broadly recognized the use of social media by student activists, such work has remained without substantive theoretical and conceptual understanding of *how* such media functions. My work specifically attends to the ways college students employment of new media aligns and differs from other disruptive movement strategies and tactics (i.e., in-person demonstrations and protests) most commonly discussed in the social movements literature in higher education, history, and sociology.

The aforementioned work has been represented through numerous proposed and invited presentations at conferences of the American Educational Researchers Association (AERA),

Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Conference, and American College Personnel Association (ACPA) as well as the publication of several sole, first-authored, and collaborative book chapters based on empirical evidence (Davis, 2019a, 2019b; Davis, Stokes, & Morgan, 2019; Ferguson & Davis, 2019; Davis, Harper, & Christian, 2018). This work also led to the production of the co-edited volume, *Student Activism, Politics, and Campus Climates in Higher Education* (Morgan & Davis, 2019), which was published by Routledge, a highly regarded education and social science research press. As one of few books on higher education activism at the time, the project was a field advancement effort that brought together a number of noteworthy higher education scholars to discuss a broad set of issues and instances of student political engagement. The book further serves as a comprehensive, contemporary portrait of activism and student political engagement and in the United States as well as a go-to resource for researchers, faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals to understand how broader sociopolitical conflicts are evident on-campus. Finally, in recognition of the aforementioned contributions, I was invited to serve as lead-author of the chapter “Activism and Social Movements in College: Actors, Contexts, Tactics, and Strategies of Postsecondary Political Engagement” (Davis, Morgan, & Cho, 2023) for the fifth edition of *American Higher Education in the Twenty First Century*, one of the most widely read texts in the field of higher education.

In accordance with the aforementioned research, I was also invited to serve as lead author of “But Is It Activist? Interpretive Criteria for Activist Scholarship in Higher Education” (Davis, et al., 2019) published in *The Review of Higher Education*, a high-impact higher education research journal. Written in response to a heightened period of social and political unrest, this article considers how higher education scholars can align their research with the broader sociopolitical aims to engage postsecondary education and its stakeholders in organized

resistance. In doing so, we offer definitional clarity in understanding the role of scholarship as a production of counter-hegemonic knowledge as well as provide several considerations and consequences for writing against the racial status quo. Additionally, I was also invited to review books related to activism and social movements to include *Campus Uprisings: How Student Activists and Collegiate Leaders Resist Racism and Create Hope* (Teachers College Press) (Douglas, Shockley, & Toldson, 2021) for college for *Academe* (Davis, 2021), the publication of the American Association of University Professors, and *No Study Without Struggle* (Beacon Press) (Patel, 2022) for *Journal of College Student Development* (Davis, In Press), another top journal in our field of study.

The final strand of my work on activism and social movements in college has addressed issues of free-speech on campus in policy and practice. For instance, in analyzing (re)emerging policies and practices aimed at suppressing student acts of political dissent (Davis, 2019c), I employed critical race policy analysis and case study approaches to examine the interrelation of governance structures in developing protest policies that sustain institutionalized forms of white supremacy. By institutionalized white supremacy, I am referring to the ways campus, system, and state policies interact to codify punitive sanctions that 1) maintain hierarchies of racial power, and 2) disparately target and impact racially minoritized student activists. As contested discourses on free speech, peaceable assembly, and public safety continue to permeate colleges and universities, understanding the policy implications for student activists (and others) is critically important to creating anew a higher education for the public good. Further, conceptualizing how multiple policy contexts collude to create the conditions for criminalizing already vulnerable student communities from exercising their own constitutional rights for democratic engagement reveals the ways some institutions uphold antidemocratic policies and practices. The most recent development of this strand of my agenda includes “In Defense of Dignitary Safety: A Phenomenological Study of Student Resistance to Hate Speech

on Campus,” published in the *Peabody Journal of Education* and written in collaboration with a former postdoctoral fellow under my mentorship (Stokes & Davis, 2022). This article extends the relatively limited scholarship on free speech in higher education research that considers a more holistic understanding of the *impact* of speech on postsecondary environments (Ben-Porath, 2017). More specifically, we draw attention to the heightened volatility of campus racial conflict during the Trump Presidency through institutionally-sanctioned hate speech on college and university campuses. We pay particular attention to the ways racist hate speech threatens the dignity of racially minoritized students as well as the institutional retribution they experienced for their activism in defense of their dignitary safety. In contrast to the predominant scholarship on the topic, which advances race-neutral legal arguments in defense of hate speech as protected speech, and therefore justifiable, we present evidence that challenges race-neutrality and illuminates how such interpretations “render racially minoritized students more vulnerable to social, political, and institutional harm” (Stokes & Davis, 2022, p. 7).

With regard to my use of multimodal approaches to the study of student activism, I have produced two installations of [*Longitudinal Depictions of Student-Led Organized Resistance*](#) as visual and digital scholarship projects. These projects reflect the breadth and depth of contemporary student political engagement at the intersection of campus and community. Using visual ethnographic methods, the installations bring together documentary photography and film from 24 U.S. cities and across more than three dozen postsecondary institutions (including two-year colleges to four-year universities, public and private institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and historically white-serving institutions) to illustrate a portrait of contemporary student activism and how new media tools help students achieve their movement goals. The first installation, “Ethnographic Film, Photography, and Digital Artifacts from the New Student Movement,” represents documentary evidence spanning

early developments in the Black Lives Matter movement on-campus between 2013 and 2017. This installation was presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education conference and published digitally through video hosting platform *Vimeo*. The second installation, “Ethnographic Film and Documentary Photography from the Campus Abolition Movement,” which was presented during a Presidential Session at the 2022 Association for the Study of Higher Education conference, offered an outsider-insider perspective on campus-community organizing in which faculty, staff, students, and local residents are collaboratively working to resist university expansion and the encroachment of campus police into Black neighborhoods in West Philadelphia. This project has also aligned with my written work in several instances to include serving as the cover image on the aforementioned co-edited volume on student activism (Morgan & Davis, 2019) as well as a scholarly essay entitled “[Killing Us Softly: Navigating State and State-Sanctioned Violence Against Black Men’s Humanity](#)” (Davis & McGuire, 2019), which was published as part of the University of Michigan’s National Center for Institutional Diversity’s *Spark: Elevating Scholarship on Social Issues* publication.

Critical University Studies: Consequences of Higher Education on Civil Society

As the many and various concerns of campus activists and community organizers in my work have become clearer, which include issues of race and racism beyond the boundaries of college and university campuses, my analytical gaze has more recently focused on the intersection of postsecondary institutions and the communities in which they are located. This line of inquiry is consistent with the emerging (sub)field of Critical University Studies (Williams, 2012), an outgrowth of cultural and critical studies, that interrogates the presumed beneficent role of higher education in relation to issues of culture, labor, power, and politics within broader society. In drawing upon my learnings from earlier work examining student activism, and the increased public discourse on issues of police violence in recent years, the primary focus of my research upon arriving to the University of Michigan shifted to include a deliberate

focus on campus policing and the carceral university. By carceral university I am broadly referring to the ability and deputized authority of colleges and universities to police (i.e., surveillance and control) and punish through the present threat of violence, use of force, and criminal detention. Specifically, this strand of my agenda emerged through the lingering recognition of the ways colleges and universities are often microcosms of society and how much of what transpires beyond the city limits of campus also exist within its formal boundaries. Thus, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, Breonna Taylor in Louisville, and the myriad other instances of fatal police violence in 2020, I considered their implications for higher education. And, in conjunction with a graduate student, I co-authored an opinion essay for *Inside Higher Ed* entitled “[More Colleges Should Divest From the Institution of Policing](#)” (Davis & Dizon, 2020). Drawing on historical records, news stories, empirical literature, and data from the Campus Law Enforcement Survey, we argue for the abolition of police from college and university campuses. Further, we advocate for an investment in the “structures and resources that humanize and offer dignity to racially minimized students and communities” (Davis & Dizon, 2020, para. 13). I also subsequently published “[If Black Lives Matter to Colleges, They'll Divest From Campus Policing](#)” (Davis, 2020) in the *Los Angeles Times*, which challenged postsecondary institutions to move beyond their rhetoric and toward material justice for Black communities impacted by the university’s utilization of police.

At the same time, various constituencies, including existing and developing activist collectives, were publicly demanding their institutions divest from the institution of policing. Among them were the Cops of Campus Coalition, a network of dozens of movement organizations working toward police and prison abolition in higher education. While such work was not necessarily new, the explicit examination of abolitionist praxis in activism and social movements in college has been virtually non-existent. As such, and given my prior research

and on-the-ground relationships nationally, the considerable gap and timeliness of an abolitionist research program presented an opportunity to adjust my broader focus to the acute phenomenon of racialized policing. In support of this work, I was awarded the prestigious National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship for my project *#PoliceFreeCampus: A Digital Ethnography of Black Campus-community Resistance, New Media Organizing, and Abolitionist Praxis for a Police-free Future*. This digital ethnographic study seeks to understand and document the digitally-mediated processes by which campus actors and community stakeholders are collectively resisting the racial project of policing and challenging postsecondary institutions to adopt abolitionist visions of public safety and community care. As evidenced through my preliminary data analysis, this study offers new insights regarding the contemporary relationship between campus and community-based movement work as well as the tactical repertoires employed to effectively organize across policing boundaries. The findings from this study are currently being developed into a series of manuscripts for submission to the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* (Davis, Skinner-Roy, Arroyo, & Wadley, In Preparation), *The Review of Higher Education* (Davis, In Preparation), *Journal of Higher Education* (Davis, In Preparation), and the *American Education Research Journal* (Davis, In Preparation). Additionally, this work has been recognized through invitations to serve as a speaker in the University at Buffalo Graduate School of Education Dean's Lecture Series, the Critical University Studies Working Group public lecture at the University of California, Berkeley, and the RacismLab at the University of Michigan as well as invited sessions in Division J and Division K of the American Educational Researchers Association Annual Meeting.

The aforementioned study also broadens an understanding of campus policing that makes visible the ways colleges and universities as neoliberal and settler-colonial enterprises create the conditions for surveillance, control, and punishment. This has been partially

conceptualized by scholars as the college-prison nexus (Johnson & Dizon, 2021) as a way of understanding higher education's relationship to the broader carceral state, which I expound upon in a forthcoming article in *The Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice* (Davis et al., In Press). The article entitled "Legitimacy for the Carceral State: A Critical Discourse Analysis of University Response to Activism and Issues of Campus Safety as Non-Performative, is an expanded version of a paper recently presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education conference in which my colleagues and I explore the ways university responses to student activist and community demands for divestment function to legitimize and reaffirm carceral solutions (i.e., state surveillance and incarceration) to campus safety concerns. More specifically, our findings point to the ways college and university faculty and staff, to include student affairs professionals, are an intricate component of what we conceptualize as campus surveillance personnel, an ascribed structural position within a broader campus safety enterprise. Further, we illustrate how some formal efforts by postsecondary institutions to convene stakeholders and institutional leaders in committees, working groups, and task forces as a way to appear accountable while obfuscating their goal of indemnify colleges and universities from greater social and political scrutiny.

At the same time, given the urgency and emergency to address the racialized policing epidemic on campus and beyond, I recently submitted a co-authored article and practice brief entitled "Campus Policing: Eight Steps Toward Abolition" (Dizon & Davis, Under Review) to the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* for review. Practice briefs are short-form scholarly articles that provide evidence-based arguments and conceptually-framed recommendations for practice that address specific, urgent challenges for higher education practitioners to employ in real-world scenarios on campus. In our brief, we draw upon national data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics Campus Law Enforcement Survey and the Campus Safety Survey, higher education news stories, and interdisciplinary scholarship to help practitioners

understand the racially-disparate consequences of campus police and policing practices employed by campus educators for minoritized communities on and away from campus. Building from demands of student activists, community organizers, and numerous scholars, we offer eight recommendations that move colleges and universities closer to the establishment of safety as a pre-condition through providing the requisite resources that promote inclusive, affirming campus environments for students (and others) disproportionately subject to police and other forms of material and psychological violence.

From a public scholarship standpoint, my work has grown considerably in the production of multiple essays, additional awards and fellowships, public teaching events, and digital media products. For instance, I was selected as one of twenty university faculty to serve as a [2022 Public Engagement Faculty Fellow](#), a program supported by the University of Michigan Office of the Vice President for Research. The fellowship specifically supports faculty in their need for time and space to reflect, develop skills, and incubate public scholarship ideas as well as support the integration of engagement into their research agendas. Additionally, in recognition as one of five faculty from across the university whose work centers anti-racism and community engagement for a more just and equitable society, I was selected as an [2022-2023 Anti-Racism Collaborative \(ARC\) Research & Community Impact Fellow](#) and awarded a \$50,000 internal grant to extend my work on campus policing and the carceral university through a series of public events (i.e., national teach-ins and panel conversations on campus policing), convenings, digital scholarship projects (e.g., [#PoliceFreeCampus Podcast](#)), and data collection support. Finally, I recently wrote, produced, and hosted the [#PoliceFreeCampus Podcast](#), a 7-episode digital discussion series in conjunction with an interdisciplinary group of scholars, higher education practitioners, and campus-community organizers. The podcast aims to bring the field of higher education and student affairs into closer conversation with the limitations and possibilities for campus safety and security in a world without police. Through a historical

and conceptual introduction of the campus abolition framework, which invites scholars and practitioners to reconsider and reimagine postsecondary education as a life-affirming institution, each conversation is facilitated to address common myths about campus policing practices and organizational forms that render marginalized communities vulnerable to state and state-sanctioned violence. This includes, but is not limited to, exploring the over-reliance on armed police for everyday campus challenges, campus police involvement in off-campus arrests and acts of brutality, and law enforcement alternatives for responding to campus sexual violence.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To further explore the implications of my developing work in the area of Critical University Studies, I recently submitted an application for the William T. Grant Foundation's Scholars Program, a \$350,000 award across five years for promising scholars to further develop a line of inquiry in their early-career. My research plan included a longitudinal assessment of the political efficacy within the campus-community movement to resist university expansion in West Philadelphia's historic Black Bottom neighborhood. Specifically, in my preliminary analysis of fieldwork data collected during my postdoctoral and NCID fellowships, a distinctive pattern emerged in which campus policing (as an institution and set of power relations) can be understood as symptomatic of the sociopolitical and economic conditions created by colleges and universities as settler colonial projects. While not selected for the program this cycle, which was my last year of eligibility, I was a semi-finalist and received encouraging reviewer feedback to revise my application for the Foundation's Reducing Inequality grant program. It is my intention to (re)submit the grant application during the Foundation's Fall 2023 application cycle to further advance this line of inquiry in my remaining years on the tenure-track.

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