

# **The Sankofa Principle: From the Drum to the Digital**

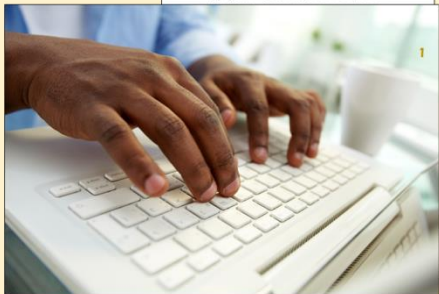
**Abdul Alkalimat, University of Illinois  
December 1, 2016**

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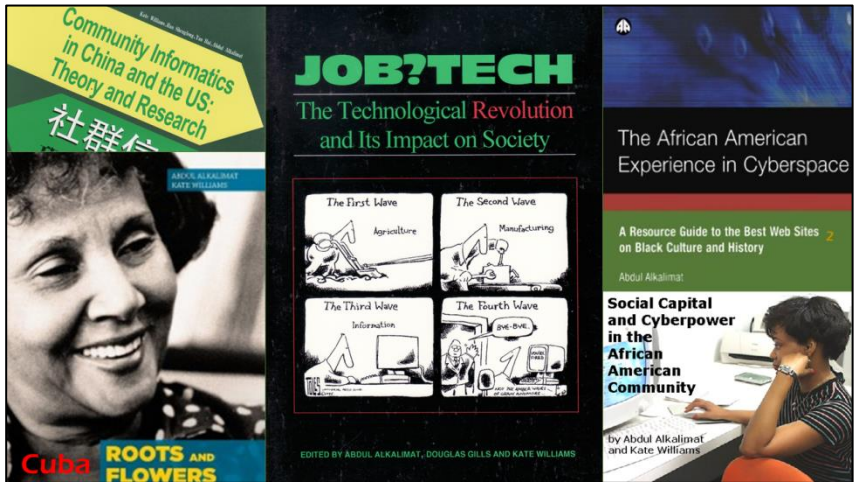


**Keynote for the 30th Symposium on African American  
Culture and Philosophy hosted by the Purdue  
University African American Studies and Research  
Center**

**Conference theme: "Exploring the 'Humanity' in the  
Digital Humanities: Africana/Black Studies Perspectives  
on the Digital Humanities"**

Colleagues, comrades, and friends:



It is a great pleasure to be here at this conference and to have been asked to give this opening plenary talk. I want to give thanks to Professor Ronald Stephens and his staff for being such gracious hosts and for that generous introduction.



I love having the opportunity to share my views on the subject of our conference as it has been driving my scholarship and activism for the last couple of decades. In addition it gives me an opportunity to learn from young scholars emerging in this new intellectual environment of Black Studies and digital humanities.

Our conference theme is an exciting one: “Exploring the Humanity in the Digital Humanities: Africana/Black Studies Perspectives on the Digital Humanities.” As we live in the whirlwind of racist oppression there is no more important task than to find a way to affirm our very humanity, that which racism most viciously attacks. We constantly realize the wisdom of what that great African revolutionary Amilcar Cabral instructed us to do, to always “return to the source.” The people, our people, create the ontological and epistemological

basis for who we are and what we can know about ourselves.  
So, I like our theme very much.

	<p><b>Outline</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>1. Introduction</b></li><li><b>2. Historical reflections</b> Sankofa The Drum and the Digital</li><li><b>3. eBlack Studies</b> The values we need The research method we need The discourse we need The memory we need Our model for social transformation</li><li><b>4. Conclusion about the next few decades</b></li></ol>	
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The opening part of this talk will set a framework for our thinking, arguing that a historical perspective is foundational and necessary at all times. This is especially true at times like now when we are experiencing such a crisis. I call the framework we need the Sankofa Principle, and with it we can link the drum, foundational technology to Black culture, with the emerging transformational power of digital technology.

Given this I will share with you a summary of the results of our 20 years of work building a body of knowledge we call eBlack Studies, how information technology can be used to rethink and rebuild how we do Black Studies. As those of us here know, rethinking the implication of digital technology is a necessary task as we face this revolutionary transformation of all of society, and most certainly the institutions of higher education. We have to recognize the need to change. We also have to understand that the more things change, the more they remain the same in some respects. This is a dialectical approach to change, it's at the heart of how we understand history, always

combining the new and the old, what we have known with what we are just beginning to know. And third, we have to agree to use both science and art, reason and emotion, both sides of our brains to be truly and fully human.

This is not some kind of neutral undertaking. Black people remain very much exploited and oppressed. So Black Studies must always remain true to its origins, link itself back to the struggle of Black people to be free, to the struggle for this society to move beyond its history of negation to a historical stage of affirmation. So eBlack is part of a new stage of scholarship and it is also a new arm of the Black liberation movement.

**Frantz Fanon: "Each generation has a mission. It can fulfill it or betray it."**



1. **Black Studies as social movement:** The Black liberation movement and the Black Student movement united to fight racism and transform higher education (1960s)
2. **Black Studies as academic profession:** The faculty and students of Black Studies achieve excellence based on the universal standards for scholarship (1980s)
3. **Black Studies as knowledge network:** The Internet enables Black Studies to become a virtual knowledge network, a global information commons (2000s)

**The third stage of Black Studies poses a mission**

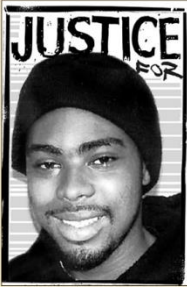
Black Studies has gone through three historical stages of development: Black Studies as social movement, as academic profession, and as knowledge network. These are not absolutely sequential stages, but rather overlapping modalities of how we operate, how we do what we do. Every organizational manifestation of the Black liberation movement has always had an educational component. These educational activities have been based in community institutions like churches and libraries.

The best 20<sup>th</sup> century example of this is the Black History Month activity established by Carter G Woodson in 1926. There was also the Garvey UNIA, the work of Noble Drew Ali and his Moorish Science Temple, the Mississippi Summer Project Freedom Schools in the 1960s, and the many manifestations of the left, from the Communist Party to the Black Panther Party to various forms of a Peoples College.

When Black Studies was vaulted into mainstream educational institutions by the radicalized Black student movement in the 1960's, a new academic profession was born. So for the last 50 years we have now had at least three generations of Black intellectuals socialized into the academic mainstream in its various manifestations from community colleges to PhD level institutions including the most elite private schools.

And now we are once again being transformed by our new digital tools and the opportunities that are opening up to us. As an academic profession we left our community to face the internal review process for hiring, for peer review publishing, for promotion to tenure, in exchange for the professional perks of job security, a solid middle class salary, international travel, and status. But now information technology is providing a way for us to reconnect with the community. Digital tools provide an easy way to cross over what often seems like a feudal moat that separates the campus from the community. We are only a click away if we are willing to drop the virtual drawbridge down and follow the path of open source and the creative commons uniting us with the Free Culture movement. In fact, this make the tasks begun by Du Bois and others easier in many ways.

## Police murders dominate Black oppression in the 21<sup>st</sup> century



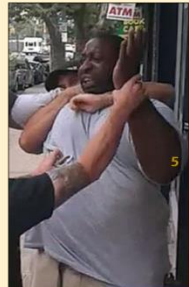
Oscar Grant 2009



Trayvon Martin 2012



Michael Brown 2014



Eric Garner 2014

**Every 24 hours someone employed or shielded by the US government killed a Black man, woman, or child!**

But as we do this we are reminded of the terror that our community faces. Nothing should ever make us forget that we are part of a community under attack. These men and women being killed are part of our family. They are our humanity that must be respected and protected. We do not yet know all the names, but for most of us there is a current name in our very own town or county that each of us knows very well.

A new movement is emerging, a new generation is finding its path to freedom



### #BLACKLIVESMATTER

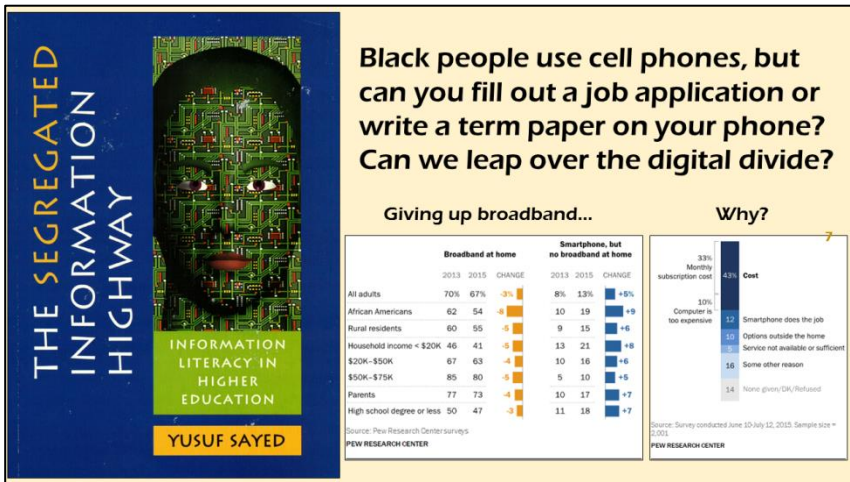
Trayvon Martin - Eric Garner - Michael Brown - Tamir Rice - Ezell Ford  
Orlando Barlow - Oscar Grant - Renisha McBride - Dante Parker  
Jordan Davis - John Crawford - Alton Arbery - Kimani Gray  
Dante Price - Steven Eugene Washington - Victor Steen - Sean Bell  
Aiyana Stanley-Jones - Wendell Allen - Aaron Campbell - Kendrec McDade  
Bo Morrison - Timothy Stansbury Jr. - Timothy Russell - Joreean Blake  
Jonathan Ferrell - Amadou Diallo - Ervin Jefferson - Patrick Dorismond  
Ousmane Zongo - Ronald Madison - James Brissette - Ramarley Graham  
Trayvones McGill - Jerrey Green - Sheron Jackson - Duane Brown  
Angelo Clark - Steven Rodriguez Christopher Kuzane - Raymond Allen  
Justin Sipp - Melvin Lawhorn - Nehemiah Biltard - Michael Lennard  
Harquez Smart - Tondra Nhejane - Rasha Boyd - Stephen Watts  
Manuel Loggins Jr. - Johnnie Kamahi Warren

**Black lives matter.  
Brown lives matter.  
All lives matter.**





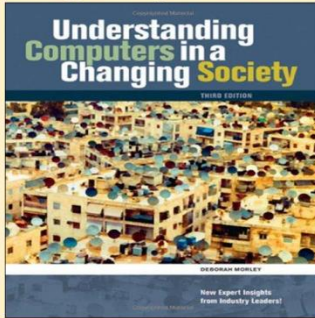
We are part of this moment when Black people’s struggle is being born again as a new generation of activists is emerging in the community and on campus. If Black Lives Matter this should no-where be more important than in Black Studies. Indeed, our conference theme is saying in different words that Black lives matter!



But with our focus on the digital we have to be concerned with the glaring inequality of the digital divide. We are not behind in cell phone use, but in other areas we are far behind any form of equity in the effective use of digital tools.

## The crisis in Black Studies, a societal crisis

Budget cuts  
Technological revolution  
Hegemony of the 1%



Let us also remember that Black Studies is not exactly a safe space. Neoliberalism brings the market framework to all of our institutions. For us this means our students have become customers while we serve as salespersons of institutionalized knowledge. Corporatized knowledge is force fed into our consciousness via mass media and the ever present digital monopolies of Google, Microsoft, Apple, and so on. None of us should feel so secure that we think we are playing the game because in fact at the same time the game is playing us.

## Struggle must also be waged in cyberspace

Malcolm X, a great communicator, founded Muhammad Speaks.




Following his lead in the digital age, we can communicate faster, on a global scale, in more powerful ways—and it can cost less





So in the end we will have to raise the level of our game and understand that the struggle must be waged in cyberspace as that is the new arena in which we are being attacked and marginalized. It is also the arena in which we have new possibility for various forms of Black unity, so once again it is the worst of times and the best of times as well.

**Sankofa** is that all thinking must be anchored in history  
(That's where we find our humanity)



Of all our studies, history is best qualified to reward our research. And when you see that you've got problems, all you have to do is examine the historic method used all over the world by others who have problems similar to yours. And once you see how they got theirs straight, then you know how you can get yours straight.

— Malcolm X —

AZ QUOTES

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And all of this is why we need the Sankofa Principle. Sankofa is a word in the Twi language of people who live in Ghana. Its literal meaning is “go back and fetch it,” referring to knowledge that one needs. Each elder is a manifestation of this Sankofa principle as people value their memory as a vital source of knowledge and wisdom.

African American intellectual history in all disciplines utilizes this principle, especially the writing of autobiographies. The history of our people and of each of us has been at the center of the intellectual production of each successive generation. There is no more important principle in Black intellectual history than the Sankofa Principle.

## Sankofa

helps us to understand  
that knowledge forms  
change over historical time



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Oral  
history



Written  
history



Digital  
history

Of course when we do this we are free to accept the fact that knowledge comes in many forms – from oral history, to written texts, and now to digital media. The information we seek and need has to be validated in its many forms without privileging one and disregarding or devaluing the rest. This too is about the humanity of our people, and their history. All these forms of knowledge are simultaneously operational today and can be represented in a digital media form.

### Sankofa Compares the Drum and the Digital

	The Drum (traditional)	The Digital (21 <sup>st</sup> century)
Similarities	Code generating	
	Diverse forms	
	Basis for literacy in communications and cultural activities	
Differences	Natural material	Industrial material
	Culturally specific	Universal
	Local	Global
	In the moment	Archived

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For a moment let us consider a historical polarity when comparing the drum in traditional society with digital tools today. There are similarities and differences. Both are code generating machines made by human beings in many diverse forms, large and small, different colors for style, usually operated by human hands, and both being the basis for literacy in communicating and performing cultural activities. This suggests there are sustainable features of human culture and that the past links to our present.

But here are important differences. We made our drums from natural materials wood and animal skins. We embraced an organic relationship to nature out of necessity, and out of sustainable cultural practices. Digital tools are built on industrial production augmented by major advances in the use of electricity, the mining of metals from Africa (like coltan from the Congo, necessary for cell phone production), and the exploitation of labor in China (like the 1.4 million workers at Foxconn that manufactures all the Apple products). Drums were specific to a cultural context in form and the content of its sound – to hear a drum was to hear a specific people's cultural production. Computers represent a new standardization of global culture, as we basically see the same machines used all over the world. The drum was local and now the digital is global. And most important of all for culture and knowledge the drum was heard when played and had to be played over and over again, whereas the digital is both instantaneous in ways that far exceeds what the traditional drum could do, and at the same time has the simultaneous capacity to be archived and stored in some kind of memory facility for replication when called upon. Now of course we know that the shelf life of each storage facility is up for question and is not likely to match what paper has accomplished, but it is a work in progress.

## Technology and Black history

Historical periods	Communications innovations	Examples
Africa	Speech and song Writing and numbers Drum	Chaka Zulu, Queen Nzinga, Kimathi
Slavery	Secret codes Quilts Newspapers	Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth
Rural tenancy	Radio, telegrams	Ida B. Wells W. E. B. Du Bois
Industrial urban	Television	Martin Luther King, Malcolm X Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer
Information society	Fax, computers, internet Social media past present future	Million Marches Black Radical Congress Black Lives Matter

Of course technological change has been constant over the years, including both written text and the capturing of voice and visual action. At each stage our people have had to change and adapt to new conditions. Sometimes Black people, in the community and on the campus, have had access and control of aspects of the technology, but in many instances these technologies have been in others hands and have been used at times against Black people in a negative way though sometimes positive. So both the humanity of Black people and our negation persists in the archives of these technologies. Nothing demonstrates this more than the reruns of old movies on TV that reminds us of all of the negatives and sometimes of some positives.

**The  
essence  
of Black  
humanity  
is our youth**



**We are ancient to their future**

So the Sankofa Principle is a fundamental feature of how we think to live, to affirm our humanity. We do this not only to honor our elders and ancestors, but because this is the wealth that our young need to survive and prosper. In the very early years Black children are part of the promise of humanity that all children represent. But they are subject to all the biological and psychological warfare being waged against Black people through factory food and the drug industries, legal and illegal. And they are taught to be inferior by a system that conspires to negate our humanity. This sets the agenda we must address in our scholarship and activism in this information-revolutionary period we are living in.

This has been a driving force in my thinking that has led to eBlack Studies.



## Three core values in the info society

**Cyberdemocracy:**  
everyone can connect



**Collective intelligence:**  
everyone can contribute

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**Information freedom:**  
everyone can use



Technology is wedded to ideology. This means that when something is developed it has been designed by people who are imposing their orientation on the world through invention. Just one example is when computer terminology is created. Let me quote from Wikipedia on the terms master and slave:

Master/slave is a model of communication where one device or process has unidirectional control over one or more other devices. In some systems a master is selected from a group of eligible devices, with the other devices acting in the role of slaves.

In other words, "The master/slave configuration is basically used for load sharing purposes when two identical motors connected to two different drives are coupled to a common load." One drive is defined as the master and is configured for running in the speed-control mode whereas the other defined as slave is configured for running in torque-control mode.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master/slave\\_\(technology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master/slave_(technology))

So we have to enter the digital game with our own set of assumptions that can serve as our orientation without falling prey to this kind of historical reference that functions to negate us. In fact our values reflect the universal possibility of the digital age, just the way that the Freedom movement has always proclaimed the maximum possibility of democracy in this country. Using the Sankofa Principle on our Freedom movement I am proposing we consider three fundamental values.

1. **Cyberdemocracy:** this is a necessary mandate to link with our entire community. As academics we live and work in resource rich institutions and must always find ways to share with those in our community most in need of digital tools and the skills to use them
2. **Collective intelligence:** contrary to racist thinking we know that all Black people think and have a rational capacity to develop ideas about how they view themselves and the society. Our digital tools make it possible to consider and include every voice in our analysis, opening up our data collection and research strategies to affirm this.
3. **Information freedom:** Privatization and commodification of all culture and information is the main thesis of neo-liberalism and we must oppose this at every manifestation and fight for culture and information to be free for all to share.

These three values are universal for eBlack Studies scholars. Now we turn to method.

## D7 method

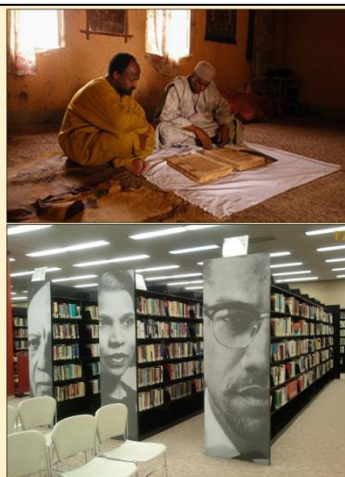
D1. Definition	Defining the problem, summing up the relevant literature, formulating the research question and/or hypothesis
D2. Data collection	Operationalizing the variables, drawing a population sample, collecting data regarding the variables
D3. Digitization	Inputting, scanning, otherwise putting the data on a computer, organized in a useful way
D4. Discovery	Analysing the data to test the hypothesis or answer the research question
D5. Design	Laying out the data and analysis in text, tables, and figures to convey the findings to various audiences
D6. Dissemination	Sharing the findings with the various audiences as widely and effectively as possible
D7. Difference	Using the research to make a difference in your research community or the larger world

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We have designed what we call the D7 method for eBlack Studies. This is a revision of what is generally called the scientific method, but we have added D3 Digitization and D7 Difference. Of course some data is born digital and then D2 and D3 are one and the same. Let's walk through this model of eBlack Studies research method.

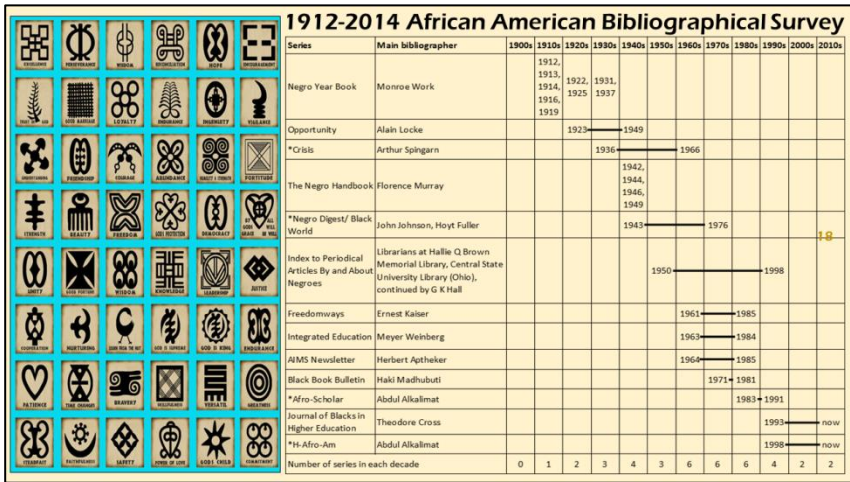
### D1 Definition

1. Review of the literature
2. Find a good question  
(more important than an answer)
3. Formulate key concepts
4. Operationalize the concept from the abstract to the concrete



The task here is to identify a problem to address. Within that, what specific research question will the research seek to

answer? The Sankofa Principle requires us to first investigate this research question with an intensive review of the literature. Here the Black librarian is an invaluable collaborator. There is a century of research to rely on.



This century-plus of research on African America is available through the decades if you consult the bibliographical mapping of Black intellectual history. There have always been scholars who provided comprehensive bibliographical tracking of Black intellectual production. The pre-eminent scholars in this regard include Monroe Work, Arturo Schomburg, Dorothy Porter and Jean Hudson among others.

In this record I want to particularly reference the 1946 book by Harry Greene, “Holders of Doctorates Among American Negroes.” This is an inclusive detailed directory of all PhD and MA holders to that date with data on their work.

# 1983-1992 Black Studies Newsletter



Our own work in this regard was producing a quarterly comprehensive listings of books and articles from 1983 to 1992 in a publication we called Afro-Scholar. This is now online and can be easily accessed.

The main point here is to place our research in the historical process of the generational production of knowledge, never failing to consult our history because important information is always there. Each field of scholarship has a history, and each major research question has a history that usually has been taken up by several disciplines.

All research either confirms what is known, challenges and replaces what has been known, or adds something entirely new. These are the only three results from all scholarship but one can't know which unless the historical review of the literature has been done. D1, Definition, is about formulating a research question, something you want your research to answer.



## D2 Data Collection

1. Identify a population
2. Choose a case or a sample
3. Choose a method
4. Design and implement field work
5. Begin by developing a relationship with your study participants
6. Collect and archive data



D2, Data collection, creates the basis for answering a research question. It is important in all cases that we think of our population of people as not only objects for our analysis but also as thinking subjects who can always contribute to the design and implementation of research as well as in the analysis.

Now some data is born digital and this requires its own methodology. For instance, we used born-digital data to make the first comprehensive survey of Black Studies academic units. Our first attempt was in the 1990s and at that time many units did not have a web presence, but today it is a norm, and it has the value of being self-reported data. In 2013 we found that 76% of 1,777 US colleges and universities had been impacted by Black Studies: 20% having established formal units and 56% having changed the curriculum of their existing units. Since our survey the annual obituary notices of Black Studies in the *New York Times* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* have stopped, but of course not the attacks.

## D3 Digitization

1. Migrate the data to a digital format
2. Protect the privacy and identity of respondents
3. Make data available to the research team
4. Archive all work on the data



This is the new feature of eBlack Studies research, moving our data and analysis into digital form. One of the main features is that we can embrace research as a collective activity bridging time and space. For us as individuals this means that our research is with us whenever we have our laptop at hand. Those who use larger datasets will need network connectivity to that data. But more than this, we have the possibility of developing what might be called a Black Studies Collaboratory, a “center without walls, in which the nation’s researchers can perform their research without regard to physical location, interacting with colleagues, accessing instrumentation, sharing data and computational resources, [and] accessing information in digital libraries” (Wulf, 1989).

## Three Major Forms of Digitization

1. Digitization of discourse
2. Digitization of scholarship
3. Digitization of experience



The digital adds to but does not replace hard copy

Digitization takes three forms:

1. Digitization of discourse (virtual community of scholars and activists)
2. Digitization of scholarship (secondary data)
3. Digitization of experience (primary data)



## Digitization of discourse

← Using Youtube to establish a directory of a speech community



Using social media to collect the digitization of discourse

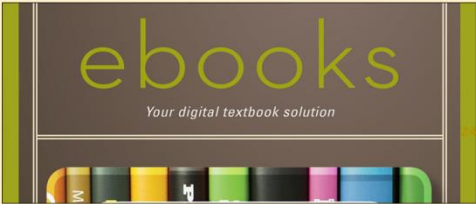
In terms of discourse there are at least two main ways this has been done:

1. Aggregating voices that are already online, creating a virtual community
2. Building an intentional community based on shared interests

An additional aspect of this is developing discourse communities of scholars that I will address shortly with a discussion of the listserv H-Afro-Am.



## **Digitization of scholarship**



**An information commons  
or  
a marketplace of commodities?**

The digitization of scholarship is taking new forms and provides new functionality. This connects with data collection in that we have the need for comprehensive data sets that are inclusive of relevant information on each major topic being studied.

Examples of this include a data set that attempts to document every slave ship of the transatlantic trade, a data set for every African American novel, and the many sites digitizing key works from the Project Gutenberg ebooks to the Gilder Lehrman Center's online document collection on slavery at Yale.

A major advance in this has been the dSpace software developed at MIT in 2002. This is an open source tool for archiving scholarship. This has been adopted at many institutions: Deep Blue at the University of Michigan, IDEALS at

the University of Illinois, and PURR at Purdue (Purdue University Research Repository). This was subsequently proposed as national policy by the National Science Foundation in its report *Long-Lived Digital Data Collections: Enabling Research and Education in the 21st Century*. They emphasized that there was a “growing realization that intermediate data may be of use to other researchers” (2005, p. 20). So this kind of archiving has become essential.

The crisis facing Black Studies is that the neoliberal paradigm of commodifying research has become so pervasive that little Black Studies scholarship has been posted in these free access archives. Most HBCU’s do not use dSpace and therefore are being erased in cyberspace archives. In fact this goes even further in that institutional archives are also ignored by Black Studies scholars and departments in all too many cases.



One of the developments that fits into this point concerns the development of collective works projects. This includes Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, and Martin Luther King. These are hard copy commodity products in the main, although the University of Illinois did make the Booker



T Washington volumes free available online for some time but not anymore. Here is what we have done to begin making the material by and about Malcolm X available to the public without any barriers of institutional affiliation or cost. The Shabazz family owns his works, but in a much greater historical sense they belong to all of us. My suggestions for years has been a political solution to this issue of financial interest in personal archives of great public importance. In matters of intellectual property we need a policy like eminent domain for real estate whereby the government can take property in the public interest and adequately compensate the owner. Otherwise in a fundamental sense we are commodifying our history and that is not a good solution.



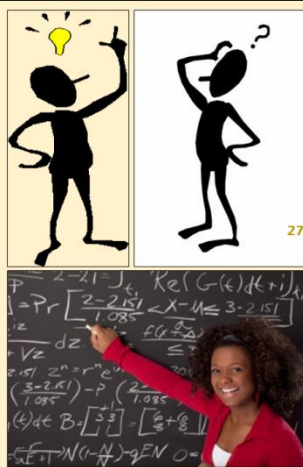
The most exciting aspect of digitization is on experience, especially the digitization of everyday life, in the now and at any other historical time frame. We have made this part of how we have redefined our classroom pedagogy. We turn the classroom from a site of intellectual consumption via our syllabi, reading lists, and lectures, into a site of intellectual production in the digital age. The main tool we emphasize is the smart cellphone

that can handle text, audio, video, and photographs. We have worked with our students to build websites that target all of the churches, or all of the hair care institutions in the local community. Another way we have done this is to collect all of the Black community based websites into a directory such as we did for the state of Illinois outside of the city of Chicago.

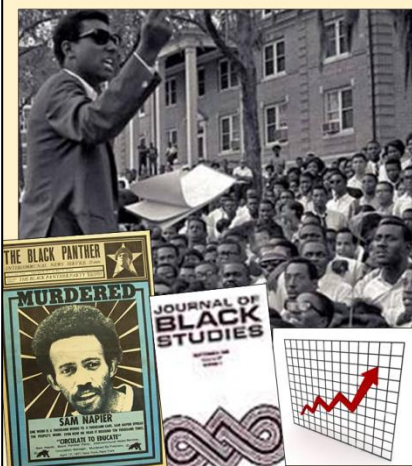
We found that the archives were full of material not within easy reach of the community or scholars for that matter. There is a great deal of campus research on the local community that has never been shared with the community. Meanwhile the community has been uploading its material regarding family, church, neighborhood and many other aspects of social life into social media. We built a website, a digital library really, called eBlack CU (Champaign Urbana) that contains 10 days of video/audio, 50,000 pages of text, 1,000 photographs, and boasts 58,000 users so far. In the process we found a woman who had uploaded 9,000 community photos to Facebook in one year. Graduate student Noah Lenstra who staffed this project is now on the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

## D4 Discovery

1. **Clean and describe the dataset**
2. **Concentrate first on your dependent variable/s**
3. **Explore the relationship between dependent and independent variables**
4. **Find the patterns**
5. **Summarize your findings**



Discovery is how one answers the key research question. The test is best argued back into the context of the review of the literature utilized when defining the research question. Remember there are three forms that the findings of a research project takes: to confirm what is known from previous research, to contest what has been recorded in the research literature or to combine aspects in new ways, or to address a new question that has not been investigated. In the digital humanities we have great opportunities to raise new research questions, but only when this has been validated by an exhaustive review of the literature. This validates that our work is special, now, makes a contribution. There is nothing special about our work unless we can prove it.



## D5 Design




1. Always begin with a full report
2. Define your audience/s
3. Choose a format
4. Language is key
5. Use images when possible
6. Be brief and straight to the point

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But findings don't speak for themselves. They have to be presented in a comprehensible form to whomever is the target audience. And audience matters. For eBlack Studies this includes Black Studies scholars, the Black community and the broader global network of scholars in the digital humanities. The digital includes video, audio, and graphics of all kinds, so we have a great opportunity to be creative in maximizing who we can

speak to, both out of our desire for academic excellence as well the historical necessity of social responsibility.

In fact in a conference in 1977 it was my good fortune to invent the slogan that became the mission statement of the National Council for Black Studies: “Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility” some 40 years ago.

	<h2>D6 Dissemination</h2> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Post the full report to the web</li><li>2. Send draft to key reviewers, study subjects first, and pay attention to comments</li><li>3. Plan formats for different audiences, go global </li></ol>	
	<p>4. Keep hard copies</p> <div></div>	

Each design for each audience then needs to have effort behind it to make contact with the audience. For scholars this means having the energy to make multiple submissions based on listening to reviewers, but having thick skin to avoid being discouraged. The best way to do this is have as your first audience some colleagues close to you who support you and who you trust, who will read and critique your work. We can't afford to work solo in isolation. This also means presenting works in progress to conference sessions, again not only getting suggestions for revision but also making contacts with possible venues for publication.

The main target for scholarly articles is a journal. For the Black community we have the mass media – radio, TV via cable channels, and the Internet, especially Facebook and sharing

within networks. Here language is key, as we must accept the challenge of speaking in plain language – remember what people said when Malcolm X spoke: “Make it plain brother, make it plain.”

# D7 Difference

1. Seek change in the world

2. Seek change in policy

3. Seek change in research


4. Seek change in yourself


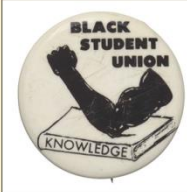
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And finally, we have to include change in our framework to make sure we don’t get caught in the self-serving process of seeking approval from academic gatekeepers and ignoring the change we need on so many levels. Research is about finding out what is real and true and as we do this over time we change ourselves, and then we stand on this knowledge that we know very well. In sharing this with our colleagues we seek to change research in general as well. But also research on Black people always has some kind of policy implications for the US and indeed other parts of the world. This is our responsibility – remember academic excellence and social responsibility.

But a word of caution, don’t expect one research paper to change the world. It is our task to design research programs, a process involving many specific research projects, amassing large quantities of data and critiques of alternative explanations before we can make a serious impact and make a difference.

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## D7 method

D1. Definition	Defining the problem, summing up the relevant literature, formulating the research question and/or hypothesis
D2. Data collection	Operationalizing the variables, drawing a population sample, collecting data regarding the variables
D3. Digitization	Inputting, scanning, otherwise putting the data on a computer, organized in a useful way
D4. Discovery	Analysing the data to test the hypothesis or answer the research question
D5. Design	Laying out the data and analysis in text, tables, and figures to convey the findings to various audiences
D6. Dissemination	Sharing the findings with the various audiences as widely and effectively as possible
D7. Difference	Using the research to make a difference in your research community or the larger world

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So in review we have presented our conception of a research method for eBlack Studies, a digital humanities model for the transformation of Black Studies.

D1 Definition

D2 Data collection

D3 Digitization

D4 Discovery

D5 Design

D6 Dissemination

D7 Difference



## 2013-05-21

Identities of "the slaves"  
 Re: Were "the slaves" Africans or "Americans"  
 Re: Were "the slaves" Africans or "Americans"  
 Re: Were "the slaves" Africans or "Americans"  
 Re: Were "the slaves" Africans or "Americans"  
 Re: Were "the slaves" Africans or "Americans"  
 Were "the slaves" Africans or "Americans": 4 REPLIES  
 Were "the slaves" Africans or "Americans": 2 REPLIES  
 Re: Query re: "high-toned"  
 Re: Query re: "high-toned"

[illegible]

2013-05-20

H-Net, Public History and Independent Scholars  
 The Racial Wealth Gap As Deliberate Public Policy  
 2013 National Underground Railroad Conference- Little Rock, Arkansas (June 19-22)  
 Social Security Changes Could Hurt Black Most  
 REGISTRATION OPEN: Black German Heritage and Research Association Convention, Amherst College, Aug. 8-10, 2013  
 YouTube: James Turner: Pioneer of African Studies and Freedom Activist  
 Jamaica Kincaid: "People Only Say I'm Angry Because I'm Black and I'm a Woman"  
 2013 SAHMLA Conf CFP: Women's Studies Panel  
 research on women and social media  
 College diploma gap widens between rich and poor  
 Call for Papers: 1619: Making of America-Deadline Extended  
 Postwar Civil Rights History  
 Query re: "high-toned"  
 Former Black Panther Party leader Elaine Brown at Marcus Books!  
 Towards a Black Aesthetic (essay by Hoyt Fuller)  
 cfp: "Cultural History in the United States: Past, Present, and Future Trajectories"  
 William "Nick" Nelson ( d 2013)

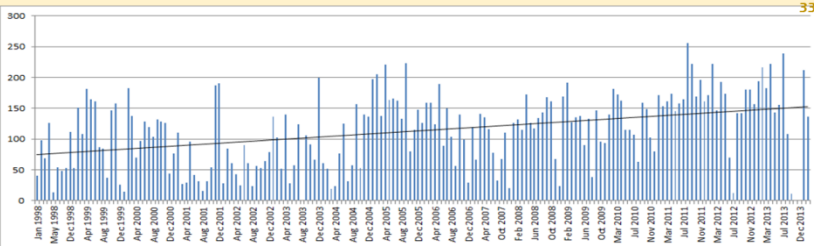
[illegible]

## H-Afro-Am:

- 17 years of discussion of all things Afro

- **>21,000 posts, >12,000 topics, average 112 posts/mo**

- Avg 112 posts/month to >3,700 people; offlist posts too





Over the 17 years there were more than 21,000 messages covering more than 12,000 topics.

## H-Afro-Am's readers and writers

- **Diverse readers: 598 colleges & universities among 1,688 .edu subs**
- **Readers from leading institutions**
  - >25 subs each from Michigan, MSU, Indiana, Memphis, Temple, Columbia, NYU, Duke, Illinois
- **International, esp UK, Germany, Canada, France**
- **Diverse writers**
  - 19% of messages were from one-time posters
  - 14% were from 50-times-or-more posters
  - 0.5% from a 20-time-or-more writer
- **Multiple voices on a topic (threads)**
  - 2,289 or 18% of 12,578 topics involved two<sup>34</sup> or more posts
  - 2% involved ten or more posts



Readers were diverse and writers were diverse too. Close to one in five of the topics (18%) generated two or more messages, that is, a thread, a conversation. Two percent of all topics had 10 or more messages. The longest thread was 69 messages on the topic of “passing.”

H-Afro-Am demonstrated that Black Studies was an area deserving of a digitally based discourse community, something that could operate on a global level. National conferences that enable face to face meetings once a year are important, including such conferences as we are in right now, but this listserv was an everyday service to more people than attend any Black Studies conference face-to-face.

# H-Afro-Am archived

Editors have access to monthly statistics:

- a. Number of subscribers
- b. Number of sign offs
- c. Number of posts
- d. And more

**We can measure our impact quantitatively**

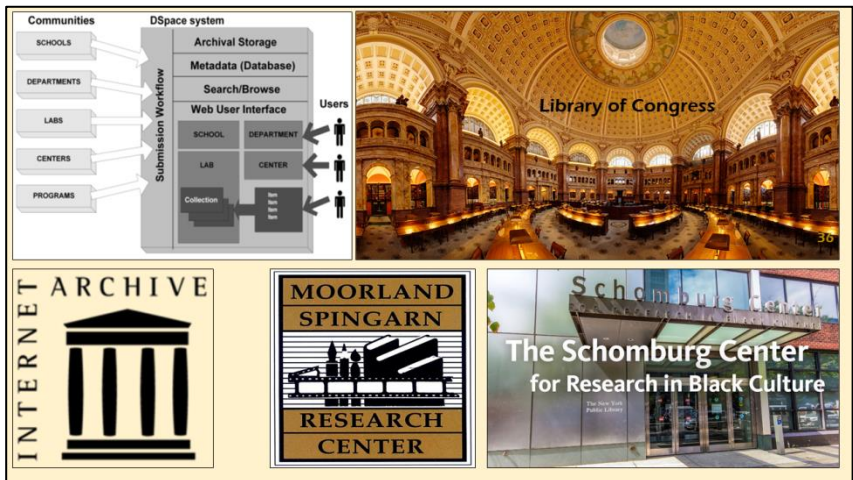
**H-Net switched from listserv/email to drupal, negating mass appeal.**

**You can find and search the logs (the archive) of all messages 1998-2014**

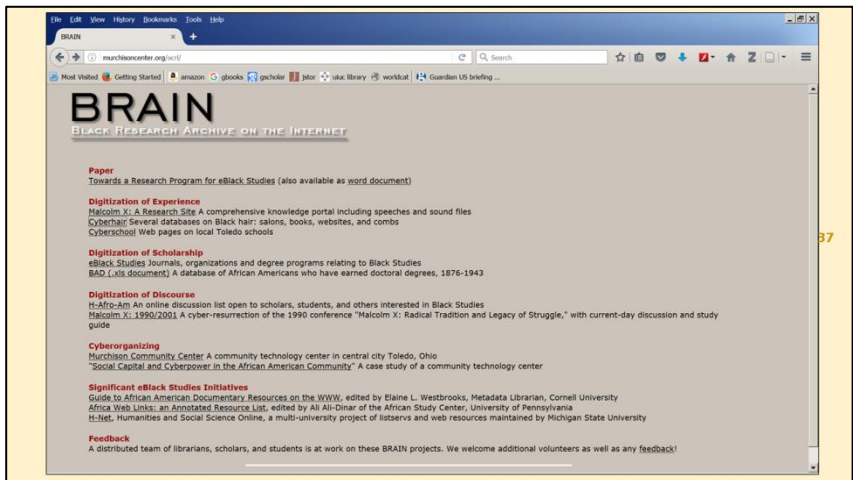
A screenshot of a web browser window displaying a file index for the directory /stats-lsv/h-afro-am. The browser's address bar shows the path. The page title is "Index of /stats-lsv/h-afro-am". Below the title is a table with columns for "Name", "Last modified", and "Size". The table lists various files with names like h-afro-am.20001115.txt and their corresponding last modified dates and sizes. A "Parent Directory" link is also visible at the top of the list. The page number "35" is visible in the bottom right corner of the browser window.

Name	Last modified	Size
Parent Directory	-	-
h-afro-am.20001115.txt	01-Dec-2000 07:21 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20001115.txt	15-Nov-2000 14:09 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20010101.txt	01-Jan-2001 07:07 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20010201.txt	01-Feb-2001 07:04 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20010301.txt	01-Mar-2001 07:04 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20010401.txt	01-Apr-2001 07:04 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20010501.txt	01-May-2001 07:15 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20010601.txt	01-Jun-2001 07:03 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20010701.txt	01-Jul-2001 07:03 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20010801.txt	01-Aug-2001 07:06 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20010901.txt	01-Sep-2001 07:03 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20011001.txt	01-Oct-2001 07:05 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20011101.txt	01-Nov-2001 07:03 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20011201.txt	01-Dec-2001 07:05 2.3K	
h-afro-am.20020101.txt	01-Jan-2002 07:03 2.3K	

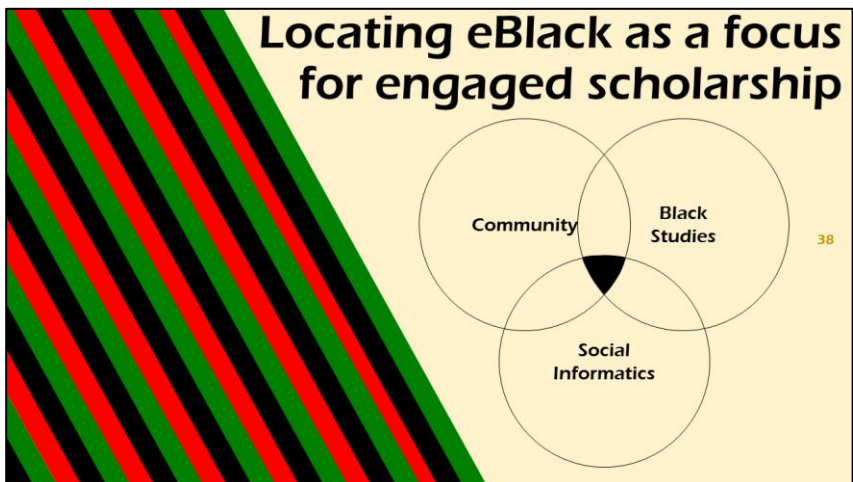
H-Afro-Am was and is part of H-Net, a service organization based at Michigan State University that offers virtual communities for academic fields of study based on the work of volunteer academics. From the start in 1992 until 2014 it was based on the simple and yet effective use of email. They then made the mistake of fixing what wasn't broke, hiring consultants to switch them from listservs to a Drupal content management system website, and then H-Net "discussions" as they call them really declined in importance. You see the steady growth here until messages crashed and have not recovered. The new technology was too complicated for almost everyone to post messages. A big lesson is we have to safeguard our platforms. In Sankofa terms, freedom of the press is for those who own the presses.



Of course the final step in the digital humanities as in all genres of research are the memory institutions. Memory institutions are where we store our information for later retrieval. My strong advice for all scholars is to combine the storage of hard copy as well as digital formatting. The venerable institutions like the Library of Congress, The Moorland Spingarn Archive at Howard University and the Schomburg Center in New York City are some of the institutions that have been and will continue to store hard copy. But we have to pay attention to what has been mentioned as the dSpace software option on a campus as well as the more inclusive Internet Archive founded by Brewster Kahle in 1996 that now contains 20 petabytes of data, 370 million websites and 273 billion pages.

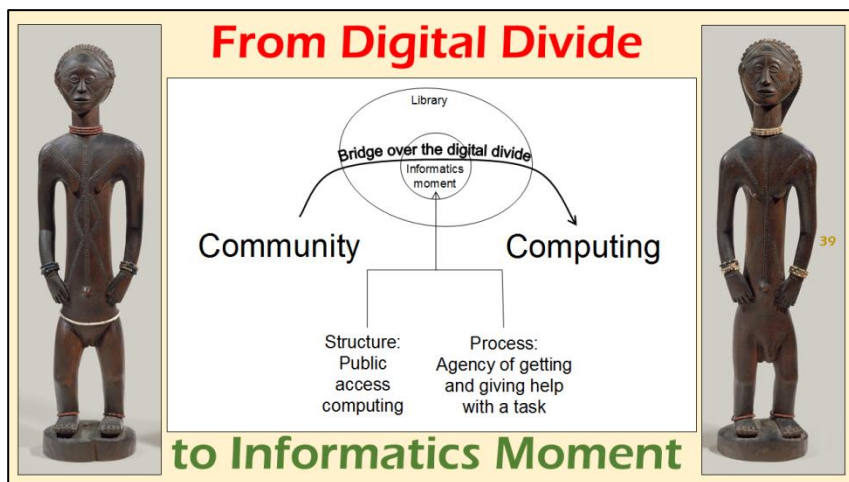


Our work in this regard we called BRAIN: Black Research Archive on the Internet. We just wanted to demonstrate how such a virtual institution could be developed as part of eBlack Studies. It is critical that we activate the memory institutions so that our work is preserved for generations to come. We are indeed ancient to their future.



We have argued that there is a necessary relationship between eBlack Studies and the Black liberation movement. But more

specifically, we will now theorize this point and relate it to our research program. The connection between Black Studies and the community can be redefined by using an approach to social phenomena called social informatics. Our research program is in a subarea of this new field that is called community informatics, how the community is facing the digital age.. We are especially concerned with the historical, spatial, organic communities that have defined the history of human society up to the present time: the neighborhoods we all grew up in.



We know our community faces a relative digital divide, not in the use of cellphones and texting, but in the full use of computers. So our first concern is how to intervene at this historical moment to deal with this fundamental issue of social inequality in the information society. We are focused on social solutions like public libraries and computer labs in churches and community centers. Kate Williams has theorized that what she calls the “informatics moment” is the critical instance of social interaction when we help each other get over the digital divide. It is this interaction that is redefining the library and reestablishing human connections in the information society.

Noah Lenstra expanded this concept in his dissertation to what he calls the informatics lifecycle.

## Digitization of a Local Community: eBlack CU

```

graph TD
    C[Community, esp bonding social capital] --> CS[Cyberspace]
    C --> PC[Public computing]
    CS --> CP[Cyberpower, or community changed]
    CP --> PC
    PC --> C
    CS <--> PC
        
```

**Community informatics is a partnership between scholars and the community, building knowledge for self-determination**

Our general model for our research program involves cyberpower as our major dependent variable, seeking to explain how Black people get Black power to impact and change their lives using digital tools in the information society. We recruit the community as colleagues in the research we call community informatics.

eBlack as a Practical Project: The Toledo Experience			
	Black Studies	eBlack Studies	The Toledo Experience
Professional Discourse	Conference (face to face discussions)	Listserv discussions	H-Afro-Am
Curriculum Development	Classroom based campus courses	Distance learning	Joint project with University of Ghana
Research Productivity	Hard copy publications	Research web sites	Malcolm X: A Research Site
Public Policy	Consulting and internships	Advocacy web sites and petitions	1998 Black Radical Congress
Community Service	Volunteering in an actual community	Building a virtual community	Toledo Black Church web project



An example of the impact of cyberpower in Black Studies is the model we developed during our tenure as founding head of the Black Studies program at the University of Toledo in the 1990's. In each of five major areas we transformed our procedures to embrace digital technology. This included recruiting teachers from the African Diaspora to teach our students via distance learning digital technology. Even after I left the University of Toledo, colleagues there extended this to faculty based in Zimbabwe and South Africa as well.



One final warning is that the information society is not heaven on earth. We live a bit of hell. All of the major digital companies that provide the virtual environments in which we volunteer to share our information cooperate directly with the surveillance agencies of the state. There is no such thing as privacy anymore. This is not a time to be naïve about the kind of society we live in.

# The Sankofa Principle



We should reach back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us so that we can achieve our full potential as we move forward. Whatever we have lost, forgotten, foregone, or been stripped of, can be reclaimed, revived, preserved, and perpetuated.

This is another instance when we need the Sankofa Principle. After all, we have endured slavery and slave like conditions that match and exceed what people mean by fascism. We have our history to learn from.

“We should reach back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us so that we can achieve our full potential as we move forward. Whatever we have lost, forgotten foregone, or been stripped of, can be reclaimed, revived, preserved, and perpetuated.”

# Conclusion

Knowledge is from the people and for the people

So it must be with the digital

And don't forget that books will still be important

Remember the values:  
Cyberdemocracy  
Collective intelligence  
Information freedom



In conclusion I hope this talk has been food for thought, been an example of work that helps you think about your work.

Knowledge is from the people and for the people. So it must be with the digital, but don't forget that books will still be important.

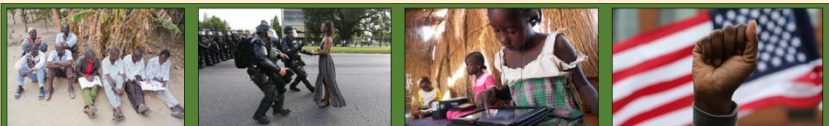
Remember the values: Cyberdemocracy. Collective intelligence. Information freedom.



**Thank you**

**Abdul Alkalimat**  
**University of Illinois**  
**[mcworter@illinois.edu](mailto:mcworter@illinois.edu)**

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Thank you for listening.

## Further reading

Alkalimat, Abdul, and Associates. *Introduction to Afro-American Studies: A Peoples College Primer*. Sixth edition. Chicago: Twenty-First Century Books, 1986. First edition published 1973; Sixth edition available online at <http://www.murchisoncenter.org/rahul/introbook/>

Alkalimat, Abdul. "eBlack: A Twenty-First Century Challenge," in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, volume 2 number 3, p 69-76. available at <http://www.eblackstudies.org/eblack.html>, 2000.

----- The African American Experience in Cyberspace: A Resource Guide to the Best Web Sites on Black Culture and History. London: Pluto Press, 2004.

-----, *Cyberorganizing: An eBook*. Chicago: People's College Press, 2004. available online at <http://eblackstudies.org/grbk/>

-----, "Information Technology and the Transformation of Black Studies," *International Journal of Africana Studies* (Special issue: Sustaining Black Studies in the 21st Century: Perspectives from a Convening), Spring 2010  
Kate Williams, Han Shenglong, Yan Hui, and Abdul Alkalimat, eds. *Community Informatics in China and the US: Theory and Research*. Beijing: National Library Press, 2012.

Noah Lenstra and Abdul Alkalimat, "eBlack Studies as Digital Community Archives: A Proof of Concept Study in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois," *Fire!!!* vol 1, no. 2 (2013): 151-184.

Alkalimat, Abdul, and Kate Williams, *Roots and Flowers: The Life and Work of Afro-Cuban Librarian Marta Terry González*. San Francisco: Library Juice Press, 2015.



The Sankofa Bird reminds us that we must continue to move forward as we remember our past. And at the same time we plant a seed for the future generations that come after us.

To cite: Alkalimat, Abdul (Gerald McWorter). "The Sankofa Principle: From the Drum to the Digital," Keynote talk at the 30th Symposium on African American Culture and Philosophy, hosted by the African American Studies and Research Center, Purdue University, Lafayette, IN, December 1, 2016.