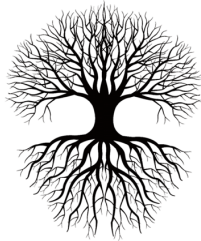# Jacques Lesure

I'm Jacques Pierre Lesure. I'm without a doubt a collection of traumas, circumstances, and triumphs. But aside from those, or as product of them, I'm a creator, lover, and contributor. I'm the son of a loving mother and a benefactor of relentless love and support from many more. I'm a sprinkle in the story of time, a grateful holder of breath, and an energy of my own. I aim to reflect one of the most beautiful places I could ever know, the eastside of Atlanta. I strive to tell the truth and own all of this bravely as I press forward.

Their Dreams Are Not Ours: Black Higher Ed Reform During the Obama Administration

Jacques Lesure
University of Wisconsin-Madison
jplesure1@gmail.com

The significance and educational contributions of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and subsequent support they should receive, was highly contentious during the Obama administration. Rooted in tensions born out of liberalism and racialized political economy —the cultural politics reflected in the state's discussion and approach toward reform highlight deeply embedded logics and facets of coloniality that find themselves embedded in projects of progress taken up by a wide range of social and political institutions and actors. This conceptual essay builds a case for deeper inquiry into these paradoxes.

Introduction

The United States' social, political, and economic fabric has always engendered demands for significant transformation. However, how Black being is both represented and responded to by the state changes across time. This is evidenced in the nearly two-century period of reform that has impacted public and private institutions, from corporations, to philanthropic foundations, to the affairs of local municipalities. While these shifts have occurred across political spectrums, they are all a part of the U.S nation state's ongoing reconciliation with the tensions and possibilities of emancipation — and the afterlife of slavery. (Hartman, 1997) This generates the idea of redress, which can be understood as that which is owed, structurally antagonistic to the nation's perpetuity, yet vital to the functions of racial capitalism, liberal multiculturalism, and neoliberalism. Analyzing the cultural politics of how the state imagines and enables prescriptive action toward redress generates critiques of modernity. These critiques reveal deeply embedded logics and facets of violent coloniality that find themselves embedded in projects of progress taken up by social institutions and actors — creating paradoxes and ironies worth noting. (Andreotti, V.D., Stein, S., Ahenakew, C., & Hunt, D., 2015)

The underlying interests of governmental policy efforts have long been a topic of discussion in the fields of critical policy studies and cultural studies. Traditionally, a critical policy analysis approach that lends itself toward a meditation of the ways that power and knowledge construct "truths" and common-sense has not been of much interest to policymaking (technocrat) and policy-taking (practitioner) audiences in the field of Education. The most convincing rationale for the field's reluctance to adopt this methodological turn is that educational research, by and large, is intended to supply the recommendation realm with solutions and fixes. Even critical scholarship within race and education employs framings such as 'disproportionality', 'inequality', and 'inequity' that ultimately insists there to be a calculus of solvability and redress. (Dumas. M, Dixon. A, May-

orga. E, 2016) A cultural-political approach helps read these available framings and discourses as by-products of power and discursive motives, as opposed to viewing them as well-intentioned remedies to otherwise perfect political and economic systems.

Therefore, the contributions of scholars using an approach to educational policy studies that rely on critical notions of policy formation and intention have provoked necessary discussion. A critical policy analysis approach is increasingly being applied across a range of studies in education, some of which have even incorporated antiblackness into their conceptual framework to better interrogate the sum of the impact on Black people. (Gulson. K, 2010; Gulson. K & Webb. P, 2016; Dumas. M, Dixon. A, Mayorga. E, 2016; Dumas. M, ross. kihana miraya, 2016) While these studies are becoming more prominent within the field of educational studies, higher education as a setting of interest has not received the bulk of the attention compared to the quantity of literature that refers to K-12. Higher education institutions are often explicitly resourced with the task of managing varied crises of modernity and are imagined as being able to be forward thinking in solving social and economic issues. Yet, these same institutions are subject to similar core dilemmas as other public and private institutions tasked with imagining futures.

The combined efforts of the White House Initiative on HBCU's, the HBCU community, and the Interagency Task Force that oversaw My Brother's Keeper —a collaborative initiative started in February 2014 to address the social and economic opportunity gaps for boys and young men of color — evidence assumptive logics and approaches to higher education reform. Milestones were put forth in around post-secondary education and training. Thus, assumptions embedded within the Obama administration's stated intentions and archived efforts to alter the educational and economic outcomes of Black men at Historically Black Colleges and Universities should be interrogated.

This call for deeper inquiry is based off the premise that coloniality is the management of modernity's unraveling violence and is the central mechanism that drives both My Brother's Keeper and the White House Initiative on HBCUs. This unraveling violence is the "spaciality (expansionist control of lands), ontoepistemic racism (elimination and subjugation of difference) and geopolitics of knowledge production (epistemic violence) that are constitutive of modernity." (Andreotti, V.D., Stein, S., Ahenakew, C., & Hunt, D, 2015) The goal of this analysis would be to generate a deeper understanding of how key tensions and solutions that emerge from the data are reflective of the state's "enunciations" of modernity's violence. These enunciations help clarify the dispositions of the state despite notions of liberalism and progressivism that can cloud our collective discernment of research, policy, and action.

Key Literature

The cultural-ideological formations present in higher education reform discourse during Obama's tenure, situated from 2008 to 2016, lends themselves to a closer analysis of the discursive and material products of the state's engagement with liberal multiculturalism and racialized political economy. Critical perspectives around governmentality could be employed to theorize the role and power of the 'state' in structuring the conditions that Black men are documented to withstand in higher education and U.S society.

Defining the contemporary governmental 'state'

While oftentimes elusive and invisible, the governmental 'state' is often contested in its definition and scope of power. For the purpose of conceptualization, I define it as "the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, what has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy." (Foucault, 1991) Foucault's reading of political economy as the principal form of knowledge is challenged by Wilderson's provocation of Marxism. Wilderson makes clear that the dilemmas in Gramsci's State are explained via a crisis of authority, something that is "ideological and contingent" — as opposed to something ontological and gratuitous. (Wilderson, 2003, p. 229) Therefore, much like Russell Means stated in his infamous speech on indigenous politics in the U.S, Marxism and Leftist critique of the state would not mean freedom for all but rather a loss and negotiation of one's beingness within the project. (Means, 1980)

However, Foucault also cautions us against overvaluing or misnaming the state as a rigorous and individual entity with a set of functions that render it essential and requiring occupation and attack. Instead, the state is posited as a composite reality and a mythicized abstraction — with its governmentalization being its most powerful function. Foucault defined governmentalization as "the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on.". (Foucault, 1991, p. 103)

Indeed, the state engages in the labor of ongoing reconciliation and racial definition. So much so that we must take seriously Melamed's (2015) warning that contemporary racial capitalism is associated with more than white supremacist capitalist development but that also deploys "liberal and multicultural terms of inclusion to value and devalue forms of humanity differently to fit the needs of reigning state-capital orders.". (p. 77) No era or political administration can earn our blind eye. Her work also connects to critiques of modernity, reminding us how deeply centric loss and disposability are to the persistence of our political-economic system. (Melamed, 2011)

Various literature has also pointed toward the rise of neoliberal governmentality as a mechanism of racial-capitalist world order. Neoliberalism has been defined many times across works of literature and applied in various disciplines. (Baldridge. B, 2014; Clay. K, 2019; Spence. L, 2015) I interpret it as a political project that asserts a "common sense" by utilizing ideological rhetoric, political-economic rationality, and insists that social institutions and actors be accountable to market principles above all else. This matters to educational research on higher education because these logics aggressively structure not only the aims of colleges and universities nationwide but also the basis on which their participants can be advocated for. Within neoliberal governmentality, higher education is a without a doubt a product that is responsible for being managed by skilled workers who produce other skilled workers entering knowledge and market economies. Thus, the neoliberal governmental racial-capitalist state engages the topic of higher education reform to improve outputs, increase transparency for consumers (and governments and private agencies) to facilitate economically rational activity. (Jankowski, N., & Provezis, S., 2014)

This motivation took unique form during the Obama presidency as discourse that explicitly addressed race and structural racism was elevated in the cultural and political mainstream. His administration, for many, was assumed to be evidence of years of successful racial critique. Beliefs of colorblind ideology began to gain prominence as the nation embarked on a journey toward redress. This fantasy was ultimately dampened by the emergence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in response to the insidious murders of Black people, often on camera for millions to repeatedly view.

Additionally, Obama's administration is widely understood as a case study in racial neoliberalism, characterized by policies and rhetoric that enabled and encouraged privatization, market competition, and a focus on individual behaviors as the locus of corrective possibility. (Singh, M. V, 2018) Goldberg's (2009) full-length treatment of racial neoliberalism offers an expansive critique of the ideologies and rationality. He writes boldly of one of the implications asserting that "devoid of race in the public sphere, racism – as modes of racially driven subjection and exclusion, debilitation and humiliation – is freed up to circulate as robustly as individuals or non-government (or non-government-funded) institutions should choose in private." (p. 339) This shift of role in terms of how the state engages racial difference is congruent with Foucault's analyses and also explains the "neoliberal multicultural imagination" that runs rampant in which Black people's blackness and the material conditions that follow stand in the way of a post-racial America. (Dumas, M. J., & ross, kihana miraya., 2016) HBCU's and higher education institutions at large are no strangers to these phenomena. This is evidenced by decades of transition that has included private partnerships, budget allocations, the creation of new academic departments, and shifts in administrative structure.

However, I hold that much of the intentions of the governmental state of the Obama administration were interpreted through a lens of a battle narrative. For many, the warrior figure was a Black man whose best efforts should be commended due to the unflinching and complex web of systems and structures that no one could alter with efficacy. Wilderson (2010) addressed this in a book written within film studies asserting that "neoliberalism with a Black face is neither the index of a revolutionary advance nor the end of anti-Blackness as a constituent element of U.S. antagonisms." This assertion, alongside Sexton's (2008) book critiquing multiculturalism encourages us that scrutiny should remain throughout modernity, no matter the rationalities and logics that arise.

This is instructive toward the goals of the proposed research study, by situating the given data within a particular frame of political skepticism and doubt — clearer analysis can emerge. What was made possible in the social-political-economic era that could be unpacked was fixed within the parameters of a liberal state utilizing both rhetorical and tactical strategies that respond to a particular fixed moment. These parameters laid the groundwork for the type of reform efforts that were dreamed by a wide range of stakeholders.

Empirical and conceptual trends in Black male higher education research

Works of literature within higher education, masculinities studies, and educational studies can help interrogate representations of the problems that Black men and HBCU's — individually and collectively — are said to endure. HBCUs are without a doubt subject to a capitalist political and economic system, implicating adaptabil-

ity that dampen ideas of institutional agency or freedom. (Ferguson, R. 2012; Goldberg, D. 2011; Slaughter, S. & Rhoades, G., 2010) Much of the literature of the last decade on Black men in Education uses an anti-deficit approach that couples with a mission of debunking the idea of a monolithic experience that can be addressed in policy and action. (Williams, K. L., Burt, B. A., Clay, K. L., & Bridges, B. K., 2019). In doing so, various intersections of identity and experience have been introduced into the empirical and conceptual landscape as areas of study. Terms such as persistence, motivation, and achievement also become of increasing relevance to empirical studies of the last decade as a result of these trends. (Palmer. R. T & Wood. L, 2012)

This shift in framing and knowledge production is evident even in the literature that addressed the case of Black men at HBCUs. The experiences of Black queer, trans, and other non-cis-gendered students previously absent from the literature of the past decade have been explored and centered in recent studies. This would be deemed a major step forward for institutions to consider under the rationale of greater inclusion and multiculturalism. (Mobley, S. D., & Hall, L., 2020; Mobley, S. D., & Johnson, J., 2019) The needs of these students, some of who presumably are male-bodied, have likely been addressed as topics of Black 'men' in education, which is to say they have not been addressed at all. Black 'man' often proxies as heterosexual and cisgender in the discussion of problems.

Ironically enough, the state's (and its many apparatuses) lack of concern with Black people's gendered and sexualized locations is evident in the case of research intended for cisgender Black men as well. Even in studies that supposedly default to the concerns of cisgender and heterosexual students who are Black men, virtually no critical perspectives on gender are cited. (Harper, S. R., & Gasman, M., 2008; Palmer, R. T., Maramba, D. C., & Dancy, T. E., 2013) Conceptually, this would suggest that researchers and policymakers believe that cisgender Black men have no gender at all, or not one that positions their body and being as vulnerable. A recent study exploring the academic motivation of HBCU Black male athletes — a social role within the university that is heavily tied to notions of sexuality and racial capitalism — did not interrogate gender and sexuality at all. (Bailey, E., & Fuller, R.D., 2019)

Contrary to Crenshaw's (2014) at-once popular criticism of the Obama administration's focus on outlining and planning initiatives for Black boys at the expense of Black girls, the governmental state fails to make legible and respond to the very specific needs of any Black person with care. Previously mentioned notions of modernity's violence and coloniality, racialized political economy, and governmentalization instruct us to never interpret care as the state's ability or intention for Black people. We see this lack of attention to all Black men's gendered location within the governmental state policy initiatives such as My Brother's Keeper, where milestones and goals formulated fail to even mention the material needs of any Black men past rationalities motivated by childhood development based in scientific reasoning and economic vitality. (Obama, 2014) This void in methodology generates the startling question of how an empirical study, community initiative, or policy effort for Black men could read as efficacious and aiming at redress under modernity without being grounded in any claims or stances about our gendered being and possibility.

Furthermore, the significance, challenges, and contributions of HBCU's as educational institutions have also been explored in various disciplines such as black studies, social work education, and even public health. In

these works of literature, the case for HBCU's — and the call-to-action for further investment into them — is the central purpose of the article. Utilizing the cultural-political approach, these appeals for further support can be interpreted as revealing a wide range of assumptive logic. For example, Bowles, D. D, et al (2016) argued that HBCU's have a significant impact and influence on the social work profession. While Noonan et al (2013) laid out their role in training the health care workforce. Taking into account a study on the correlation between HBCU's and Black people's social mobility toward the middle class, an assumptive logic is revealed. (Broady, K. E., Todd, C. L., & Booth-Bell, D., 2017; Hardy, P. M., Kaganda, E. J., & Aruguete, M. S., 2019)

The cultural value of HBCU's — their legacy, history, and symbolic place in the Black psyche — does not warrant enough sympathy to appeal to a wide audience. Instead, economic rationality is what brings the counter-projects of HBCU's legibility and purpose even as racial liberalism and progressivism are further espoused as tenets of an anti-racist United States. This is such the case that Andrews et al. (2016) published the empirical perspectives of HBCU business deans regarding the survivability and sustainability of their institutions.

The significance and contributions of HBCU's to the educational and developmental outcomes of Black men specifically have also been explored in literature. The premise of this selected literature does not lead as strongly with the same type of economic rationality of earlier mentioned studies but certainly contributes to the argument for further investment and reallocation of available resources. (Gasman, M., Nguyen, T.H., & Commodore, F., 2017; Shorette. II, C. R., & Palmer, R. T., 2015) All of the literature introduced likely contributed to a logic that justified the expressed partnerships of the Obama administration and HBCU researchers, students, and leaders deem them worthwhile towards reform in U.S society.

There dynamics speak to a need for a critical imagination around how HBCU's can work though enunciations of modernity's violence, much in the spirit of Mobley's (2017) call for them to be renewed as sacred sanctuaries for Black people. This is not to suggest that HBCU's should exist in perpetuity and simply change their ways to grant Black people freedom. Rather, it is an attempt at a loving investment into Black people's collective memory and critique that guides us into tomorrow. Empirical work concerning racial representations and logics are present in aforementioned articles that address HBCU institutions and scholarship as marginalized in the political-educational landscape. However, few articles cited unpack these data with a critique of the state's affairs as constructing liberal dreams that are incongruent with radical visions of freedom and liberation. The weaving in of frameworks that do so could be illustrative and bolster critical scholarship in the realm of higher education.

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