

# **Developing and Reflecting on a Black Disability Studies Pedagogy: Work from the National Black Disability Coalition**

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## **Abstract**

## **Introduction**

This collection of writing has grown from the work of the National Black Disability Coalition (NBDC), led by Jane Dunhamn and Leroy Moore. The NBDC was founded to advance knowledge about Black disability, both in the US and throughout the African Diaspora. The organization's mission statement is, in part, "to create a space for inquiry within universities that brings together faculty and students [...] to consider Black disability issues within broad-based social, cultural and historical contexts."<sup>1</sup> Elaborating on

this mission, in a speech at Temple University in March 2015, coalition co-chair Jane Dunham stated that, among our most important tasks, is to put out a call to action to Black students with disabilities, so that they can lead the next wave of change. This collection of writings is offered in the spirit of that call, and includes a collaboratively-authored Black disability studies (hereafter Black DS) syllabus, as well as reflections from members of the Coalition on their experiences of teaching and learning in Black DS classrooms.

It is not our intention to give a definitive picture of what Black DS pedagogy "is," but rather to suggest some of the things it *may* be, and become, as it grows. In addition to furthering the goals laid out in the mission statement of the Black DS Coalition, we also wish to give educators and students a sense of how they might begin to incorporate some of the principles of Black DS, and disability justice more broadly, into the learning spaces they inhabit.

Throughout this collection of writings, we advocate for Black DS to be taken, *not* as a marginalized special-topic course, but rather as a crucial part of all disability studies courses and pedagogies, as well as all Black and Africana Studies courses. We recognize that, like disability itself, Black DS cannot simply be "added and stirred" into existing pedagogies; rather, the inclusion of Black DS is a paradigm-shifting change. The pieces included in this collection are enactments of an ongoing conversation—a conversation that we hope the readers of *Disability Studies Quarterly* will join thoughtfully.

The following sections comprise statements from the leaders of the National Black Disability Coalition, Jane Dunham and Leroy Moore; reflective writings from two students and two instructors of Black disability studies; and a copy of the pilot syllabus. As co-chairs of the NBDC, Dunham and Moore both bring decades of experience in anti-racist, disability and arts organizing to their words; their pieces offer a historical and cultural introduction to the rise of the NBDC, and show how its efforts encompass not only pedagogy and scholarship, but also community- and arts-based work. From this broader historical/cultural background, our collage of voices then brings forward work from students Shancia Jarrett and Britney Robinson, each of whom offers an individual perspective on her experience of learning Black DS and applying its intersectional critiques to her work in and after college. Finally, the two pieces from instructors Akemi Nishida and Sami Schalk highlight the ways that

specific locations (geographical, historical, cultural) shape the work of Black DS pedagogy, as well as some of the interesting questions that might arise in the Black DS classroom.

The pilot syllabus, presented at the end, is the collaborative effort of many NBDC members. This syllabus can be adapted for use in a wide variety of classrooms, not only those formally designated as "Black DS" pedagogical spaces. Our purpose is to invite more students and instructors into active discussion and engagement with these ideas, so that the meaning of what "Black DS pedagogy" is can continue to grow.

### **Who Shall Introduce the Subject?**

*Jane Dunhamn, Director, National Black Disability Coalition*

The past two years of Black disability studies (Black DS) exploration have proven to be rewarding and overwhelming. I would like to thank the Black DS Committee. From the beginning, the journey of discovery took us home. It was the historic Shiloh Baptist Church that offered us space and fed us well. Our organizer, Deacon Jerome Harris simply asked Rev. Armstrong to host us, and resoundingly, his response was yes! When we met in June 2013, there were many people in the audience who were new to the concepts of disability studies and queer studies. This is, again, testimony that when we come together we grow. That is not to say it is always without struggle.

The most difficult and formidable challenge to Black DS are the two intersections that gave rise to the need for this area of work. The first is, how can Black DS be incorporated into disability studies with authenticity and the commitment to include community action, much as with the model of Black/Africana Studies? In other words, who is competent to introduce the subject from an Afro-disability perspective? The second is, how can Black DS be incorporated into Black/Africana Studies, where there has been little to no knowledge of disability studies? In other words, who is competent to introduce the subject from a disability-Afro perspective?

Both questions take me back 20 years to my anti-racism training. This particular course was taught/led by a Black, gay, assistant attorney general. The class was predominantly White, and many folks were from the

Department of Justice, including clerical staff, probation officers, attorneys and judges. All in the class were there because they truly cared and wanted to do the work. The trainer took us, White and people of color, back to our earliest experiences and feelings about race. We all reached a painful discovery about ourselves and our collective race experience exhibited in deep sorrowful crying. The stories of pain from racism by people of color from early childhood and the experience of White people from early childhood, who thought they had escaped racist beliefs and behaviors because of how they were raised, gave rise to the class coming together and understanding that racism had not eluded any of us.

This experience reminds me that shifts in perspective come not only from information and policy, but also from personal experience. For example, before the passage of the ADA, Judge David S. Admire, Chairman, Criminal Justice Department, Bethany College, implemented an innovative program for defendants whom he recognized as having non-apparent disabilities, reducing recidivism by 43%. He wrote:

As a judge, I was continually confronted with offenders whose behavior was unexpected and surprising. This was observed not only during their criminal activity but during their travel through the criminal process. This behavior did not appear to be intentional, but rather an inappropriate response to the circumstances that existed at the time. Furthermore, this behavior reminded me of the behavior of my two children who had been diagnosed with learning disabilities (LD) and attention deficit disorder (ADD). This collision of my personal and professional lives began a journey into the fascinating and complex world of neurobiology and its impact on the criminal justice system. (Admire, 2006)

It is the work of each of us who believes in Black DS to help one another learn what we need to know to assist students in their discovery. We must be able to own our biases in race and disability to grow into this new field of study.

### **Black Disability: From Hiding to Displaying**

*Leroy F. Moore Jr., Chair, Black Disability Studies Committee of the National Black Disability Coalition*

The National Black Disability Coalition (NBDC) has been working on creating a working theory and practice of Black DS. Once again we continue the conversation about disability identity from a Black perspective. We agree it is different from dominant culture disability, but the questions are—What are the differences? How does the Black community display those differences? And how do Black disabled people, family members, and loved ones sit within their disability in their communities? It is the intent of Black DS to examine many questions and experiences, provide research and engage Black disabled scholars. The range from history, culture, arts, sciences, leadership, and politics from the experience of Black people with disabilities must have a home that is Afro-centric, most importantly to engage Black disabled pride and knowledge.

I must be clear that NBDC cannot and will not speak for all Black disabled people; however, we too have extensive knowledge and first hand experiences as Black disabled people. Many scholars have written about disability history from medicalization to institutionalization to civil rights to disability rights movement to disability culture. Although we have new books, for example, Terry Rowden's *The Songs of Blind Folk: African American Musicians and the Cultures of Blindness* and Dea H. Boster's *African American Slavery and Disability: Bodies, Property and Power in the Antebellum South, 1800-1860* (Studies in African American History and Culture), outside of all the growth in disability studies, the view of disability in the Black community has only shifted marginally. We have grown from hiding disability to survive under slavery, to displaying disability under harsh abuse in freak shows, to playing disability to receive services.

The above history helped shape how Blacks from the 1970s through today view disability. My parents' generation often viewed disability as something to overcome or something to be labeled with to receive services or to be classified into for special education. Beginning in the 1990s, current disability culture has very lightly touched the Black community with events controlled for and by the Black disabled community, for example: Vision Awards, Black Disabled Leadership Summit, Not Everyone Reads Black Authors campaign and the Black, Gifted and Disabled campaign by the National Black Disability Coalition (NBDC) and New Vision: Disabled Poets and Artists of color under

Disability Advocates of Minorities Organization (DAMO) and Harambee Education Council for the Black community in Oakland, California. These activities have planted seeds to not only increase legal rights and services but to increase leadership, arts and culture in the Black disabled community. This has been a slow process; many organizations have come and gone, but each step has helped to chip away the "overcoming disability" attitude in the Black community.

As we know, the hiding of disability was mainstream and not only tied to the Black community, as we saw in former President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. However, what is different was the birth of institutional disability power, first with parents of disabled children, and then people with disabilities who began protesting for their rights. Both groups were composed of members of the dominant culture who stepped into these newly found positions within the disability organizations they had created. They were not required or called to check their privilege when setting up these organizations that should have created the reshaping of disability identity with a disability culture viewpoint that benefited everyone. However, because of institutional practices that shaped early disability organizations, the isms in our society seeped into these disability institutions which created roadblocks for "others" to enjoy the benefits that came out of these organizations.

Similar to disability rights, disability culture continues to have trouble reaching people outside of dominant culture who have little access or resources to higher education. Even today in secondary education settings disability is mixed with many factors and practices that disconnects and marginalize disabled students and their parents. It is mostly segregation, seclusion and restraints that separate disabled students from other students. How can disability pride show up in the Black community after segregated, stigmatizing education systems?

In the past, pride and shame have conflicted in the Black community. On one side Black culture has been full of pride to fight back from the mainstream negative messages toward Black people. On the other side, Black pride was taught that it had to be shown at certain times with certain people understanding that too much pride can cause discrimination and harm from dominant culture. Even during the most difficult times in our history, Black

pride has always been a part of the Black community. Even so, the treatment and viewpoint of disability pride was non-existent. The attitude of the Black community has grown from cursing disabled people, to hiding, to obtaining services, to overcoming, to most recently realizing that Black disabled people have history and have always been in every movement from Reconstruction to Disability Rights.

We can see that viewpoints change when people begin organizing with new thinking. Today, many Black disabled people are taking what the disability rights/culture movements laid out and mixing it with Black culture and pride to write, sing and create visual arts that speak to the Black disabled experience. The National Black Disability Coalition is working to spread Black disabled culture and history in the Black community and, most importantly, to establish Black DS, through the work of the Black DS Committee. Black DS will provide a guide to scholarly institutions of the interest and need for students to include intellectual skills in the subject matter for future fields of study which translate to a better understanding of the Black Disabled experience. At the end of the day it is always about the growth of people.

## **Lost and Found: The Stories of Blacks with Disabilities Found In the Community**

*Shancia Jarrett*

The concept of disability and its impact on the Black community is vaguely discussed as a reality within the discipline of disability studies. Within my first semester of graduate school, I engaged disability solely as a philosophical and sociological construct derived from the experiences and the theories of White scholars. These pedagogies ascribed terminological values to disability based on the individualistic perspectives of White scholars. The designers of these predominant approaches to disability fail to holistically provide a diverse approach to engage the multicultural aspects of disability. As a Black woman, who academically and actively engages disability, I realize that the predominant theories of disability which disregard the experiences of Blacks undermine the impact and existence of disability within minority communities. Disability is a non-discriminatory reality; anyone can acquire a disability. Thus,

theories which deny the non-discriminatory reality of race fail to adequately represent disability.

As a result of the omission of people of color from disability studies, I cannot academically encompass the works of Blacks within classroom settings. The concrete and present conditions of being Black and disabled fail to withhold any significant or tangible impact within my studies. For instance, during the course "Narratives and Disability," none of the personal accounts narrated the voice and the experiences of the African Diaspora. Within this course, I pondered whether or not Black disabled authors and scholars existed? Additionally, I questioned if academia considered the works and experiences of Blacks were valuable to field of Disability Studies?

Within this reflection, I do not intend to cast blame on the teachings of my talented pedagogues. Instead, I consider it to be an opportunity to provide awareness, understanding, and intervention. Ironically, a majority of my counterparts are truly unaware of what it means to be Black in the United States of America. Furthermore, when I reflect on disability and the realities of being Black, it becomes evident that social disparities such as racism and discrimination impede the union of Blacks into the disabled community. So often, disability within Black communities becomes concealed under the blanket of homelessness, substance abuse, violence, and poverty. Hence, societies and dominant cultures fail to pinpoint markers of disability due to its covert nature.

In my attempt to understand the ramifications of disability within my community and personal encounters, I considered asking two simple questions:

1. How do we identify disability?
2. How do we engage the disabled community?

The first question concerning the identification of disability provided me with the privilege of awareness. Through awareness, I received the opportunity to witness the life and relationships of disabled Blacks. The privilege of awareness allowed me to critically examine disability beyond its distinctive nature of labels and diagnosis. Disability is not only a semantic marker, but



also an undeniable reality of happiness and hardships. In other words, disability symbolized life. The second question of engagement required me to not only observe but to also consider the humanity of those who are Black and disabled. In order to find opportunities of engagement and appease my curiosity, I committed my efforts to volunteering within community-based and government agencies which served underrepresented communities. As advocates and health-care professionals work with people with disabilities, they must be knowledgeable of the ethnic backgrounds of their clients to fully serve the disabled population.

The second question concerning the engagement of the disabled community required me to not only observe but to also consider the humanity of those who are Black and disabled. In order to find opportunities of engagement and appease my curiosity, I committed my efforts to volunteering within community-based and government agencies which served underrepresented communities. While participating in these engagements, I realized that medical providers and professionals structured their intervention efforts on approaches which emphasized models of control without acknowledging the lived experiences, the rights, and the choices of disabled Blacks.

Collectively, these questions promoted my academic research and my efforts of intervention. Within these opportunities, it was apparent that institutional frameworks of discrimination derived from racism hindered the acceptance and the advocacy efforts towards disabled Blacks. Most importantly, the classroom could not teach me these realities. Outside the classroom and into the urban communities, I witnessed the accounts of Blacks with disabilities. Overall, their stories were limited and buffered by neglect. It makes no sense for us to buffer the engagement of disability by arguing on the philosophical and sociological nature of disability, if we deny the experiences of people of color. Why? To ignore is to neglect and to neglect is to deny. Blacks cannot be ignored, neglected, or denied; we are humans.

## **A Work/Activist in Progress**

*Britney Robinson*

I was unaware of the existence of the disability community prior to taking a course on disabilities studies during my last undergraduate semester at Spelman. At the time, what I assumed to be true about people with disabilities was not complex. Their presence or personal stories were not typical occurrences for me; so, I "othered" individuals with disabilities. Full understanding of the social prejudice, discrimination and marginalization due to one having an impairment (whether physical or mental), and my role in that context, had never been a thought before.

So why did I sign up for a disability studies course? What did I hope to gain from such a class? My purpose in registering was to increase my public health knowledge (my desired career field) about a group of people whom I saw as needing health care assistance. Coming to the class as a Black woman taking a class with a few other Black women, learning about our history or myself, was not a part of the plan. Discovering a part of my being that I did not know existed but had shamed and hidden away was not a part of the plan. You see, the course was not named something conspicuous like "Black Disabilities Studies," which would have alerted me that Blackness and disability could be one. The course was called "Composing Disability, Health and Wellness" which set off no alarms in me that Blackness was related.

The class was based on a reading (or piece of media), followed by a seminar-style discussion. For the first two weeks of the course we read literature, then engaged in class discussions about the medical and social model of disabilities, what health is, and some implications of being a visibly disabled person. Afterwards we dove into Black DS literature and narratives which centered on the intersection between Blackness and disability. Such topics resonated quickly with me and us as we quickly included gender and sexual orientation to the intersection (which was natural in an environment such as ours). We freely expressed our interpretations of and reactions to the use of disabled, Black bodies as propaganda for the call to the end of slavery. We held heated conversations (which many times continued as we left the classroom) expressing our shared outrage of the disregarding of and at times denial of mental health on our campus even with its call for physical and dietary health. "Staring," invisible disabilities and accessibility were concepts we were able to examine from the readings, and then identify with people with

disabilities on and/or relate to our lived experiences. Our lived experiences came out in the classroom in such a way that would likely not have occurred in a different setting such as with a majority male audience or at a predominantly white institution (PWI).

A project that stands out for me was an accessibility audit we performed on our campus. We found that our campus bookstore's elevator was packed near top to bottom with boxes of books and paraphernalia; the majority of our dorms possessed only a staircase as an entryway; many campus buildings' restrooms lacked grab rails. These findings were shocking to us. We understood that many of the buildings on the campus were historic; however, we also recognized that some fixes, such as clearing out an elevator or installing a grab rail, were simple and inexpensive. As a result of the project, I gained a newfound appreciation of accessible buildings and structures which I still practice today. A second result of the project was that we prepared some of our findings to be recommended for resolution.

The effect of our BDS course did not end once we left the classroom. On my end, I ensured that an app being developed for the "Wellness Revolution" incorporated mental health support. At least two of the class members enthusiastically posted (and still post) Facebook statuses where members of our and other campuses as well as their friends, acquaintances and family can see, read and optimally relate or identify with the intersection of the Black, disabled (and LGBT) Community. Another student used her status as the President of one of our student organizations to support a call for one free, excused absence in consideration for students with disabilities.

As a result of the entire Black DS course, my outlook on and recognition of social and health issues affecting people with disabilities and Black people with disabilities in particular was sparked and is still in development today. I work to acknowledge disabilities within the Black community through my current conversations with my Black peers, to keep Black DS in my thinking and current graduate school activities (as much as I can as a novice Black disability ally at a PWI), and to hold myself accountable for ableist behaviors and patterns I still carry. My understanding and knowledge of Black DS is still in infancy, yet it will only grow because it is in my face now.

## Teaching Disability Studies in the Shadow of Black Lives Matter Protests

*Akemi Nishida*

The brainstorming and writing of this reflection occurred while I was involved in nation-wide protests that were asserting that "Black Lives Matter." Racist violence debilitates the bodyminds of people of color, particularly Black, brown, and indigenous bodyminds.<sup>2</sup> As I teach disability studies at urban public universities, I continue to encounter moments when racism, ableism, and sanism are deeply entangled and seem impossible to separate from one another. These moments are when I face the countless narratives by students about how their race played a significant part of them becoming disabled or being diagnosed with disabilities, or how their life options (e.g., occupation) are structurally limited at the intersection of race and disability. While I teach the basics of disability studies, from the social model through the disability pride discourse of the disability rights movement, these student narratives and their critical questioning set the pedagogy of the course. They articulate the pitfall within what is considered to be the *basics* of disability studies, particularly in relation to its racial neutrality.

Disabling effects of racist violence is one of the examples where the Black DS and many of my students challenge disability studies to pause and seriously engage in the conjunction of racial violence and disability: including unnecessarily over or under diagnosis, hypo- and hyper- medicalization of bodyminds, and on-going police violence. Racism entails direct and debilitating violence. Or racism is infused with environmental injustices (e.g., polluted industrial wastes are dumped into racial minority neighborhood or nations of the Global South) or armed conflicts that disable many bodyminds of racial and ethnic minorities. The social model of disability, for example, needs to be extended out of its racial neutrality position within which exemplary issues of inaccessible built environments or exclusionary social norms are analyzed solely in relation to disabilities and stripped off of the racist, classist, and other influences. Social conditions that debilitate many people are profoundly racially coded, and disability studies needs to integrate into its analysis the racial, class-based, and other injustices that shape the making of disability. When the classroom is overwhelmingly filled with the

testimonies of students (in classes I teach, white students are the minority) who were "pushed to" segregated special education classes throughout their educational histories and/or who became disabled as a result of neighborhood gang-related violence, or when activists continue to raise the issue of how racial environmental injustices and ableism and sanism conjunct (e.g., Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha in *Sins Invalid*, 2013), I am reminded and frustrated with the disability studies' investment in the "racial neutrality" or more precisely its ignorance and avoidance of critical racial analysis (Bell, 2006). Moreover, while the concept of disability pride has been a key for community building and the mobilization of people within disability rights movements, what also needs to be addressed and fought against is racist violence which causes disability for many people of color.

With the reflection shared here, I do not mean to house racial violence exclusively in the Black DS sphere, as it is obviously rooted in white supremacy which is the backbone of this country. Nonetheless, as people chant fiercely that "Black Lives Matter," the bold leadership which has been taken by Black DS advocates to integrate disability studies and Black studies and foreground lives of Black disabled people, needs to be heard and followed by the larger disability studies as well as integrated and centered within the disability studies pedagogy.

## **Beyond Analogies: Challenges of Teaching Black Disability Studies**

*Sami Schalk*

In my recent course "Disability in Contemporary African American Literature," I introduced upper level students, primarily women of color, to disability studies and to the study of Blackness and disability in literature. I had taught disability studies courses before, but never one so explicitly focused on race. In this reflection, I want to share some of the challenges I faced in getting students to understand the relationship of both Blackness and disability and racism and ableism. These challenges, I believe, are more likely to occur in Black DS courses where race is central to the course.

Disability studies scholars have already discussed the problems of and limits to oppression analogies, that is, comparisons between two marginalized

groups. Often these comparisons reduce the issues of one group in favor of another, while at other times, analogies deny the existence of individuals belonging to both oppressed groups. At the same time, we know that analogies can sometimes be useful to help students understand the oppression of groups they do not belong to, potentially creating allies. In my course, analogies were often useful as we discussed how discourses of disability were used against Black people collectively to enslave them. By discussing how the rhetoric of mental capacity has been used to deny the rights and humanity of many groups of people throughout history, my students were able to make connections between histories of oppression. Analogies then served me well as I introduced key concepts to my students. I quickly found, however, that students understood discourses of disability to be weapons of racism, that is, part of pseudo-science long disproven and safely kept in the past. As a result, when we moved into discussing books with contemporary settings, students moved from analogies to conflation and erasures.

When we began to discuss texts such as Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals*, Meri Nana-Ama Danquah's *Willow Weep for Me* and Bebe Moore Campbell's *72 Hour Hold*, students easily comprehended how the intersection of race and disability made life more difficult for the disabled Black women in these texts; however, they struggled to understand the relationship of ableism and racism in these texts at a structural (not merely individual) level—as they were able to do when we discussed discourses of disability used during the antebellum period. Instead, students began to resort to phrases such as "She was disabled by her race" or "Her gender became a social disability." Disability quickly lost its social, material and political significance as a category of oppression and became merely a synonym for "disadvantage." I pushed students to use disability to refer to impairment, identity, discourse or a social system/social construct, but again and again the same conflating phrases appeared. Disability as a socially constructed category marginalized in the contemporary US, quickly became a catch-all for all oppressions. We are all disabled in some way...

Why did this occur? Of course the easiest answer is the English language. Disability, impairment, and handicap in both verb and noun forms are each

used in all kinds of ways not related to disability as in disability studies—from golf to broken down cars on the side of the highway. Another easy answer is that students are relatively knowledgeable about issues of race and gender—they tend to know at least something about Civil Rights and feminisms—but disability rights is less familiar; ableism is an unknown term and concept. While I believe these issues are part of the reason my students have struggled to discuss race and disability in contemporary settings beyond explicit representations of intersectionality (Black disabled characters), there is more going on here. The above two problems are challenges faced by most of us teaching disability studies courses to students unfamiliar with the field. The specific challenge I believe that occurs in teaching Black DS is helping students understand structural racism and ableism as impacting all Black people, not merely those who are disabled. When I talk to students about lack of access to healthcare, incarceration, violence, war and other social issues which disproportionately impact people of color, I try to get them to also see how structural racism also therefore disproportionately positions people of color to be(come) disabled. If ableism is the discrimination against people with disabilities and the valuing and privileging of nondisabled bodies, what do we make of discourses around Black bodies which use metaphors of disease, illness, dying, curing, and healing? How are these discourses racist and how are they also deeply ableist?

The challenge I see in teaching Black DS is to help students understand how racism and ableism collude in a variety of ways in contemporary society, not only in the lives of Black disabled people, but also Black people collectively as discourses of disability continue to be used as means to control and do harm to racialized populations. I believe the best way to do this is to incorporate discussions of Black DS into both disability studies and Black/Africana studies courses. As scholars, activists, instructors and students begin to understand the various intersections, parallels and overlaps between the experiences of Black people, the experiences of people with disabilities and the experiences of Black disabled people, especially in regard to social services, representation, social attitudes, violence and access to technology, we will be better equipped to work together toward improving all of our lives. Black disabled voices must be prioritized in this. And to do this, disability rights communities must expand to recognize and value the experiences of those

with non-apparent and chronic disabilities such as asthma and diabetes, which are overrepresented in communities of color. Indeed, as Black DS grows, I believe it will deeply alter both disability studies and Black/Africana studies as we know them.

## **Course Outline: Black Disabled Experience**

### *Black Disability Studies Committee of the National Black Disability Coalition*

The intent of this course is to provide students with an introduction to the intersections of race and disability from a critical social justice perspective. The course is to also provide a guide to scholarly institutions for future fields of study and professional advancement.

### ***Learning Objectives***

The course in Black Disabled Experience is to develop critical intellectual skills in the arts, culture, sociology and history of people from the disabled Black community in the United States and the African Diaspora.

1. To create a more accurate and complex understanding of Black people with disabilities and the evolution of Black disabled people in historical contexts of the United States and the Diaspora, including the U.S. civil rights movement and disability rights movement, Black arts/music and Black history.
2. To invite students to reflect on how an appreciation of Black disability relates to the professional, social and personal aspects of their lives.
3. To have the opportunity to learn from Black disabled people and family members.
4. Use the knowledge and skills of Black Disability Studies to effect social change.

### ***Course Outline***

#### **Arts**

1. Black Music & Disability from Blues to Hip Hop



2. Entertainment Industry: Black Disabled Bodies
3. Black Disabled Images & Media

## History

1. Slavery & Disability
2. Talented Tenth & Black Disability
3. Black Civil Rights Activism and Disability Rights & Activism
4. Black Nationalism, Black Power and Disability
5. Black Disabled Activism in the Motherland
6. Black Experience in Dominant Culture Disability

## Sociology/Culture

1. Black Family & Disability: Raising Black Disabled Children
2. Black Church & Disability
3. Masculinity & Feminism through the Lens of Black Disabled Men & Women
4. Juvenile Justice Systems, Incarceration & Institutionalization in Disability
  - a. "Labeling" and the school to prison pipeline; why minorities are overrepresented in special education.
5. Disability Stigma & Black Leadership
6. Discrimination & Disparities in Disability Service System

## ***Core Competencies***

### I. Critical Analysis

- Define Black Disabled Experience in a Disability Justice context.
- Discuss the intersections (or lack of) between Black disabled philosophy and dominant culture disability philosophy.
- Define Black Disability centeredness and explain the need for Black Disability Studies discipline.

- Discuss the role of gender in the Black disabled experience.
- Discuss the differences between the role of the mainstream Black intellectual and the Black disabled intellectual.
- Discuss how the concept of race has affected the development of the Black disabled experience in literature and the arts.
- How do we defend the validity of a Black Disabled personality? Discuss how research analysis would aid in the scholarly investigation of a topic in Black Disability Studies social science/behavioral curriculum.

## II. Discipline Knowledge

- Discuss how the intersections between race, gender, and class issues in the Black disability experience differ from those in mainstream disciplines.
- Discuss the role sexism and class has played in the discipline.
- Discuss the history of the Black disabled experience in poetry, novels, essays, autobiographies, and narratives.
- Discuss the literary works of major (influential) Black disabled figures.
- Discuss the characteristics of the Black church and its relationship to Black disabled people.
- Discuss the politics of Black popular culture, especially of Black disabled music, the mass media and cinema.
- Discuss the political, economic, and cultural development of the Black Disability Movement.

## III. Effective Communication

- The ability to argue Black disability issues orally and to write about them persuasively.
- Development of listening skills.
- Respect for the opinion of others.

#### IV. Understanding Human and Cultural Diversity

- Ability to work as allies/consultants for Black disability issues and to assist leaders, stakeholders and policymakers in developing Black Disability Studies curricula.
- Assist community organizations in understanding the psychological, sociological, economical, and health issues that relate to the Black disabled experience.
- Lead dialogue inside and outside the academy on recent Black disabled issues and studies.
- Ability to discuss characteristics of a Eurocentric world view of disability.

#### ***Readings***

*(Note: Films and potential speakers are still under discussion)*

#### Arts Readings:

- a. The Songs of Blind Folk: African American Musicians and the Culture of Blindness; Terry Rowden
- b. The Life of M.F. Grim; Percy Carey and Ronald Wimberly
- c. Blues People: Negro Music in White America; Leroi Jones
- d. Truly Blessed; Teddy Pendergrass
- e. Brother Ray: Ray Charles Own Story; Ray Charles
- f. The Illest: Disability as Metaphor in Hip-Hop Music; Moya Bailey
- g. When I Move, You Move: Thoughts on the Fusion of Hip-Hop and Disability Activism: Rebecca A. Adelman
- h. Krip Hop Nation is More Than Music; Leroy Moore

#### History Readings:

- a. Killing the Black Body; Dorothy E. Roberts
- b. Porgy; Dubose Heyward

- c. First Waco Horror: Lynching of Jesse Washington and the Rise of the NAACP; Patricia Bernstein
- d. Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit; Robert Bogdan
- e. Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling Transformative Body Politic; Nirmala Erevelles
- f. Female, Black and Able: Representations of Sojourner Truth and Theories of Embodiment; Meredith Minister

#### Sociology/Culture Readings:

- a. Crippin' Jim Crow: Disability and the School-to-Prison Pipeline; Nirmala Erevelles (In the recently released *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the US and Canada*, co-edited by Liat Ben-Moshe, Chris Chapman, and Allison C. Carey)
- b. Case Studies of Minority Student Placement in Special Education; Beth Harry, Janette Klingner, Elizabeth Cramer, and Keith Sturges
- c. Why Are So Many Minority Students in Special Education? Understanding Race and Disability in Schools; Beth Harry and Janette Klingner
- d. Lomax's Matrix: Disability, Solidarity and Black Power of 504; Susan Schweik
- e. African American Slavery and Disability: Bodies, Poverty and Power in Antebellum South; Dea H. Boster
- f. Blackness and Disability: Critical Examinations and Cultural Interventions; Christopher Bell
- g. Sick From Freedom: African American Illness and Suffering During the Civil War and Reconstruction; Jim Downs
- h. The Mark of Slavery: The Stigma of Disability Race and Gender in Antebellum America; Jenifer Barclay
- i. Harriet Tubman: A Biography; James A. McGowan and William C. Kashatus
- j. The Hidden Reassurance of Black ASL; Carolyn McCaskill

- k. *Unspeakable: The Story of Junius Wilson*; Susan Burch and Hannah Joyner
- l. *Black and Deaf in America: We are Different*; Ernest Hairston and Linwood Smith
- m. *Black Deaf Students: A Model of Educational Success*; Carolyn Williamson
- n. *Roar of Silence: Trial and Triumph Through Deaf*; Kenneth Walker and Bob Schaller
- o. *Still I Rise: The Enduring Legacy of Black Deaf Arkansans Before and After Integration*; Glenn B. Anderson
- p. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*; Rebecca Skloot

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## Endnotes

1. Other parts of the mission statement include furthering knowledge of the history, culture, arts and sociology of people in the Black disabled community, as well as promoting a more complex understanding of Black disabled people within Black arts, Black history, the U.S. civil rights movement, and the disability rights movement. More information is available at <http://www.blackdisability.org>.

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2. A concept of "bodymind" is used in this article, instead of separating body from mind, in order to emphasize the deeply intertwined nature of body and mind. Please refer to Price (2015), for example, for a further conceptualization of "bodymind."