From Black Power to Black Studies
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Black studies is a field in constant motion, and this encourages teachers and researchers to use a wide range of terms for their academic discipline. I use “black studies” because it was the term used by student activists when the field was created, it is easily recognizable, and it is readable. Occasionally, I use synonyms, such as Africana studies or African American studies, for variety. When referring to a specific academic unit, I use that unit’s name. For example, in discussing Howard University’s department, I use the term “Department of Afro-American Studies.”

There is also considerable debate around the terms “program” and “department” within the black studies field. To reduce the need to constantly write “program or department,” I employ the words “program” and “academic unit” as generic terms. Specific units are referred to by their official names, so it will be clear whether a particular program is organized as a department or as an interdisciplinary program. There are a few instances in the text where the distinction between program and department is important, and this is clear in the context of the passage.

Finally, there is substantial debate over terms such as “black power,” “black nationalism,” and “cultural nationalism.” In this book, I have adopted the definition provided by political scientist Michael C. Dawson, who argued that an essential ingredient of black nationalist thought is an emphasis on institutions created and controlled by the African American community. Thus, those people who emphasize black control over institutions or black-oriented culture are described as nationalists or cultural nationalists. I have also tried to use these terms for individuals and groups that other social scientists, historians, and activists have described as nationalist, such as the Nation of Islam. However, these are not categories with fixed boundaries. Many of the people mentioned in this text have changed their opinions over time, emphasize nationalism only in certain contexts, or combine nationalism with other political philosophies.
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