

Message from the Director

The pioneering historian, sociologist, and activist-intellectual, W.E.B. Du Bois once wrote, “Ignorance is a cure for nothing.” While this maxim was written in the early 20th century, it can easily stand as a reminder for the times we are currently living in.

African American Studies is a program committed to critical intellectual engagement, inquiry, and investigation into the life experiences, beliefs, legacy, and futurity of African Americans and African descendants whether on the continent of Africa or throughout the African Diaspora. African American Studies is not merely about what has been done to African peoples, but rather how their experiences have mutually shaped the worlds, places, sites and circumstances they have encountered. It is as much about the past and present as about the possibilities of the future.

At SLU, African American Studies students engage in first-rate research projects, and learn from (and with) scholars and artists who are highly productive, locally respected, and nationally recognized in their fields of expertise, and excellence as teachers and mentors. As the trailblazing Black feminist theorist bell hooks advises, “committed acts of caring let all students know that the purpose of education is not to dominate or prepare them to be dominators, but rather to create the conditions for freedom.” In our courses students come to “embrace a world of knowing” that fuels connection between campus, local community, the nation, and the world.

Du Bois, of course, was prescient, but it is *how* we combat ignorance that matters. In effect, he is asking us how we go about curing ignorance. African American Studies demands we raise tough questions about social and economic inequality, political marginalization, resource insecurity, and structural invisibility. Tasked with confronting these persistent markers of Black life, African American Studies thus examines the vast array of strategies African Americans employ in transcending these barriers.

African American Studies is a vibrant, challenging area of study, and an intellectual community engaged in the hard work and the rigorous heart-work of what Robin D.G. Kelley calls “love, study, and struggle” towards the creation of a just world.

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