

Black UCI During the COVID-19 Pandemic: How Waywardness Transcends in a Time Of Crisis

The COVID-19 Pandemic has and continues to have a large impact on the United States educational system. Students, along with teaching faculty, have struggled to stay engaged and motivated in school during this pandemic. With physical distancing and stay-at-home orders, one report done by the CDC in June of 2020 showed that rates of anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and substance abuse nearly doubled in the United States (CDC 2020). It is safe to assume that these physical and mental barriers have limited the waywardness of the students and staff here at UCI.

Stemming from the early 20th century, the term wayward womanhood has been used to describe Black mobility on insurgent ground. Saidiya Hartman in her book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*, describes waywardness as “an ongoing exploration of what might be; it is an improvisation with the terms of social existence, when the terms have been already dictated, when there is little room to breathe... it is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive” (Hartman 228). While Hartman’s book discusses the intimate lives of wayward women from the 1920’s, the same concepts can be applied to Black lives practicing waywardness in the present day.

How can waywardness offer a framework to understand how the Covid-19 pandemic affects Black women today? Waywardness is the creation of space and mobility when space and movement is not guaranteed, and often limited and policed. So then how can Black wayward lives create space in a time of quarantining and stay-at-home orders? How can one utilize spatial practices when space is restrained? How has the limited mobility that follows quarantining and physical distancing affected the Black wayward lives? How have members of the UCI community reckoned with the effects of the pandemic alongside the intensifying policing of Black people’s mobilities across the country? How then is it possible to claim and utilize insurgent grounds?

In our research we will examine how COVID-19 limits the space and mobility of Black UCI students and faculty, and how they have been able to transcend the physical and mental constraints of the pandemic. We plan on inquiring how students have handled the isolating factors of the pandemic. What percentage of students remained online for the fall quarter of 2021? For those students who returned to in person lectures, how have they transitioned from online learning back to a physical space? Or rather how was the transition from a physical classroom to an online space? How has this pandemic affected the varying years of UCI students? What were the hardest parts of quarantine? What struggles are still being faced now? How have students continued to use wayward practices such as leisure, occupation of space, and utilization of mobility?

For Black UCI faculty and staff, we will inquire similar research questions along with investigating how the transition to online learning has been? What are the struggles of teaching during this pandemic? In what ways has this pandemic impacted their students? Is there a change in student participation? What are motivating factors that drive them to continue teaching? Is there a struggle with motivation to teach? How has space been created or not created for students during the pandemic? How do professors occupy space? What does mobility mean to them?

The approach of this research project will be primarily focused on documenting the oral histories of UCI students and faculty to investigate how the pandemic has impacted their lives, both mentally and physically. In this process we will analyze how wayward practices--creative uses of space that violate prescribed boundaries-- transcend the restrictive space of COVID-19. Oral histories can shed light on the under-documented practices and experiences of marginalized groups. This project will be led by [Redacted]and [Redacted], under the mentoring of Professor [Redacted]. [Redacted] will be responsible for organizing interviews, interviewing willing UCI student and staff participants, and ensuring the progress of the project stays on track. Sabrina will be responsible for distributing interview release forms, documenting and transcribing interviews, and tracking the progress of the final paper. Both [Redacted] and [Redacted] will construct a final paper concluding the results and information gathered from this oral history project. This project will utilize the experience [Redacted] gained from her internship with The OCS Project last summer. The OCS Project documents the Black Panther Party's survival programs, specifically the Oakland Community School. Through this internship Trinity gained experience archiving sensitive photos of former BPP members and OCS students, while also assisting in transcribing interviews conducted by [Redacted]. This project will serve as a record not only of the constraints that the pandemic imposed on Black people in the US, but the strategies they employed to survive and construct meaningful lives.

Research Timeline:

Fall Quarter:

Wayward Womanhood GSS 171/AFAM 128 with Professor [Redacted] to help mentor and develop our topic.

Set up *Trint* account.

Begin lining up interested UCI students and faculty members.

Winter Quarter:

Begin and complete UCI student and faculty interviews

Transcribe Interviews on *Trint*

Meet with mentor Professor [Redacted] to check on project progress

Begin 15-20 page paper

Spring Quarter:

Meet with mentor Professor [Redacted]

Complete 15-20 page research paper

Prepare for Presentation at the UROP Symposium

Research Budget:

Item	Budget Amount	Explanation
<i>Trint</i> Subscription	\$300.00	<i>Trint</i> is an online program that allows you to transcribe interviews. The advanced subscription (which allows you to upload more than seven audio files) is \$60/month. \$300.00 would cover a subscription from December to May.
Participant Compensation	\$300.00	20 participants compensated with a \$15 gift card to Taco Bell will equate to \$300.00

Total Budget Amount: \$600.00

References:

Primary Sources

Davies, Carole Boyce. *Left of Karl Marx the Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*. Duke University Press, 2007.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*. Serpent's Tail, 2021.

“Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation during the COVID-19 Pandemic - United States, June 24–30, 2020.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 13 Aug. 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>.

Tourmaline. “Filmmaker and Activist Tourmaline on How to Freedom DreamTour.” *Vogue*, Vogue, 2 July 2020,

<https://www.vogue.com/article/filmmaker-and-activist-tourmaline-on-how-to-freedom-dream>.

Secondary Sources

Wilderson III, Frank B. *Afropessimism*. Liveright Publishing Corporation, a Division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2020.