“What A Black Feminist Politic Can Contribute toward Diversifying and Addressing Discrimination in Political Science”

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On September 3, 2015, the Executive Committee of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS) will vote on a proposal that five self identified Black feminists reconstitute the editorial Board of the National Political Science Review (NPSR).

Why is this significant?

After decades of participation in the field of political science, black political scientists who still largely make up the professoriate of the discipline at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s) in 1969 founded an autonomous association at Southern University in Baton Rouge which convened as The National Conference of Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS) and has met ever since. It is organized to study, enhance, and promote the political aspirations of people of African descent in the United States and throughout the world. It aims to contribute to the resolution of the many challenges that black people confront. Our organization promotes research in and critical analysis of topics usually overlooked and/or marginalized in political science scholarship. We believe that our scholarship must address wide-ranging "real world" issues and not the narrow, and often manufactured, concerns of the discipline.

First published in 1989 the National Political Science Review, The NPSR was conceived with emphasis particularly on theoretical and empirical research on politics and policies that advantage or disadvantage groups by reason of race, ethnicity, gender and/or other such factors. However, as a journal designed to serve a broad audience of social scientists, the NPSR welcomes contributions on any important problem or subject, which has significant political and social dimensions.

The NPSR seeks to embrace the socio-political dimensions of all disciplines within the social sciences and humanities, broadly defined. Generally, the NPSR seeks to incorporate analysis of the full range of human activities, which undergird and impinge upon political and social life. Thus, in addition to contributions from political scientists, the NPSR seeks relevant contributions from historians, sociologists, anthropologists, theologians, economists, ethicists, and humanities.

1 This white paper for APSA Short Course, “Coalition Building to Advance Diverse Leadership and Address Discrimination in Political Science,” would not have been possible without editing from M. Shadee Malaklou, who is a PhD Candidate at the University of California at Irvine, where she regularly teaches an introductory course on antiblackness for the Department of Gender and Sexuality Studies. Her dissertation repurposes Frantz Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks to rethink the planetary alignment of race, sex and gender, using coded representations of Iranian sexualities as a case in point. She is an assistant editor for the forthcoming special issue of Rhizomes, Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge, entitled, “Black Holes: Afro pessimism, Blackness and the Discourses of Modernity,” forthcoming Winter 2015/Spring 2016. She also writes regularly for Racialicious and publishes essays on her own blog, JFCB: Popular Culture, Critical Theory, and the Limits of a Liberal Humanist Discourse.
The NPSR strives to be at the forefront of lively scholarly discourse on domestic and global political life, particularly as disadvantaged groups are affected. ²

While the National Political Science Review has an incredible history of activist scholarship on black politics globally and domestically especially with regard to the subfields of American Politics, Comparative Politics, Urban Studies, Public Policy, and more recently American Political Development, Political Theory, Identity Politics, and Gender and Sexuality Politics it has yet to become a core or go-to resource for the teaching of undergraduate and graduate students in Research One universities. While the curriculum in Race and Ethnic Politics is expanding and a host of new journals have been launched in the past three years including Politics, Groups, and Identities, and Race and Ethnic Politics, still most U.S. political science departments woefully under-represent scholars conducting research on black politics either narrowly or widely defined. In large measure outside of the HBCU campuses recognized as the founding campuses for the National Conference of Black Political Scientists and the handful of key historically white university campuses where this scholarship has made a significant and lasting inroads in undergraduate and graduate curriculum, most Research One/historically white campuses do not prioritize hiring black politics scholars or teaching the subject matter.

NPSR has a rich history and has been an important treasure in the earliest articulations of black politics in the field of political science. Our longstanding commitment to protest and insurgency, multiethnic alliances, radical gender politics, methods and applied political science (i.e. electoral mobilization), the state and political change, public policy its limits and extensions, legal culture and civil rights makes the NPSR a singular voice among others. But we do face some challenges. To be plain, journals such as Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society and The Black Scholar have distinguished themselves as interdisciplinary venues with strong institutional financial investments, vibrant engaging websites and blogs, and long-term investments by their publishers. Our history is strong, our commitment to cutting-edge scholarship is strong, but relative to our closest competitor journal, the National Political Science Review has room for growth. Now is the time to build on what we do well and grow the publication.

Consider that the Black Youth Project and #BlackLivesMatter have had in roughly one decade as great an impact in introducing the core questions posed by the discipline of black politics widely defined as the existence of any of the flagship historic journals in the interdisciplinary social sciences. However, the National Political Science Review has an incredible opportunity to engage this generation of highly mobilized, well-read, and civically engaged young people concerned with and active on the most pressing issues of concern. Because this as yet untapped highly engaged activist readership and authorship has the noteworthy habit of circulating academic articles, blogging about and engaging with black activist scholarship, and influencing the way that scholars of black politics conduct their research, our vision rests on supporting the long term viability of the journal through increased engagement via social media in addition to other initiatives. Though we do not anticipate leaving the print format in this application cycle we must

² Excerpts from: http://www.ncobps.org/?page=AboutUs
follow up on the interest in questions such as linked fate and the boundaries of blackness, mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex, the role of black women and black queer people in institution building/mass movements/ and downtown city politics, and how the compelling theoretical provocation of #blacklivesmatters breathes life into global/diasporic/and Pan-Africanist approaches to gendered consciousness and black freedom struggles. Our students are in the classroom and in the streets, they are taking online classes and sitting in lectures and conducting teach-ins through community organizations, they are in the re-entry process as well as serving long stints of time in the prison industrial complex and in the military, they are publishing retorts to newspaper headlines and making film, art, and poetry with an acutely trained eye toward shaping public opinion. Our students are incredibly aware of the stakes of their diminished access to democratic parity and effective leverage in the legal system. We must prepare ourselves to share the historic findings of the scholars published in the NPSR with a new generation of scholars-in-training regardless of their starting position and with a renewed commitment to listening to their urgent desire to be part of social justice movements and activist scholarship across methodologies.

There are three key areas for growth for the National Political Science Review that align most succinctly with important trends in the field and various studies conducted by leaders in field. In the following, we propose a comprehensive articulated vision for the journal for a three year focus on: 1) building the publishing culture in the association, 2) ongoing empirical analysis of and attention to the journal’s sustainability, and 3) a continued and expansive emphasis on the journal’s cutting edge contributions to interdisciplinarity and wide-ranging methodological approaches. Placing emphasis in these three key areas will enable us to produce two high quality issues for each forthcoming volume in the upcoming three-year publication cycle. We agree to increase the balance and attention to articles on pedagogy as well as continuing with our longstanding robust attention to activist research. Through this plan and its nuanced attention to the complexities of the discipline we hope to modernize the National Political Science Review, improve its financial autonomy and add concrete financial value, and provide intellectual support for strong activist scholarship by improving the submissions pipeline.

**Area I: Improving the Submissions Pipeline**

Building the publishing culture in the association requires a series of planned activities from Year
1-Year 3 that institutionalizes practices that are currently part of the commitments of the association and journal editorial board. One of the strengths of the journal is that it offers a very wide range of types of publishing opportunities for scholars at different ranks in the field and across the disciplines for which black politics is critical and relevant, including: Research Articles, Trends and Current Issue Analyses, Symposia, Pedagogy Essays, Works in Progress, and Book Reviews. This range of publication opportunities has also grown our audience in political science, ethnic studies, gender and sexuality studies, American studies, and cultural studies. However, as submissions come from scholars across rank and with widely varying experience with publishing in refereed academic journals and with widely varying personnel requirements for tenure and promotion at different institutions, a great deal of the work of correspondence about how to prepare competitive and successful scholarly research articles is done between authors and the editorial board. This typically involves members of the Editorial Board working between eight to ten hours with each author prior to submission in activities such as attending panels at the national conference and pre-meetings, reading papers while in preparation for the national conference, reading revised papers after the national conference, coaching authors through the submission process, correspondence and reminders about the expectations of publishing and requirements of successful submissions, etc.

One of our first initiatives will be to publish a document, to be widely circulated among our membership, about the standards and expectations of publication including length and citation and style guide. We will also make available online resources for publishing information to enhance publication widely in the association. This will directly contribute to increasing the material received by the NPSR and improving the submissions pipeline.

While the range of publishing opportunities in the journal for scholars is definitely a strength that reflects the egalitarianism of the association, there is significant room for growth in terms of supporting and promoting the publishing culture within the association, increasing the numbers of high quality submissions, exploring the possibility of publishing two issues (rather than one) of the journal annually, finding a publisher that will charge the organization few or no operating costs, and increasing the overall impact factor of the journal’s authors. Consequently, we will focus on speedy time frame for submission decisions (implementing the academic journal standard of a 30 day turnaround), strong and consistent copy editing standards, and exercising editorial judgment so that scholars can trust that their work is being submitted to a journal that reflects the highest academic standards.

While we would like to continue to support panels on books and continue to identify strong

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4 NCOBPS has a substantial membership and we believe that if we invite diverse members to submit articles to the journal that can contribute to enhancing the publishing culture of the journal. About 50% of the people asked to submit to the Volume 17 submitted. Based on experience a direct ask can yield a higher submission rate. Currently the association and journal editorial board identify potential authors to submit scholarly research for consideration for publication in the NPSR based on informal networks. Such networks include invitations to submit scholarly research by established faculty members in the association, allied associations, Special Issue Editors, Symposium Editors, the Editors, Editorial Board members, those who have formally published in the journal, Annual Conference Section Chairs, Annual Conference Panel Coordinators, and the Book Review Editor. This range and latitude has produced a regular stream of high-quality submissions.
papers for submission to the journal, we propose the following systematic approach to improving the submissions pipeline and building the publishing culture for all association members:

**Year One— introduction of the annual NPSR Publication Award**: a small monetary award, decided on by the Editorial Board, that acknowledges a scholarly contribution to the journal that exemplifies the journal’s historic emphasis particularly on theoretical and empirical research on politics and policies that advantage or disadvantage groups by reason of race, ethnicity, gender and/or other such factors…. [that reflects the goal of the] journal [being] designed to serve a broad audience of social scientists… and the socio-political dimensions of all disciplines within the social sciences and humanities, broadly defined…which undergird and impinge upon political and social life.”

Such an award would give a spotlight to the journal in the national conference and associational life and remind members that it is a top venue for scholarly publishing on black politics.

**Year Two— Introduction of the Annual Publishing Panel**: The journal and the association would bring in a cross-section of publishers and editors of journals to offer information and to more formally discuss access to publishing opportunities. The purpose of such a panel is to provide mentorship and scholarly community building. This panel session would be coordinated by the Editorial Board and would prioritize familiarizing attendees with the history of the journal, explaining the role of the journal in the life of the association, determining ways to have our journal listed among the top 50 political science journals, highlighting the impact of key articles across the history of the journal, explicitly connecting the role of publishing in the NPSR and expanding our group of potential authors.

**Year Three— Introduction of the Half Day Annual Writing Workshop** during which the journal and the association collaborate to support a Pre-Conference or Post-Conference seminar focused explicitly on preparation and submission and timely revision of scholarly articles. Our goal would be to have 10 attendees use the four hour block to work together in one session to familiarize themselves with the format of the journal submission requirements, revise their conference papers based on feedback received at the conference or develop a feedback incorporation plan. The seminar is primarily designed to encourage and promote revising and submitting the conference paper within one week of attending the conference.

**Area II: Who is Using the Journal and How? The Need for Data.**

Serious attention to the ongoing empirical analysis of and attention to the journal’s sustainability requires data gathering and evaluation of the impact of the journal both in the curriculum and at college and university libraries. This data-gathering and evaluation of the impact of the journal will be critical in our campaign to have the journal indexed by academic and non-academic search engines. In Summer 2014, a group of University of California, Irvine students created a

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5 Excerpts from: [http://www.ncobps.org/?page=AboutUs](http://www.ncobps.org/?page=AboutUs)
Google database listing the authors and titles and volume/issue number of each essay published in the NPSR. Their first goal was to identify which articles could be readily found electronically, as stand-alone citations, or as cited in other scholarly works using open-source web databases and search engines. Their second goal was to identify whether the author’s affiliated campus or institution subscribed to the National Political Science Review. Their third goal was to use this Google database as a tool for contacting published authors about how they have used their publication in teaching and research as a means of measuring the impact of the journal systematically. They would also use their contact with authors to urge them to post their NPSR publications as PDFs on Google author pages and/or on academia.edu author pages. This ongoing project provides a model and base for the systematic study of the impact of the journal and allows us to demonstrate the necessity for the journal to be indexed via open-source databases such as Google and academia.edu and not only via university library-based subscription services. Indeed, their searches drove traffic to the journal. Our goal is to have every issue of NPSR searchable on Google books.

This kind of data-driven activity raises the questions associated with the politics of publishing in black politics for graduate and undergraduate students as well as helps them understand how important readerships are to sustaining academic research in areas of critical concern and greatest need. Such data is necessary for the NCOBPS organization and is also necessary as we begin to circulate proposals to publishers who might offer a more competitive business model that preserves the academic integrity of the journal, preserves the name and volume numbering, and preserves the greatest access to the journal for NCOBPS members without additional cost. We propose the following systematic approaches over a three-year cycle to institutionalize and make permanent the collection of data.

Year One—Introduction of an annual survey of the published authors and all NCOBPS members developed and administered jointly by students at Providence College and the University of California, Irvine. The survey will complete the data gathering begun in Summer 2014 and combine it with answering the following questions: Who is submitting? What is the acceptance/rejection ratio? Who cites the journal beyond the field of political science? Who teaches the journal beyond the field of political science? Who reads the journal beyond the field of political science? Who cites, teaches, and reads the journal in the field of political science? Who is the journal going to? Who is its readership? Do all the authors subscribe to the journal? Is the journal being cited in theses and dissertations? What trends can we show over time? What is the readership compared to other political (defined broadly) journals and non-academic serials that effectively capture the black academic reading market? What is the readership compared to other politics (defined broadly) journals and non-academic serials that effectively capture the black non-academic reading market? Our data collection process will help us to determine longitudinal trends, thereby providing necessary information to show us where we can increase our share of the academic and non-academic reading market.

Year Two—Continue with the second year of data gathering and enhance the financial viability of the journal. Our goal is harness the longstanding history of the journal in our promotion and modernization. This will be used to partner with a publisher already outfitted with online submission capabilities and a central author tracking system. Additionally, we can expand the
scope of the journal via the distribution to black and independent bookshops with local and national distribution.

**Year Three**—Assess the extent to which the three years of annual survey, which includes promotion of the journal and the wider distribution of the journal, have impacted the sustainability, readership and submission rates. Include findings and analysis on the impact and readership of the journal in presentation to the Executive Board, at the Annual Business Meeting, and in the Report circulated to the Editorial Board. This should become a central feature of the Annual Reporting mechanism.

**Area III: Interdisciplinarity as a Tool for Expansion**

Our goal is to continue the emphasis on the journal’s cutting edge contributions to interdisciplinarity and wide-ranging methodological approaches. Since Volume 1 (1989) the National Political Science Review along with the other publications of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists has been concerned with topics as various as the content on race and ethnic politics in political science textbooks, race in post-authoritarian Brazil, and the impact of the narcotics trade on domestic and international relations. “Thus, in addition to contributions from political scientists, the NPSR seeks relevant contributions from historians, sociologists, anthropologists, theologians, economists, ethicists, and others…. [and] to be at the forefront of lively scholarly discourse on domestic and global political life, particularly as disadvantaged groups are affected.”

This set of wide ranging political concerns has pivoted in some years to feature the study of civil rights achievements and theoretical analyses of the principles of black nationalism, and in other years to feature the study of the formal rules of electoral politics and the dynamics of incorporation and compromise and deal-making in the same arena. This provides evidence of an incredible commitment to interdisciplinary scholarship along with varied methodological approaches. From qualitative studies of black women’s experiences in politics to empirical survey-based approaches, we are building on an already epistemologically vibrant intellectual conversation. The following three-year approach reflects how we think it best to implement the development of this hallmark tradition in the NPSR.

**Year One**—this year we will introduce interdisciplinarity formally by bringing on a Book Review Editor/Associate Editor, Keisha Blain, who is a political historian based in a History Department. Dr. Blain’s areas of expertise overlap beautifully with our goals of interdisciplinarity because her areas of research are in Black Nationalism, black women’s political organizing, political development, international relations, and political theory. As a historian with a publication record in competing/peer journals she brings a fluid sensibility and respect for the field of political science and African American Studies, having completed her postdoctoral fellowship with one of the longtime members of NCOBPS, Dr. Darryl Thomas at Penn State University. In the past we have had members of the Editorial Board in allied social science and humanities fields but we

6 Excerpts from: [http://www.ncobps.org/?page=AboutUs](http://www.ncobps.org/?page=AboutUs)
have never had a member of the Editorial Board whose primary area of scholarship is not political science. This innovation will enable us to formally reflect our goals.

Year Two—This year will feature a Reflection on Interdisciplinary scholarship solicited by the Editors from a senior scholar in the association and one outside of the association. This will highlight our commitment to interdisciplinarity and wide-ranging methodologies in another tangible and explicit fashion. Though, not a regular or annual section of the journal, it will highlight what we are doing and spur research.

Year Three—This year will feature an invited Special Issue on Methodology and Epistemology solicited by the Editors from a senior scholar in the association. As this year completes our three-year cycle it is imperative that we be able to consider what the NPSR does that is unique compared to other politics journals that focus on methods and innovative modes of conducting research in this field, and its interdisciplinary offshoots. It seems particularly timely to offer one issue in this three-year cycle that can be part of the discussion with a range of publishers as we transition into a new editorial board.

How has NCOBPS come to embrace a Black Feminist NPSR?

We do not think we would have had such a positive reception without the support of Dr. Wendy Smooth, who is the immediate past President of NCOBPS and served as the Chair NPSR Editorial Selection Committee. She writes:

“We were impressed with the highly interdisciplinary nature of the proposal. We noted that the scholars were well situated geographically to solicit proposals from regional meetings in political science, which could potentially extend the reach of the journal to new audiences. The proposal stood out for its attentiveness to growing the journal, enriching the skills of our NCOBPS scholars and raising the overall profile of the journal through a concerted examination of the data related to submission and review patterns. The committee held in high regard the proposal’s investment in developing junior scholars through publishing workshops, and the commitments to raising the profile of the journal as an outlet for outstanding scholarship. The submission included an editorial board reflective of the broad nature of black politics. In addition, the editorial team demarcated that the editors would hold primary responsibilities for each subfield commonly associated with black politics. We found this a very productive way to organize the editorial team and we suggest using these distinctions on the main editorial page to assist authors in submitting their work and working with the appropriate editor. We found this proposed editorial team deeply familiar with the workings of the NPSR with one proposed editor currently holding a leadership position with the journal and another who has served as a recent guest editor of a special issue. This, we thought assured the continuity of the caliber of journal production we have become accustomed to under our current editors.”

How can scholars outside of NCOBPS build a coalition with NPSR?

The September 2013 APSA newsletter published the APSA-Revised Journal Rankings. The proposed new ranking is the successor to the one originally drawn up in 2006 for the Research Quality Framework. The upshot of the review is that the number of ranked journals on the APSA list increased from 489 to 586 journals. The revision exercise was firmly committed to retain the 5:15:30:50 ratio of A, B and C journals in order to retain the integrity and credibility of the
exercise. Given this fixed ratio and the increased number journals in absolute terms, there are
now more journals at each level, indicating 85 to 89 “A” journals, 163 to 176 “B” journals and
215 to 291 “C” journals.

NPSR is listed as a “C” journal. Why is that? One of the criteria for rankings is citation. This is
not an accusation, but an observation. In fact, members of NCOBPS have been guilty of not
citing each other, so we must start with ourselves. Two years ago at APSA, scholars Daniel
Maliniak from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), Ryan M. Powers from the
University of Wisconsin - Madison, and Barbara F. Walter from University of California, San
Diego’s presented a paper entitled, “The Gender Citation Gap.”

Their research investigated the extent to which citation and publication patterns differ between
men and women. Using data from the Teaching, Research, and International Policy project on
peer-reviewed publications between 1980 and 2007, they show that women are systematically
cited less than men after controlling for a large number of variables including year of publication,
quality of publication, substantive focus, theoretical perspective, methodology, tenure status, and
institutional affiliation. These results are robust to a variety of modeling choices. They then turn
to network analysis to investigate the extent to which the gender of an article’s author affects that
article’s relative centrality in the network of citations between papers in their sample. Articles
authored by women are systematically less central than articles authored by men, all else equal.
This is likely because (1) women tend to cite themselves less than men, and (1) men (who make
up a disproportionate share of IR scholars) tend to cite men more than women. This is the first
study in political science to reveal significant gender differences in citation patterns and is
especially meaningful because citation counts are increasingly used as a key measure of
research’s quality and impact.

“I would argue that this data is more discrepant for Black women. To revise these citation
practices and build alliances with Black feminist scholars, one need look no further than our most
recent journal volumes, specifically, Volume 16, entitled, ‘Black Women in Politics: Identity,
Power, and Justice in the New Millennium,’” guest edited by Nikol Alexander-Floyd and Julia S.
Jordan-Zachery; and Volume 17.1, forthcoming this month, which will include a symposium on
the Association for the Study of Black Women and Politics. Next year’s volume 17.2 will
similarly include an article written by Nikol G. Alexander entitled, “Black Women Political
Scientists At Work: A Conversation with Nadia Brown and Wendy Smooth.” I invite you to join
our conversation, to collaborate with us, and to cite us.”