
MOREHOUSE

COLLEGE



The Identity, Art and Democracy Lab

an active psychology space for affirming narratives and social justice

The present crisis arises because, although it is historically imperative that our society take the next step to equality, we find ourselves psychologically and socially imprisoned.

White America has an appalling lack of knowledge concerning the reality of Negro life.

*Martin Luther King, Jr.
American Psychological Association Convention
Washington, DC — September 1967*

The Dilemma

Systemic racism cuts across, at least, individual, cultural and institutional domains [Jones, 1996] that frame Black people based on negatives. Pathology and deficit narratives lead instead of stories of complicated lived experiences that connect all of us. And because of the psychological sense-making that narratives provide to the individual, negative narratives about Black people can anchor anti-Black racist behaviors. The challenge, then, is to make available, and to center broader and thicker narratives that allow for nuance and contextualized looks at Black people that represent a more accurate understanding of their lived experience and, by extension, a better opportunity at understanding and embracing one another. Simply, more global views of Black people yield more authentic engagement and allow for healthier human interactions.

The Lab

The Identity, Art and Democracy Laboratory [IADL] was established by [David Wall Rice](#) to understand “the self” through narratives. In setting analysis on life stories, **identity** is understood in a more robust way because of the ability to push beyond stereotype with more complete and complex stories of and relating to the person. Within the Lab we are intentional in convening scientists, activists, students, artists, politicians, academics, organizers, and athletes. We do this calculating that one’s storied self is a process and product of human creativity and social life — **art**. Considering identity in this way also affords an opportunity to view how one frames and exercises their democratic space, or how they are visible. The Identity, Art and Democracy Lab, then, provides a novel way to move from “counting and summarizing” the complex identities of Black people to authentically engaging us, scaling toward new contours of freedom work and **democracy**.

A Cycle of Freedom Work

The Lab studies identity as expressed through the narratives of lived experiences with designs on how stories are connected to affirming behaviors, healthy representation, and resistance. Visibility plays big in the Lab. We are interested in examining how it is illustrated through self-definition, and how that thread of personal freedom can be scaled to social impact. Lab work cycles through three distinct iterations:

- **Case study conversation(s)**, data collection of the narrative;
- **Collaborative analysis** with working groups to establish themes, interventions and programming that extends from a synthesis of narratives; and
- **Application**, the implementation of designed programming and interventions as defined by narratives through working group conclusions

The Lab is an advocacy/participatory research space. This means that inquiry is done in collaboration with the researched, while theories are positioned in ways that have us asking about strengths, not deficits. Questions that we look at are examined through scaffolding that attends to not only counting and summarizing, but that places equal emphasis on socially constructed understandings and the type of pragmatism that generates innovative thought and solutions.

Identity Orchestration anchors our grounded-theory approach. The theory explains the self as a container for identities that strike balance with one another and with broad social context(s). This self and society “sense-making” program of study addresses the structural and cultural causes of Black inequality by way of first person narratives. With narrow focus on systemic anti-Black Racism in this way, there are tremendous opportunities to advance understanding, programming and practice in But more importantly, it examines paths toward equality, necessarily, across cultural contexts. No doubt, other lenses and modes of investigation will emerge as pivotal, but the central components of Identity Orchestration — Burden of Proof, Identity Dilemma Articulation, Unadulterated Presentation of Self and Acute Identity Expression — will remain foundational.

What the Work Looks Like

The [Sport and Social Impact Initiative](#) [collaborative analysis & application] exists because of Colin Kaepernick. His resolve in not standing for the singing of The National Anthem beginning with an NFL pre-season game in 2016 kickstarted Lab work with several professional sports organizations in working to figure how best to use Sport as a platform for social impact. Components of the initiative include the course

Psychology, Sport and Social Impact taught at Morehouse College and works that are rooted in the Advocacy in Sport Workshop(s) for professional athletes looking to learn more about how to be effective change agents.

The [Center for the Development of Identity and Motivation of African American Students in STEM](#) [**collaborative analysis**] is a National Science Foundation funded project. The Center was established to examine the nature of identity-based motivation among Black undergraduates in STEM at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Emphasis is placed on STEM engagement, persistence and achievement for this group with narrative studies positioned as a significant tool leveraged to gain novel insight. The Center is defined by work in the Identity, Art and Democracy Lab and psychological research labs at Winston-Salem State University and Howard University.

[In Conversation](#) [**data collection**] is a series of identity-based dialogues that extend across programming at Morehouse College — Crown Forum, Community Classrooms, Martin Luther King, Jr. Collection discussions — and beyond. *In Conversation* centers the Lab work of learning from identity and its connection to the effective utilization of democratic space toward social impact.

The Lab's dynamic [Curriculum Framework for Social Impact](#) [**application**] is a tool designed to develop skills, attitudes and behaviors that help learners to contribute positively to their communities. It is an extension of the Morehouse College Mission and centers authentic engagement, understanding self, understanding rudimentary tactics of impactful leaders and movements, and the accountability tethered to being knowledgeable about a thing. These precepts are anchored by four domains of social justice — identity, diversity, justice and action. The framework is designed as a “map” broad enough to be integrated into other pedagogical expressions and organizational cultures, programming, goals and objectives.

[Identity Orchestration \(2022\)](#) [**collaborative analysis**] is an edited volume with former and current Lab members that extends thinking and theory in the book [Balance \(2008\)](#).

