

INTRODUCTION TO BLACK STUDIES:
A Review of a Recent Text by M. Ron Karenga

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INTRODUCTION TO BLACK STUDIES: A REVIEW

Black Studies has emerged in the U.S. over the past fifteen years in an advanced capitalist country in crisis, completely dominated by racism, national oppression, and imperialist class exploitation at home and abroad. Thus, while this academic/educational movement has faced the crying need for high intellectual standards, it has been a fertile battlefield for ideological polemics over race/nationality/class, initially in the Black liberation movement, like the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC), then after that by academics. The polemics, unfortunately have not often provided clarity that can guide the future struggles, and orient our future generations of resistance as we march into the 21st Century.

Part of this can be explained by the overall importance Black activists and intellectuals place on ideology. Ideology can have a tremendous impact on a generation when it is based on the historical evolution of an intellectual tradition, when it has successfully guided research to the extent that it meets the existing criteria for consensus in the scientific community, when it reflects the orientation of a leading socio-political force in society (especially the dominant ruling class, but also insurgent groups as well), and/or when it is systematically codified into a textbook and easily available to a large reading/studying audience.

Over the last several years, more and more attention has been given to "texts" in Black Studies. Many of the early efforts were based in a single discipline and reflected the "negation" of ruling class racism, field by field. For example, Blacks in sociology produced Ladner's Death of White Sociology (1973), Staples' Introduction to Black Sociology (1976), Thompson's Sociology of the Black Experience (1974) and Blackwell's The Black Community (1975). These works, of course, build on the earlier work of Johnson, Frazier, Cox, Drake and others. We are now moving beyond negation to affirmation, the positive development of texts in Black Studies as a definite field of study research puberty. Peoples College has produced one of the major efforts in this area, a two volume text called Introduction to Afro-American Studies (1977-1978), and this work is the basis of this review.

Our ideological orientation is the scientific orientation of Marxism-Leninism, the ideology of the working class. We use it as the basis for our work, but the value of our work far exceeds the limits of those who share our

orientation. Universal communication and dialogue is possible because Marxism-Leninism is a continuation, on a worldwide basis, of social science and of the political practice of an oppressed and exploited people fighting to be free. The strengths of a Marxist-Leninist analysis, therefore, are universal for all who stand to benefit by destroying capitalism, and opposed by those who want capitalism to live forever. Many in the U.S., however, remain uninformed, afraid and influenced by the residual repressive culture of the McCarthyite red scare of the 1950s.

It is in this context that we review a new text by M. Ron Karenga, Introduction to Black Studies (1982). Our fundamental concern is with universal criteria for all Black Studies practitioners that can be the basis for acceptable diversity--clear intellectual standards. This is a critical necessity for Black Studies at this time--to establish a framework and texts that enable progressive adherents of different ideological orientations the opportunity to study together, learn from each other, and in unity make generational gains in political consciousness and in political practice.

We are in complete agreement with the central thesis of the Karenga book on certain political and organizational questions. Peoples College (of which I am a part, and therefore by views are an articulation of a collective position) has a general political line for Black Studies as part of the campus and the community summed up in the slogan Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility. Karenga seems to be in agreement with this position as his discussion of the relevance of Black Studies (p. 26) points to "basic academic and social objectives" which for Black Studies translated into objectives such as "to assemble and create a body of knowledge which was contributive to intellectual and political emancipation" (p. 27), and "creating a body of Black intellectuals who were dedicated to community service and development" (p. 27).

On the organizational level, we are committed to building the National Council for Black Studies as the central organization to unite all the diverse aspects of Black Studies. Karenga stands firmly behind this position as well: "The National Council for Black Studies has assumed a vanguard role...and should be supported and further developed...It is in the context of a strong and viable organization that collective strategies, a standard curriculum, rationales, resources, defense of interest, scholarly exchange will evolve. Without such organized efforts and collective thrusts, separate structures will tend to be

reduced to struggle for attention, duplication of effort and negative division of effort."

We have concrete differences with the Karenga text in the area of theory, methodology and philosophy. While not being able to take up these matters in full detail, there are several specific criticisms that deserve discussion and debate. One of the first and most glaring aspects of the Karenga book is its apparent disregard for empirical analysis. The only numbers in the text are dates and a few aggregate quantities. Further, there are no extended concrete descriptive case studies presented, which means that there is no specific experience accessible to the reader that can serve as a grounding for the knowledge presented in the book. An analysis must be empirically based because it is only by rooting knowledge in concrete perception that we can be assured of correspondence between our abstract ideas (which can usually take a clear, simple and symmetrical form), and the real material world (which is full of contradiction, complexity and ambiguity).

A second and related criticism is the excessive use of typological simplification. The main point here is that while typologies stated in abstract general terms might appear to be correct (that is, have some correspondence with the concrete world) there must be a vigorously demonstrated connection with concrete experience in order that students are sufficiently grounded. In other words, ideas in one's head must be planted while at the same time planting one's feet firmly on the ground.

A third criticism that flows from the previous two regards the criteria for truth. There is no clear criteria of truth. The general method of citing experts is useful but does not constitute a sound epistemological basis (especially when the method of sampling is left unclear). But what appears to happen is the use of a deductive approach beginning with the assumed premises of Kawaida theory and the use of quotes from Black Studies authors to verify the assumptions of Kawaida and to make other assorted points throughout the text. However, nowhere does the text arm us with a criteria by which we can assess the truth, or perhaps better said, to test the probabilistic accuracy of any statement to be found in the book, given a particular concrete experience. In other words, we are presented the book more as a doctrine than as a work of science.

A fourth criticism flowing from this is the definition of Black Studies itself. Karenga holds that Black Studies is a social science. However, there is no systematic attempt made to demonstrate a general conception of what is a social science (especially as it has historically developed). Also, there is a liquidation of Black social science intellectual history such that we fail to see that the dialectic between Black and white scholars (as an expression of the contradiction between Blacks and whites in the overall society) set the stage for the historical rise of Black Studies in the 1960's. Black intellectual history overall was neglected in the text, although episodic criticisms were made of various individuals in various chapters (e.g., DuBois pp. 115-118, King pp. 180-182, and Kenneth Clark p. 330). This criticism reveals the lack of an historical and sociological approach to knowledge by which one might be able to better understand Black intellectuals in context. There are lessons to be learned from them that are relevant today only if one transposes the ideas from the original historical context and critically assesses them under current conditions.

Another criticism has to do with the eclectic approach to each chapter. In the chapter on religion (pages 162-199), there is more effort placed on explaining the historic origin and development of African religion than on discussing the religious ideas and practices of Blacks over the last several hundred years in the United States. We learn more about the religion of the Dogon than we do of the concrete religious experiences of Blacks as Baptists or Methodists in the USA from the "invisible institution" during slavery to the "storefronts" of today. The chapter on psychology reflects a completely different approach. In this chapter a great deal of attention is paid to individual contributions organized in schools (pages 328-329). However, this is a rather eclectic approach to schools and to individuals who were cited, reflecting more the ideological preference of the author rather than a more accurate and comprehensive approach to Black intellectual history. The main point here is the fact that for a text "introducing" Black Studies, there is a need to start from the main body of intellectual work that Black people have done, critically assess it and then to guide future study. Karenga takes a rather narrow ideological focus, and imposes it on Black intellectual history in too selective a manner.

The most fundamental criticism deals with the ad hoc historical approach reflected in the book. Karenga is guilty of negating historical periodization of the Black experience. He fails to use the tools of political economy, the foundation social science, to grasp the historical dynamic of Black people. Simply put, Karenga is arguing the thesis that Blacks are Africans in America. It therefore serves his purpose to place primary emphasis on Africa and slavery (covering pages 52-103) while the last 100 years is summed up on 9 pages. He then gives a 38 page discussion of 20th century political movements in which nationalism is consistently billed as the dominant practice.

Materialism must be contrasted with idealism. Materialism requires a rigorous organization of empirical (perceptual) detail in order to lay the basis for theory (rational knowledge). A Black Studies approach must have a systematically defined and empirically measured concept of experience, such that one is able to test arguments and evaluate theories on an objective basis that can be replicated in the community of Black Studies scholarship. We think that the Black experience must involve race (biology), nationality (society/culture) and class (political economy).

Karenga's book is based on idealism. A good example of this is where Karenga deals with Black religious ideas, but not the concrete historical development of the Black church. The main thrust is on consciousness, not on the concrete socio-historical collective life of Black people carrying out religious practices in their churches. Further, since we must be secure in our knowledge, it is important that all of the great theories be tested against the available data, and incorporated or rejected as part of our overall knowledge that we have about Black religious behavior. An example of this would be the Weberian thesis on the impact of protestantism on economic behavior, the Marxist theory of religion as an oppressive influence on people, or any other.

Dialectics must be contrasted with metaphysics. Fundamentally the question of historical periodization is both a question of what is real (what is the Black experience), but also to what extent what is real reflects a dynamic of change. Each specific thing in the material world changes, both on its own terms and in relationship to everything else. There is no systematic presentation of logic of change in the Karenga book, each chapter is different and therefore there is no systematic way to interrelate the points put forward in one chapter with another, within a specific historical context. The question

of historical periodization remains at the center of the ideological juncture we face in our struggle for unity in Black Studies today.

The challenge is for Black Studies scholars, intellectuals, and activists in all fields to collectively respond to the arguments presented in this review and join in the dialogue, discussion and debate. This is a critical period for Black people, a period which demands unity in Black Studies. The most pressing ideological necessity facing Black Studies is to develop a paradigm of unity for the field. We need a theoretical formulation in which competing ideas can contend, but within the kind of framework that allows for their contention to build strength, sharpness, and clarity of understanding so that Black Studies can be put solidly on the road forward. This is the challenge. Join us!*

*The Seventh Annual Conference of the National Council for Black Studies will meet at the University of California at Berkeley on April 6-9, 1983. For additional information contact Dr. Charles Henry, Conference Coordinator, Department of Afro-American Studies, 3335 Dwinelle Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.

the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are aged 65 and over has increased from 10.5 million to 13.5 million (19.5% of the population).

There are a number of reasons why the number of people aged 65 and over has increased. One of the main reasons is that people are living longer. The life expectancy at birth in the UK is now 78 years for men and 82 years for women (ONS 2002).

Another reason is that people are staying in the workforce longer. The average age of people who leave the workforce is now 65 years (ONS 2002).

There are a number of implications of the increasing number of people aged 65 and over. One of the main implications is that there will be a need for more social care services.

There are a number of reasons why there will be a need for more social care services. One of the main reasons is that people are living longer and are therefore more likely to need social care services.

Another reason is that people are staying in the workforce longer and are therefore more likely to need social care services.

There are a number of ways in which the need for social care services can be met. One of the main ways is through the provision of home care services.

There are a number of reasons why home care services are important. One of the main reasons is that they allow people to live in their own homes for as long as possible.

Another reason is that home care services can help to reduce the need for hospital care.

There are a number of challenges associated with the provision of home care services. One of the main challenges is that there is a shortage of staff.

There are a number of reasons why there is a shortage of staff. One of the main reasons is that the work is often demanding and can be stressful.

Another reason is that the pay is often low.

There are a number of ways in which the shortage of staff can be addressed. One of the main ways is through the recruitment of new staff.

There are a number of reasons why the recruitment of new staff is important. One of the main reasons is that it helps to ensure that there are enough staff to provide the services that are needed.

Another reason is that it helps to improve the quality of the services that are provided.

There are a number of challenges associated with the recruitment of new staff. One of the main challenges is that it can be difficult to find people who are willing to do the work.

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There are a number of ways in which the challenges associated with the recruitment of new staff can be addressed. One of the main ways is through the provision of training and support.

There are a number of reasons why the provision of training and support is important. One of the main reasons is that it helps to improve the quality of the services that are provided.

Another reason is that it helps to reduce the turnover of staff.

There are a number of challenges associated with the provision of training and support. One of the main challenges is that it can be expensive.

There are a number of reasons why it can be expensive. One of the main reasons is that it often involves the provision of specialist training.

Another reason is that it often involves the provision of ongoing support.

There are a number of ways in which the challenges associated with the provision of training and support can be addressed. One of the main ways is through the provision of financial support.

There are a number of reasons why the provision of financial support is important. One of the main reasons is that it helps to ensure that the training and support that is needed is available.

Another reason is that it helps to reduce the costs of the services that are provided.