

## REPORT OF AN AD HOC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Topic: A Conference on "Higher Education and the Search for Afro-American Identity"

Session One: Atlanta, Georgia, November 8, 1967

Participants: Flournoy A. Coles, Jr. (Economics, Fisk), Vincent Harding (History, Spelman), Stephen Henderson (English, Morehouse), Gerald McWharter (Sociology, Fisk). Unable to attend: Horace Mann Bond (Research, Atlanta University), Earl Thorpe (History, North Carolina College), Darwin Turner (Dean, North Carolina A & T), Paul Puryear (Political Science, Fisk).

### I. Background:

1. For several months a number of persons on various of the Negro College campuses have been discussing informally the implications that the newest expression of Black Consciousness might have for their schools and others like them. One of these faculty members suggested to the Woodrow Wilson Foundation that it would likely be most helpful if that Foundation could help to fund a conference which would bring together representatives from as many of the Afro-American Colleges as possible. The idea struck the Foundation directors as sound and they agreed to begin by funding the initial exploratory planning sessions in which a few representatives from colleges in geographical proximity might work towards a larger meeting, if it seemed feasible to them.
2. Meantime faculty persons at Fisk University had been in serious conversation with the Ford Foundation regarding the funding of a conference which would seek to explore the ways in which a healthy sense of Afro-American identity might be encouraged in every sector of the black community of America. Since Ford appeared to be responding positively to this proposal, it became evident that conversation was needed between those who were proposing the more broadly directed conference at Fisk and those (largely in the Atlanta University Center) who were seeking to explore the more circumscribed area of higher education.
3. In consultation with the Woodrow Wilson Foundation it was decided that a group of us in Atlanta would invite several persons from two or three other schools to form an ad hoc committee to explore these matters. It was decided that we should try to bring together at least persons from Fisk and from the Durham-Greensboro complex.

## II. Tentative Agreements Reached at Planning Session One

1. A conference on "Higher Education and the Search for (or "the Crisis of") Afro-American Identity" should be held.
2. The Conference would probably best be located in Atlanta, especially when one considers matters of logistics.
3. The Conference would be sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation (with participation likely from the Danforth and Stokes-Phelps Foundations), but it is not clear who should call such a conference. Nor is it clear whether or not the colleges should be asked to make any financial contribution.
4. The dates upon which there was tentative agreement were February 29 - March 2, beginning with a Thursday evening and running through to Saturday night. Paschal's Motel has been tentatively reserved for these dates.
5. Invitations would go to the presidents of each of the black colleges, asking that he come and bring one or two other members of his faculty. Such a letter would indicate the solid interest of the foundations in such an enterprise.
6. Invitations would also go to selected faculty members and other persons closely related to the issues and institutions involved. These would generally be persons known to the planning committee, persons who have given some significant thought to the questions we are confronting.
7. There would be an attempt to include undergraduate students, graduate students (who studied at the black colleges) and public school teachers who graduated from Afro-American colleges. These three groups would comprise some 15 per cent of the participants.
8. It was our conclusion that we are likely discussing a conference involving some 250-300 persons.
9. These were some of the topics which seemed important centers for discussion in either plenary or smaller groups, or both:
  - a. An historical overview of the search for Afro-American identity
  - b. Identity, black colleges, and the larger Afro-American community



- c. The search for identity and the shaping of curriculum
  - d. Identity and the development of faculty
  - e. Identity and student recruitment
  - f. Identity and the search for financial resources
  - g. Identity and the development of extra-curricular activities
  - h. Identity and science education
  - i. Identity, the colleges, and the international non-white community
  - j. Identity and the training of teachers
10. It was suggested that the conference might consist of these general parts:
- a. Thursday night: a plenary session with one or two formal papers
  - b. Friday morning and afternoon: groups meeting according to discipline and perhaps according to administrative responsibilities
  - c. Friday night: A plenary session with papers
  - d. Saturday morning and afternoon: meetings according to geographical areas (and/or continuation of some disciplinary groups)
  - e. Saturday night: some "culturally-oriented" Afro-American entertainment
  - f. Sunday morning: meeting of a small continuation committee
11. We drew up three lists of names. These were
- a. Resource persons: who might be called upon to read papers (all of our planning committee is included in this group), chair small group sessions or act as resource personnel in such small groups.
  - b. Participants: many of whom would be of the same caliber as the first group.
  - c. Special participants: a list which now includes some of the graduate students and public school teachers, and will eventually include the undergraduates.

Each of these lists will be expanded when the planning committee meets in North Carolina. At present these are the names (The initials in parenthesis indicates the member of the planning committee who has most direct contact with the person listed.):

- A. Resource persons
- 1. Horace Mann Bond, AU (VH)
  - 2. Joseph Pierce (FC)
  - 3. Vivian Henderson (VH)
  - 4. Sir Walter Lewis (FC)
  - 5. St. Clair Drake (GM)
  - 6. George Roberts (VH)
  - 7. Wilfred Carty (VH)
  - 8. J. Alfred Cannon (FC)