

INTRODUCTION

When Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, it was a tragedy for the whole country. It was a tragedy and a crisis of special proportions for Black people in this country. Three reactions ran in rapid succession through all of the Black communities of the country. The first was a heightened sense of loneliness, hopelessness, and alienation. The feeling was quite general and quite generally expressed, that if the American, white racist society would not respond to the eloquent, moral, and scholarly work represented in the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., and his special pleadings on behalf of his people, and all humanity, then certainly life would be grim without him. The second type of reaction was rage expressed overtly by only a small proportion of the people who actually felt it, but still in sufficient proportions to cause a major crisis in many communities in the country. Following this sense and expression of rage was a third response which was perhaps more constructive. Black people in every community, and every social status, and in almost every type of organization, group or institution began to express the view that if white people could not take the initiatives to incorporate Black people in the society as equals under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., they were not likely to take these initiatives now and that, therefore, Black people must band together in spirit and action in order to take initiatives on their own behalf. The view grew rapidly and is still expanding throughout Black communities that no one Black or white leader or group of leaders will be able to deliver the Black people from their subordinate position in the social structure. The sense of commonness of status, condition, and future on the part of Black people was heightened. Thus, joint action among Black people on their own behalf has been intensified.

Among the institutions which became the targets of this concerted action and intensified demands were the educational institutions. They were perhaps more vehemently attacked than some other institutions in society, in part, because educational institutions have been more intransigent than economic and political institutions for example; but in major part, because Black people have come to view education as the major source of their achievement as a people. Thus, the universities, colleges, high schools and grade schools were approached with demands by Black students often in cooperation with Black faculties and community people and often in collaboration with large numbers of white students.

These demands have resulted in the establishment of Black Studies programs, departments, etc. all over the country. As a result of this plethora of programs and the geographical diversity, it was the opinion of many Black scholars that some mechanism should exist which would facilitate communications between these programs. This would allow us to share our common problems and seek common solutions in the interest of national unity and peoplehood.

REPORT ON BLACK STUDIES DIRECTORS SEMINAR

Sponsored by the Institute of the Black World
Atlanta, Georgia
November 7-9

On Friday, November 7, 1969 at approximately 10 o'clock, 35 Black Studies directors from the East, Midwest, Northwest, and Far West assembled at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia. These directors were present to discuss the problems they were experiencing in implementing Black Studies at their respective institutions. The Seminar was also held to acquaint these directors with the Institute of the Black World.

The seminar began with a welcome statement by Dr. Vincent Harding, Director of the Institute. He informed the directors that the Institute had as one of its primary areas of interest, the emerging discipline of Black Studies. He informed the directors that the Institute was committed to being of assistance to and assisted by their programs. That is, the Institute could serve as a clearinghouse of information about all Black Studies programs and personnel. It could offer assistance at some point in the near future in developing the problematical areas of curricula, course content, bibliographical materials, and periodic evaluations of the programs in existence. He stated further that one of the primary tasks which the Institute and its associates would undertake would be that of defining Black Studies, i.e. what it should be and where it should be going. Dr. Harding then outlined briefly the purpose of the Institute and how it came into being.

He stated that the Institute represented the culmination of a dream which grew out of his intellectual and emotional identification with the great Black intellectual giant, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois. He noted that Dr. DuBois had wanted to initiate 100 years of study of the Black experience from his base in Atlanta. In addition, Dr. DuBois had envisioned the Atlanta Center as the home of the Black University. Dr. Harding noted that the Institute was an initial step in the realization of this dream. Dr. Harding then proceeded to introduce the Institute's staff. One can see from the diverse range of interests represented by each staff member what types of activities the Institute will be involved in as well as its purpose and the purpose and function of Black Studies.

The first staff member introduced was William Strickland. Bill's major area of interest is policy studies. He noted that Black intellectuals and Black Studies must be about 1) redefining Black people's problems, 2) exposing the fallacies of white and "Negro" solutions to our problems, 3) after study and redefinition, we must develop strategies and "operationalizers" to implement the solutions we have arrived at, and 4) coming to the intellectual defense of our community. He noted further that we must re-evaluate our allies to determine those who can and cannot be trusted. And finally, we must contact our older Black radicals who for one reason or another are not in the country now. We must give our heroes their proper due. He concluded by noting that we are now in the first stage of our movement toward liberation--the re-analysis of our problems and proposed solutions by whites and "Negroes".