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REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF BLACK STUDIES

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The thrust of what I have to say can be summed up in four questions. The first question is simply: Is there a crisis in Black Studies? And if there is a crisis, the second question is, why does this crisis exist? (I hope we all agree that there is.) Thirdly, what is the nature of this crisis? And finally, what is the future of Black Studies? That will constitute the body of my report on the present conditions of the Black Studies programs.

The first question, then: Is there a crisis in Black Studies? I think that very few would argue that there isn't. Too many program directors who are facing the kinds of hassles -- budgetary problems, and administrative hang-ups - that the white people are throwing at them - are not aware that these problems are general. They are. Everyone whom I have seen who runs a program is confronted with the age-old problems of money, staff, office space, secretaries, phones, stamps, etc. There are a series of little bitty, nagging, petty problems that people trying to implement Black Studies programs have to face.

However, that is not the crisis! Those things are inevitable with any new movement. The crisis, I think, arises much less from these petty budgetary and administrative hassles than from the simple lack of knowledge of what we are doing. So, I think that the gist of the crisis is that we have not spent enough time talking about what Black Studies is, to know what we ought to be doing. When the partially blind accept responsibility to lead the totally blind out of the darkness, there is bound to be some stumbling over feet. In fact, I think that is what we are doing at the moment.

So we come down to what, I have to confess, may be a brutal but I think, personally, an honest assessment, that at the moment, Black Studies does not exist. In too many instances the enthusiasm for Black Studies has in fact generated what I would call a new category of academic, pimps and hustlers, both black and white. Brothers are trucking Black Studies. They've discovered the amounts of money available for Black Studies represent a rapid scaling up of personal status, academic rank and professional income. Lots of people who confess that they know nothing about what they are doing proceed to go ahead and try to do it anyway. That is not intrinsically bad in the sense that few of us actually know what we are doing, but when in fact one definitely conceals his lack of information to make sure that nobody finds out that he doesn't know what he is doing, then he is faking

it. Well, the faking of programs will be exposed and eliminated. I hope that not many fakers have managed to sneak into our deliberations here. It matters very little if you have. Those who are faking it know, and everybody else will find out soon enough. What is going to have to happen, frankly, is that we must confess that we really don't know what is going on. Then we must attempt to go back to the basis of our blackness, and find out what we have to do. That's going to mean that many people are going to have to get over a lot of old hang-ups about their traditional roles as teachers.

Now the second question: Why does the crisis exist? I think the reason that this crisis exists is the same reason that the society is in a crisis. I don't think you can separate American education from American society. You can do it analytically, but in practice it is almost impossible.

Basically, there are a set of assumptions which underlie this society. Most of them not articulated. And since they have never been made very explicit, most Americans don't even think about them. I call this set of assumptions "Western Cultural Imperialism". They consist of ingrained notions about an evolutionary process, about man's movement from one civilization to another civilization: a belief that western man (that is, white people) represents the highest state of evolution in terms of culture that man has ever achieved; and a belief in the United States as the epitome, the highest plateau

of human civilization. Because it is an evolutionary assumption, whitey believes it inevitable that other people farther behind must follow him. Thus non-whites are less civilized, primitive, underdeveloped, underprivileged, etc. You have heard the whole set of value judgments that people apply to people they feel beneath them.

What I have done is to try to point out that the prevailing definitions in America of intellectual validity and worth are derived from that tradition, that if you go down to the heart of what it is that is defined as being intellectually valid in American schools and Western universities, it comes down to anything that is a part of the Western cultural tradition. In one sense, scholarship has been the history of Western cultural endeavors and their impact upon lesser cultures. That is, how have we succeeded in elevating these lesser people to something which approximates what they ought to be. You can begin to understand how people who call themselves historians argue that the whole of African history was a footnote to something the English were doing in Asia. African history has been for too long simply a study of what white people were doing in Africa.

What I am trying to argue is that because of an unarticulated set of values, there is a conceptual blind spot in American education. The conceptual blind spot is the inability to conceptualize alternate and equally valid sets of cultural values that did and do exist. Western education had to believe that there

were no other values that were worthwhile. That is the only way Europeans could explain how they could do some of the things that have been done in the name of spreading something like Christianity. In fact, I would argue that Christianity is the same set of values; that it really comes down to a belief about man and universalism: they have found a way through which all men can reach salvation. They must spread this to all men and if some don't believe in it, they must be forced to believe because this is the way the Lord told us. Well, I'm not arguing about Christianity; I'm simply saying if you understand how it is used to impinge upon other sets of values, you can understand their definition of intellectual validity.

The gut of what I have to say is simply that American education can be defined in functional terms as white studies. It is precisely because American education is white studies that there is a crisis in Black Studies. Black Studies is an equal, opposite and alternative imperative, which has forced the advocates of white studies to realize for the first time that they were not talking about objectivity and the broadening of human endeavors: they were only talking about white studies. Except they don't know it. They continue to believe that they are talking about man's total environment, endeavors.

Also, some of the causes and crises of Black Studies can be related to integrationism. I cannot spend a lot of time talk-

ing about the rise and fall of integrationism, but very briefly, I believe that integrationism and Western cultural imperialism are the same. That in fact integrationism has become a bulwark of racism precisely because it has become unilateral. If you think in functional terms about what integrationism has meant and what it means now, it simply means that there is this ideal again, an ideal to which we should aspire, of which we should want to become a part. But the process of integrating has always meant losing those negative values and cultural assumptions which have kept you outside it. In other words, it is the assumption that there is this white thing up here that we all must become a part of and that as we shed the vestiges of blackness, we will move forward until we reach the Western cultural level.

Advocates of integration have difficulty understanding or being able to sympathize with people who talk about Black Studies. You are throwing up in their face everything they have believed all their lives. They have really been ashamed of blackness. They won't say it; they simply define blackness as what has kept us down. They must get out of the limitations of that definition, and the only way they can get out of it is to accept the next logical statement within that definition: Well, we can't change white people's attitudes about Black people, so we will change our own perceptions of blackness and the reality of it and ourselves. We will become white and thereby be accepted: integrationism.

So they oppose Black Studies not for intellectual reasons but for basically political ones. Black Studies is part of a revolution that proposes to sweep away the dead heads of integration, and they can't deal with it. One should understand that when evaluating their criticisms of Black Studies.

The crisis is in fact a product of two things: (1) not very many young blacks have any real perception of historical depths of serious study about blackness. It is precisely because Black history wasn't taught to the young, when the wave of black consciousness began coming through colleges and universities in the early sixties, that the younger blacks believed -- quite sincerely -- that it was they who discovered blackness. And they believed it was they who had to carry the burden of implementing it. They refused to believe that anybody older had anything to do with it because nobody ever told them that history began before them. And because of that, they have been, frankly, ignorant and uninformed about the ways that one implements formal studies of blackness. So that's one of the problems.

I have described most Black Studies programs as an attempt to make uncomfortable black students comfortable. It is an attempt to quiet the niggers. In most instances, it has succeeded. I argue that eventually, it will become a classical example of counter-productivity because I think frustrated hope is much more conducive to violence than to ambition.

Black Studies has never been defined. People have talked about it, but we still have yet to come to some positive conclusion as to what it is. I don't believe that, frankly, we can consider practical strategies about how to implement Black Studies until we find out what it is and what its goals should be. In fact, one of the major consequences of initial efforts when you are not clear about the goals, is that you may work at cross-purposes to your ultimate goals. It is something we ought to consider and think about at great length.

Everybody, as I said earlier, has been beset by budget and administration squabbles and hassles. I will give you a few examples to indicate the kind of thing that I have seen.

At one school, a program was announced with a budget of \$50, or \$60,000. Fifty or sixty thousand dollars sounds like a lot of money to me, and it sounded like a lot of money to the black students. So they accepted it as a reasonable budget. I was with the director of the program the first day he went to see the dean, and they sat down and talked about what that budget actually meant. Well, after they took out his salary, the salaries for the administrative assistants, the salary for the students who are working, their rent, furniture, telephone, stamps, the whole works, they ended up with \$600.00. Six hundred dollars was his budget. That is how much money he had to spend. This was a very prestigious institution. The administration had given enough money to establish the administrative apparatus for Black Studies but not enough for the program to do anything.

That is part of the condescending attitude of many white administrators. They have been forced to something they didn't want to do. All right, you have forced them. Now they play the game bureaucrats play best, in the back room at the budget table: Let me see, if I slice this out and this out, they would never know they were supposed to get it. In fact, you discover that you are trying to implement a paper program, one hastily thought out and ill conceived. It can't be implemented anyway. You can't implement it because they didn't give you the money necessary to implement it. The situation of a Director of Black Studies on many campuses is a pathetic one. It is one that I sympathize with.

One of the things I want quickly to do is criticize some of the structural models that are now in use. I have tried to analyze the different ways that people have decided to organize things and to measure the degrees of autonomy. And I'm not talking about any great vision of autonomy; I am just talking about whether or not you control, whether you really have any control over what you control, whether you really have any control over what you do. So, I would like to discuss programs in reverse order, that is, from the most autonomous to the least. The basic question is how have individual schools attempted to organize and orientate themselves in relationship to this thing called Black Studies, which I will define for the moment as knowledge defined by Blacks.

At the top, is obviously a concept of a Black University initiated by black people, funded by black people and controlled by black people. Obviously, in this instance, you have as much autonomy as you are going to get inside the confines of this country.

Beneath that, inside formal educational institutions, is a second level, a college of Black Studies. At that level, you are independent and equal to all the other colleges in the University with as much administrative autonomy as any other school.

Beneath that is the level of the department, and I think we are all familiar with the concept of the department.

Beneath the department, is what I call the program. That is an administrative arrangement not as independent as a department, but one that coordinates the efforts of a variety of departments and is usually subject to the whims of the individual departments and the people who run them.

Beneath that is something I call the autonomous instructional center. This is a setting up of an administrative relationship between blacks and the school which establishes an institutional structure separate from the normal structure. In other words, it is not a department and it is not a program. Some people call them Afro-American Centers or Afro-American Studies Institutes. They are engaged in activities of formal academic teaching, but also teach and grant degrees. So that you are partially teaching and partially doing community work. I call that an autonomous instructional center.

Beneath that is something called the autonomous coordinating center, where courses are taught without credit. So it is even less involved in the formal instructional aspect of the institutions.

Beneath that is the model called ethnic studies, where in fact what has happened is that the study of black people has been placed alongside the studies of all the other minority groups, and where the special features of the black experience are played down.

Then there is what I call urban or American Studies, where Black Studies has been submerged even more within another field. You have, in other words, a Black Studies option in American studies, or a Black Studies in urban studies.

Beneath that is something I call special majors, where you are even more submerged within a traditional department, which has decided to allow you to concentrate some of your efforts on blackness.

And then, the final one is what I call random offerings, where no attempt at all has been made to coordinate courses into something called a Black Studies program; and where, in fact, people simply take random courses and decide for themselves whether or not these constitute Black Studies.

There are basic flaws in most of these models. The ones having the most degree of autonomy are obviously the black university and schools. That is, the concept of Black Studies

within a larger institution probably has the greatest chance, of any model I know, of doing something. I throw stones (and this may not be justified) upon departments of black studies because I don't believe that we really want to get caught up in what I consider to be a decaying administrative structure. I think that the whole idea of disciplinary departments is, in fact, archaic. It is at the root of the problem of undergraduate education, and I don't think we want blackness to be tied up in that rotten old box because the old box has got to collapse if American education is to succeed.

The other thing is that I don't believe we have at this point the conceptual framework to be able to define Black Studies in hard enough terms to have a department. What should a department of Black Studies consist of? Within the universities, the idea of the department has a presumption behind it, the presumption being that the department does all there is to be done for the institution within that particular circumscribed subject area. So the historians claim to do history and the economists may have economic history, but they don't try to do history; and the psychologists do something else and the sociologists, something else.

What may happen when you have a Black Studies department is that the other departments may decide there is nothing they can do; the niggers are doing it all. While they haven't given you any money to do it, the fact is that you are presumed

to be able to do it. Imagine, for example, what it would take to have a department of Black Studies which deals with the Black experience, and the experiences of people of African ancestry in Africa, and the Caribbean and all over the world. Imagine the range of discipline you would have to have before you could have reasonably encompassed those various areas. My mind boggles at the thought. What I am saying is that Black Studies cuts across every formal disciplinary line that there is, and either we accept that and figure out what to do, or we get trapped in a box we shouldn't want to get trapped in. That is what I meant by the possibly dire consequences of initially uninformed efforts ending up negating our goals.

I have doubts that the program will work. It is an attempt to say in fact that the department is an irrelevant organizational scheme and that what we will do is try to go above or outside the level of the department, and make what is good into something we think is better.

Actually, the last four models I consider to be bad. The model called ethnic studies is, in most instances, expedient accommodationism. They have this problem of minority students which they can't deal with, so they throw them all together. That's a trap. I am firmly convinced that lots of people recognize that what you really are doing in ethnic studies is forcing all the competing minority groups into one little box where they will have to fight it out with each other about the allocation

of resources. So they give you, say, a program of ethnic studies that has Chicano Studies and Black Studies. They give you enough money to run one and a half and one and three-fourths of a program. And they say, "Look here, here is the money; now you all decide among yourselves how you will distribute it." If you have had any experiences with the awakening consciousness of Chicanos and Blacks, you know that they don't ride very well with each other. Imagine trying to convince Chicanos that "... well, this year there isn't anybody for Chicano leadership, but we hope next year we will find somebody."

What the departments mean is that everything is divided right down the middle. I mean everything: secretaries, desks, doors, carpets, steps, telephones, the whole works. You have to, because the symbols are much more important to many black students at this point than are the realities, and they are not capable at the moment--and I can understand that--of deferring gratification. They do not want to wait until next year. They want it now. And the white administrators are aware of that. I think ethnic studies is a trap. I think it is designed to destroy the concept of Black Studies, Chicano Studies and every other kind of minority studies being talked about.

I hope it is obvious from my description that any time anybody subsumes Black Studies into something else and says he will let you have a Black emphasis within American Studies, it is illegitimate. The same thing goes for special majors. It is

obvious when the department of history says: "Well, o.k., we will let you concentrate in Negro history." That is bull.

Now, I want to get into the matter of content. A lot of Black Studies programs are based on that ridiculous phenomenon called "soul courses". The soul course is an abomination, and it is going to have to be destroyed. A soul course is a course in which a few uninformed instructors--either black or white or colored or whatever--come together and offer courses that deal with blackness. There was one school, as a matter of fact it was the University of Southern Florida, where a man proceeded to play records in a class and asked black students who were sitting on one side of the room and white students who were sitting on the other side of the room if they could tell from listening to the record, who was playing, whether it was a black man or a white man. Not which black man or white man or techniques, but whether he was black or white. Black students may be naive: they may not know how to organize courses, but they damn well know bad ones when they get into them. What these kids did was leave the course. Well that was last year. Now they have a program and the next jive course they get, they said they weren't going to just get up and leave; they were going to stop it. That is what I said before about a classical example of counter-productivity. The old idea of penny-wise and pound-foolish.

One of the things that I want to criticize about content in terms of courses is the whole idea of great books courses. There are a lot of people teaching black history and black sociology courses in terms of the "finest" black books -- the ones most versed in the field. There are certain problems with this. It is bad, first of all, because it is wrong. There are just volumes and volumes of stuff that you can read that is much more interesting than reading things like the great books: and it is wrong because I think it cheats the student out of a sense of excitement and involvement in education. What happens if the kid says after his freshman year, there is no need for me to go to college. There may not be. If in his junior year, he is getting the same books that he read in his freshman year. After a while you get tired of that junk. What I am suggesting is that the great books course won't do. The people are going to have to know enough about black history, black music and black art to be able to point to the large number of other kinds of sources that exist: articles, magazines, etc. that tell you a great deal more than reading a book (which usually sums up an argument which has been going on for fifty years among white people). It is very difficult to understand what is being argued about until you understand the 50 years before.

We need to confess the mistakes that have been made and determine to correct those mistakes. The only way we can correct them is to in fact lift ourselves from the present for a moment,

look at what the future must be and how we can make that big jump between that which is and that which must be. And I think that one of the things that all of us are aware of is the fact that there is a great deal of tension within Black Studies between potential and reality. I believe that Black Studies is in fact the cutting edge of a revolution in American education. It contains within it all the kinds of questions and the implicit assumptions and value judgements which have made American education so rotten. If we deal with and understand these questions and imperatives, we will in fact have solved the problem of how to educate people. One of the things that Black Studies challenged was the fact of a traditional definition and relationship of the educational process and the attitudes of the people involved in it. Most intellectuals will tell you that there is no relationship whatsoever between what they teach a fellow and what he does with it. If that is true, we have lost. John Calhoun and somebody else went to Yale. One used his knowledge to advocate slavery and the other guy, to oppose it. We just can't have that. I mean there just aren't enough of us around to afford the luxury of that kind of stuff. We have got to, in fact, destroy that concept. To do that, we are going to have to do something that, in the end, is what I would consider to be Black Studies.

I argue that Black Studies cannot be understood outside the context of a black revolution. That Black Studies is the educa-

tional arm of a Black revolution. When we are talking about education and a revolution, we are not talking simply about education and a revolution, we are not simply talking about the time between when you are five to when you are twenty-five or twenty-six and getting out of graduate school. We are talking about a life-long involvement in learning, from the time you are born to the time you die. Black Studies should involve you from the cradle to the grave. If it doesn't we lose. We have to create a totality of learning experiences for Black people which will make blackness automatic and avoid for the next generation of black children the kind of agonizing appraisals, anxieties and doubts that upset black people today.

We need to start at the level of the home. Black children have got to be immersed from the day they are born in a situation where there is a comfortable and free atmosphere of positive blackness. And from that kind of context, then approach educational institutions.

Now I am going to try to develop a conceptual model in two minutes to explain my conception of the thrust of Black Studies. There are several variables. The variables are simply institutional and non-institutional efforts, formal and informal education, ideological and intellectual perspectives.

I don't think you can separate Black Studies from black self-determination. Any effort in Black Studies must be directed towards black self-determination. I am talking about cre-

ating a series of strategies which comprehends the complexity of the relationship black people have to the society and which will enable us to deal in realistic ways with the American institutions. There are some things that cannot be done in white institutions. White universities cannot, for example, become black universities; and attempts to make them into black universities will always fail. There are some marginal gains which can be made in white institutions. But there are other things black people need to do completely outside them. Universities and Black Studies programs in universities are not the Revolution. They are not even Black Studies. They are simply a part of it, a very small part of what is going on. That needs to be understood.

What I come down to is my attempt to provide some categories of efforts. Admittedly, they are very crude and rough and we will argue about them I'm sure. As I indicated, the variables within my concept of a total educational process that involves all the learning experiences which any human being is exposed to from birth to death are institutional and non-institutional kinds of experiences, formal and informal education, ideological kinds of experiences, intellectual kinds of experiences. These divisions have not been made in any dogmatic way, and there may be better ways to categorize the data. I am simply suggesting an analytical process from which to view individual efforts by individual black people within the total educational thrust of Black

Studies.

I believe there is a need to create a black cultural ethos in Black Studies. In non-institutional, informal education the first imperative is cultural, the second the creation of the ethos. The second one is information, the need to develop black communications media. People need to be informed within the black community. Thus, we need to create an alternative set of communications institutions to those which exist now. Black people need to be able to control information, to be able to know that there is a source of information that is readily available to all, one where we can get the black perspective on what this is. Then from our perspective we can begin to look at theirs and understand what theirs is about. So there is the information variable.

And there is what I call intentional indoctrination. I believe that Black Studies is in fact a struggle. And that all Black Studies programs should create for black students a consciousness of struggle. Black Studies is becoming as black as people are becoming. The revolution is becoming. It is not here.

Black Studies must be flexible in the sense that the flexibility must be derived from a changing situation. As a revolutionary imperative begins to succeed, the reality which it confronts is constantly changing. As you do things that in fact move you closer to the success of your revolutionary goals

the reality that you confront changes. So in fact if Black Studies does not become an attempt to deal with the body of reality, it will also fail. It must be capable of dealing, of changing, of dealing with changes as long as necessary and then going on to the next stage. Black Studies and struggle.

So what I mean is the intentional indoctrination of struggle. Individual black people should be given a way of orienting their day to day life to the total struggle of black people. That is what I call indoctrination, that doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs all believe and know that their actions are aimed at the goal of freedom.

The second thing is the institutional arm, formal and intellectual. There are three parts to it. First, there are black initiated and black controlled institutions like the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center, like the Malcolm X University where black people initiate the thing and attempt to create a situation where they in fact can control what is going on and where they do quite specific kinds of things. Research centers, think tanks -- all of those kinds of things as one aspect of that. Another is institutions where there is a possibility of black control. Along that line are the black colleges of the South, where in fact if you play your cards right you can seize control and make them into what you want. There are lots of junior colleges, like Crane College in Chicago, where black people in fact just ripped off the college and called

it Malcolm X College. There are those kinds of things and there are parochial schools which exist in black communities and which can be ripped off and made into something relevant.

Then there is the final category, and, I think, the least important one: efforts within white institutions. They are only marginal; and we should get out of situations we cannot control. Within public schools, colleges and universities, we have to find out what the marginal gains are, and how to create a situation where black people can survive if they are still involved with those institutions. That, I think, is the mission of Black Studies.

What I had hoped to do was explain my perceptions of the role of Black Studies program Directors. I believe in the good intentions of many of the people who are running Black Studies programs. In fact, the only reason I can continue to talk about it is that there are lots of people with sound hearts and good minds and good intentions who are in it. Yes, there have been paper programs: but lots of people knew that before they got started, and they got into it because they wanted to close the gap between potential and reality. That is what I hope for the future. That, committed and concerned black people who are running Black Studies programs will in fact learn how to do it. My closing observation is pretty simple. I believe the mistakes and the conceptual frameworks of today, are the stepping stones for the realization of tomorrow's dreams.