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NOTES ON THE STRUGGLE FOR BLACK HIGHER EDUCATION

Black Urban and Ethnic Studies Programs

And the Needs of the Black Community

A Working/Position Paper

Institute of the Black World
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Prefatory Statement: On Assumptions

The Steering Committee of the National Association of Black Urban and Ethnic Directors asked the Institute of the Black World to prepare a position/working paper in preparation for its consultation in Claremont, June 20-23. The paper was to be addressed to two specific questions:

1. What should be the goals of these Black, Ethnic and Urban Studies Programs in the light of the needs of the black community?
2. Specifically, what are the standards which shall be proposed for such programs and how shall these standards be maintained?

Basic Assumptions

Our work on these questions is based on a number of assumptions which will inform the documents. Among the most important are these:

1. We have assumed that the distinctions among Black, Urban and Ethnic Studies programs are not of basic importance for our purposes. The key issue at stake is that these are all segments of a colonizing white higher education (in both black and white schools) which black students, faculty and directors may be able to turn to the purposes of the black community. This does not mean that we do not understand the

local politics which brought these different manifestations into being, or the variations which may be present in the specific roles they can play. What it does mean, however, is that when we think of national goals, we see all such programs in a single basic identity: contested territory over which black people seek hegemony, control and direction for the good of the struggle of the black community.

2. We assume that it is not profitable to discuss such programs without attempting to place them in some historical, institutional and ideological context. For the identity, purpose and direction of the programs cannot be fully addressed without at least minimal reference to those contexts.
3. Therefore we also assume that it is important to propose some ways in which at least a minimal assessment may be made of the varying potential these institutions possess for being transformed--through serious political/educational struggle--into centers of liberating black education.
4. We assume that in such an assessment some special focus ought to be placed on those institutions where black people are already gathered in large concentrations--the black colleges and universities.
5. We assume that any discussion of goals (and the related standards) of these programs "in the light of the needs of the black community" must be tentative in nature,

and that such a discussion must insist on the development of serious attempts to determine as precisely as possible these needs on local, regional and national levels. Only after that work has begun can there be the kind of necessary correspondence developed between needs and goals.

CONTENTS OF THE PAPER

With the above assumptions as guides, we have prepared a working/position paper with these basic segments:

- I. A Brief Introduction To The Historical Context
- II. A Discussion of the White School As a Context For The Struggle Towards Black Higher Education
- III. A Discussion of the Black School As a Context For The Struggle Towards Black Higher Education
- IV. Some Tentative Approaches to Goals and Standards for Black, Urban and Ethnic Studies Programs in the Context on NABUED

I. The Historical Context: A Brief Introduction

It is likely that the single most important historical reality which must inform all thinking about the future of black direction for Black, Urban and Ethnic Studies programs is the profoundly political context out of which the vast majority of these programs sprang. By and large, they were created out of the mass political movements in the black community, movements which created new black consciousness, new black students, new black demands and some new white concessions. We can safely assume that most persons gathered for this consultation are in their current positions as a result of this black political movement and the resultant white concessions.

That historical struggle is not properly understood however unless it is placed in the perspective of the international movement of African peoples. Our activity in America has been part of a far larger action by the colonized peoples, and most significantly for us, the children of Africa. The struggle on campuses, therefore, must be related not only to the national movement towards black self-determination and liberation in America, but to the international context as well. Decolonization is the central issue, whether in Trinidad, Dar Es Salaam, Wayne State or Howard. We are engaged in an international historical movement which has not yet been clearly connected, but definitely one whose connections may clearly be seen.