

THE CURRICULUM: A Response to the Institute  
of Black World

## INTRODUCTION

Black Studies is in its second stage, in a Renaissance, a rebirth of energy, a focus on intellectual productivity, professional unity, and scholarly research as the basis for ideological and political progress of the Black Liberation Movement.<sup>1</sup> The continued development of Black Studies is currently dependent on the extent to which each significant aspect of Black Studies is currently dependent on the extent to which each significant aspect of Black Studies is consciously developed as a force of unity. This requires an analysis of the historical development of each aspect of Black Studies, clarity with regard to the empirical measurement of the current state of affairs, and clarity of how alternative ideological positions explain each phenomena.

One of the key aspects of Black Studies is curriculum. Curriculum is the intellectual content and method that serves as a basic tool, the central activity of the Black Studies enterprise. The major breakthrough was a national report adopted by the National Council for Black Studies in 1981.<sup>2</sup> Since then, over the last three years, four major national curriculum projects have been developed at these institutions:

1. Institute of the Black World,
2. Chicago Center for Afro-American Studies,
3. Five College Black Studies Program, and
4. The University of Illinois.

Each of these projects received public funding.<sup>3</sup> We have

been intimately involved in the NCBS report, in running two of these projects, and in actively participating in one other. Each project is distinct. [The Five Colleges project brings together activists from two movements of innovation, Black Studies and Women Studies, and it attempts to identify areas for cooperative curriculum development in the Amherst Five College area. The Chicago enter's project focused in on Introduction to Afro-American Studies<sup>4</sup> as a case study, and is carrying out an intensive revision of this introductory text based upon the systematic input of a national panel of scholars. The University of Illinois project is attempting to develop text material for courses making up a core curriculum. And, fourthly, the Institute of the Black World project is attempting to survey and evaluate the current state of curriculum development.] This paper is a contribution to the project being carried out by the Institute of the Black World, and a statement of the ongoing work in Black Studies carried out by the editorial collective of Peoples College.<sup>5</sup>

Specifically, this paper will consist of three related parts:

1. Historical Context: The first section will sum up a position on the nature of the current Renaissance in Black Studies by examining its historical development as well as the current state of affairs.
2. Evaluation of Current Trends in Curriculum Development: In this section of the paper we will attempt to take materials generated by the Institute of the Black World project as a sample of material reflecting the national practice of Black Studies practitioners, and evaluate these materials for patterns of consensus, and to establish modes and models for Black Studies curriculum development. We will look at the course

syllabi, the comments by the IBW reviewers and some discussion of an introductory text for Black Studies.

3. Paradigm: In the last section of the paper we will sum up our own theoretical ideas regarding the ideological/intellectual parameters of unity currently emerging in Black Studies.

### Historical Context

The last 15 years (1967-1982) has been a period of great social change. However, it is important to recognize that this social change has taken two roads, change that reflects innovation (the creation of new things), and destruction (the liquidation of things). Much of Black people's struggle, in virtually every sector of society, is focused on protecting social innovations from the 60s and very early 70s, and providing resistance to the destructive change characteristic of the current period. It is this dialectical tension between innovative construction and destruction that provides the framework for understanding the development and current state of resistance in Black Studies.

Table 1 lists the important historical modes, experiences, of the Black Studies Movement. Rooted in the mid 60s, the origin of Black Studies must be seen as an academic extension of the Black Liberation Movement. While a definitive history of Black Studies has yet to be written,<sup>6</sup> in this context it will suffice to say that as a result of the Civil Rights Movement, and the reaction of the higher education establishment after assassination of Martin Luther King, there was a significant increase in Black student enrollment in the last 1960s. However, the University was