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BLACK STUDIES CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN THE 1980s: ITS PATTERNS AND HISTORY

by Gerald A. McWorter
and Ronald Bailey

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.¹ Though the last 15 years (1967–1982) have been a period of great social change, 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.

And as the Black Studies Movement moved into its first substantial stage, it bore the birthmarks of its turbulent origins. What was universally true, is that there were few Black faculty, and even fewer Black faculty prepared to teach what knowledge did exist then about the Black experience. The white campus was by and large divorced or separated from Black intellectual traditions. Black students were involved in the current popular tendencies (rhetorical style, fashion, etc.) of the Black Liberation Movement with little grasp of the theoretical basis for differences (and similarities) between the tendencies. Beyond these things, of course, there was a great deal of diversity.

BLACK STUDIES UNITY COUNTERS ECONOMIC DESPAIR

Within the current economic crisis there has been a resurgence of racism, implicating both the institutional

and societal level.² Further, there is a technical and vocational attack being made against liberal arts education in which the value of the "soft" areas is being questioned by the hard mathematically-oriented sciences. And, of course, this not only impacts upon policymakers in the University, there is a vocational-oriented pragmatism now dominating student values, so that in some places the utility of Black Studies has been seriously called into question. In other words, most students want to know, "Can the course you want me to take in Black Studies *help me get a job?*"

But as the crisis of unemployment deepens, it has become fairly obvious that the United States, indeed, all western capitalist countries, are in a deep depression in which jobs are simply hard to come by. This is having an interesting impact upon the vocational-orientation of students which might very well lead to a new interest in non-vocationally-related areas, especially the liberal arts, because people are forced to *figure out the meaning of life outside of a job context.*

The current stage of Black Studies is focused on the consolidation of Black Studies as a concrete and definite set of activities. No longer is Black Studies simply a movement of ad hoc ambiguously interrelated individuals, programs, and practices, but now must be organized as a coherent and stable community of people, organizations, and activities.

The organization of Black Studies practitioners has followed the general historical development of Black Studies as a whole. The way the Black Studies movement started and developed initially, through social disruption and a period of experimentation, is nowhere better represented than in the history of the *African Heritage Studies*

*Association.*³ This organization played the leading role in the early stages of the Black Studies movement, and more than any other organization reflects the early experiences.

AHSA was created by Blacks rejecting the white racist and imperialist collaboration of the African Studies Association, because it was felt that the ASA represented U.S. imperialism's interest in subordinating Africa, while Black intellectuals, scholars, and activists were interested in using their scholarly abilities to further the cause of African liberation. This conflict resulted in Blacks disrupting a meeting of the ASA in Canada and forming an independent Black organization, the African Heritage Studies Association. During the early days this organization captured the imagination and the energy of the Black Studies movement, and held very large and successful national conferences.

It was also this organization that reflected the dominant political trends and paralleled the development of organizations in the Black Liberation Movement, notably the African Liberation Support Committee. Key intellectual activists participated in both organizations and both organizations shared very important plenary at an AHSA conference in 1974 in which the dialogue between intellectuals and activists was intensified.⁴

During the current phase of the Black Studies movement, a major organization that has emerged is the *National Council for Black Studies.*⁵ This organization emerged in response to the crisis on the campus that threatened the existence of existing Black Studies programs in the middle 1970s. It is in the context of an organization like NCBS that the experimentation in Black Studies can be best examined for alternative models, as the Black Studies movement takes on a more permanent and long lasting

character. It is important that there be a national organization in Black Studies, including a network of affiliates on regional and state levels. This development would enable Black Studies practitioners to interact with colleagues, share experiences, and develop an organizational capacity to serve as advocates to support and protect and develop Black Studies.

At present, some level of institutional affiliation covers approximately 30 percent of the primary Black Studies practitioners. It is also important to note that Black Studies practitioners cover the entire spectrum of ideological and political positions in the Black Liberation movement. To some extent this represents the maturation of a generation, a group of people who have emerged out of the 60s and 70s with a long term commitment to struggle for unity and clarity of differences through collective scholarly research and dialogue rather than through emotional and episodic polemics.

Another critical way in which Black Studies is developing unity has to do with the professional journal literature that constitutes its primary intellectual productivity.⁶ There are essentially 26 basic journals that make up the core of Black Studies journal literature. These journals are run by Black Studies activists and reflect scholarly trends. It is also an index to a much broader literature of journals and books that constitutes a much larger body of related materials, mainly material that focuses in some way on the Black experience though not necessarily in a Black Studies context. All of this journal literature reflects the professional marketplace of ideas in which Black Studies practitioners collectively engage in the search for truth and ideas that can be applied to the situation facing Black people such that they can struggle to

make their lives better. It is the standard, methods, and values brought to the production of this literature and the evaluation of this literature that constitutes the intellectual character and the scholarly qualities of Black Studies. It is important that every major trend in scholarly research is being evaluated in this context of Black Studies, but also the extent to which Black Studies is connected to mainstream scholarship in the world today.

A fourth area of institutional unity in Black Studies is the extent to which certain key institutional practices are being standardized. The two key activities currently being standardized have to do with the curriculum, the important codification of the journal literature into the classroom, and the national conference for professional organizations, the main activity by which NCBS facilitates the national dialogue of Black Studies practitioners.

National conferences of Black Studies organizations have long been important activities. Throughout the history of Black intellectuals, and certainly this has been true in the most recent decade, national conferences constitute high points, focal points, not only for the dialogue between Black Studies practitioners but as a reflection of broad intellectual shifts from one ideological or political position to another. It is significant that NCBS is having a national dialogue on a national conference handbook developed out of the most recent successful experience of the 6th Annual Conference held in Chicago. This handbook specifies methods for the development of a conference plan, a mobilization of the national constituency of Black Studies practitioners, and the organizational and programmatic logistics necessary for a successful national conference.

TABLE 1
NCBS CORE CURRICULUM FOR AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES

(Adopted at 4th Annual Conference by National Council
for Black Studies, March 26-29, 1980)

Level 1	INTRODUCTION TO AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES		
	Social/Behav- ioral Studies	Historical Studies	Cultural Studies
Level 2	A. Basic Litera- ture Review or Survey	A. African Pre- History through Reconstruction	A. Basic Literature Review or Survey (music, aesthetics, etc.)
Level 3	B. Current Re- search and Emerging Issues	B. Post-Recon- struction Current and Emerging Issues in Historical Interpretation and Evaluation	B. Current Research and Emerging Issues (contempo- rary cultural ex- pression and transformation, etc.)
Level 4	Senior Seminar Course Area Synthesis and Application of Insights or Previous Study		

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF
CORE CURRICULA**

The second aspect of standardization, and the one most relevant to the day to

day work in Black Studies, has to do with the standardization of a core curriculum. NCBS took the lead in 1980 with the adoption of the report of the Curriculum Standards Committee chaired

by Dr. Perry Hall of Wayne State University. This report makes the singular contribution of codifying the basic parameters of a core curriculum in such a way that the diversity of ideological and academic trends in Black Studies will be able to coexist and develop within the same standardized framework.

The general framework of the NCBS model is widespread, but the content of each course varies from campus to campus. The current state of course content in Black Studies reflects trends in the Black Liberation movement, as well as trends in academic circles more generally. The main thing is that there have been two sources for curriculum development, library literature that deals with the Black experience and practical experience from the society, theory and practice. The test of how adequate our framework is must be based on the criteria of comprehensiveness and universality, covering all topics and being useful for all people. For this, we have developed a list of alternative foci in Black Studies courses.

The purpose of Table 3 is to identify key areas that have been central to the development of Black Studies and represent necessary aspects of a curriculum, course by course. Its main point is to identify trends and clearly point to areas of strength and weakness in Black Studies so we're in a better position to improve things. But, what were the intellectual precursors of Black Studies?

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THEORETICAL LITERATURE

In his insightful article called "The Failure of Negro Intellectuals," the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier stated that Black scholars "have failed to study the problems of the Negro life in

America in a manner which would place the fate of the Negro in the broad framework of man's experience in the world."⁷

Similarly, Earl Thorpe in *The Black Historians*, one of the few critical summations of Black intellectual history, suggests that "the Black historian has not joined in the twentieth century search for historical laws which has been characteristic of the majority group."⁸ Harold Cruse echoed these sentiments when he stated that "the Black American as part of an ethnic group has no definite social theory relative to his status, presence, or impact on American society ..."⁹

The positing of an alternative theoretical understanding of the Black experience – its meanings and its implications – was the main underlying intellectual challenge of Black Studies as a new field of study. There are three sources of *theory* which were central to Black Studies in its early years which remain critically relevant in the 1980s, and should be covered in any Black Studies course: (1) mainstream scholarship, (2) radical critiques, and (3) Black intellectual history.

CRITIQUE OF MAINSTREAM WORK

In an unpublished essay, St. Clair Drake summed up the relationship of the rise of Black Studies to mainstream scholarship:¹⁰

The very use of the term Black Studies is by implication an indictment of American and Western European scholarship. It makes the bold assertion that what we have heretofore called 'objective' intellectual activities were actually white studies in perspective and content; and that corrective bias, a shift in emphasis, is needed, even if something called 'truth' is set as

a goal. To use a technical sociological term, the present body of knowledge has an ideological element in it, and a counter-ideology is needed. Black Studies supply that counter-ideology.

Thus, a critical approach to mainstream work on Black people was at the core of Black Studies.

Johnnetta Cole, Hunter College, New York, in her review of anthropology syllabi, makes this point in her opening paragraph, as does IBW in its charge to its reviewers.¹¹

When the champions of Black Studies confronted mainstream scholarship in the 1960s, no discipline escaped criticism. In summary form, the fundamental charge of Black Studies was that the mainstream disciplines of western bourgeoisie science, arts and humanities, were pregnant with racism, as reflected in who the overwhelming majority of the disciplinaries are, where they come from, and to whom they are accountable. Many scholars and activists of Black Studies also charged that western scholarship suffered from a gender and class bias – a point that was tangential to the main charge of racism for some, but a point of equal centrality for others . . . Now, in the 1980s as I work in university administration, cooperating with faculty, staff and students in the revision of our undergraduate curriculum and the strengthening of that part which constitutes general education, I am no less convinced than I was in the 1960s that Black Studies can be an essential corrective scholarship for certain biases in mainstream academics . . . As we turn now to a consideration of the components which I suggest should be present in a Black Studies course in anthropology, it should be noted that we are in fact addressing the criticism which Black Studies scholarship has levelled against mainstream anthropology.

Lucius Outlaw (Haverford College) makes a similar claim in his review of Philosophy syllabi:¹²

Among all of the modes of intellectual praxis which have been institutionalized in Western academies, philosophy remains one of the most elite and ethnocentric, the Black Studies movement and the independence of African countries notwithstanding . . . The significance of this situation is understood when we take note of a basic feature and commitment of philosophical praxis: the articulation of a person's or peoples' understanding of themselves, or others, of the world and history, and of their place in them both, in the most fundamental sense. Western philosophy, along with religion and theology, continues to be the principal keeper of the self-image in its most reflective, articulate form. More than that, in its dominant tendencies and driving orientations, it seeks to define and stand guard over what it means to be 'a human being' as well. The fact that the histories of peoples of Africa continue to challenge the Western self-image, and especially, to challenge the image of ourselves the European hegemonists would enforce on us, increases the urgency of sharing in the deconstruction of philosophy as the embodiment of a deficient European American self-image as *the* model for human self-knowledge. At the same time, we must contribute to the construction of knowledge of and ideals for ourselves and the world's peoples that are more in keeping with the struggle to achieve a democratically just and liberated world. In doing so, we would, as scholars and intellectuals, have the appropriate grounding for our work.

In his essay reviewing syllabi called "The Modern Miseducation of the Negro," Manning Marable (Colgate University) makes a similar point:¹³

The demand for Black Studies was also a call toward the systematic reconstruction of American learning. Its most advanced advocates understood that the study of the African Diaspora and its people could not simply be 'added'

into the standard curricula, merged within the mainstream of white thought. Rather, the social science, literary and creative contributions of Blacks to the whole of human knowledge charted new and different directions of critical inquiry. First, Black Studies demanded a pedagogical approach toward learning that de-emphasized the 'banking' concept of teaching and advanced mixed methodological techniques, such as discussion, informal lecturing, debate and community studies. Black Studies theoreticians declared that interdisciplinary approaches toward learning were superior to narrow, selective teaching methods which concentrated on one single subject (e.g., history) at the exclusion of other related disciplines (sociology, political theory, political economy). Students were urged to devote some of their research activities towards the transformation and liberation of their own communities. Thus, there was a basic relationship between theory and practice in the learning process that was missing from white education. Students were urged to become active participants in their own education. For these theoretical and pedagogical reasons, therefore, Black Studies represented a basic and provocative challenge to the *raison d'être* of white universities.

Tom Shick (Wisconsin), writing from the perspective of an historian states:¹⁴ "The Black Studies movement raised fundamental issues related to the methodology and assumptions of scholarship that purported to address the experience of African people whether on the continent or in the diaspora."

Finally, Lloyd Hogan (Amherst College) observed a similar dynamic operative in the field of political economy:¹⁵

White scholars who dominate the social sciences have only been peripherally interested in problems of Black people. To them there are many and much more important problems for solution. At the same time we have the

anomalous situation in which most Black scholars received their graduate tutelage from the white institutions of higher learning. Black social scientists have been subjected to a perception of their disciplines which is devoid of a significant Black component. Such a perception expunges from the collective intellectual memory the major pathology of the American political economy as if it never existed. And the consequence has been a failure of ordinary social science disciplines to clarify the issues which embody the essential description and explanation of how the system of capitalist political economy works itself out in the real world. A complex system of myths, lies, distortions, and trivia has been built up to rationalize the ways in which the system operates. And social scientists – Black and white – learn how to competently spew out these vicious concoctions in the form of weighty of scientific contributions to the disciplines.

The great strength of the mainstream social science practiced in the U.S. today is the collection of empirical data and in the operationalization and measurement of concepts and relationships. It is out of this tradition that Black Studies should gain insights and models – modifying them before taking them on as such – for empirical data analysis (collection and measurement).¹⁶

It should be clear, therefore, that a Black Studies course should make an effort to convey what the mainstream scholarship has to say by critically examining the strengths and weaknesses of its substance and methodology. It is only in this way that the particular contribution that Black Studies scholarship might make can be clarified.

RADICAL THOUGHT AND THE RISE OF BLACK STUDIES

The surge for Black Studies was accompanied by a general surge of

interest in the theory and practice of radical politics: the mass struggles for civil rights and against the Vietnam War in the U.S.; and in the international arena, China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the student-worker uprising in France, Germany, and other European countries. A "new left" (as contrasted with the pro-Soviet "old left") emerged:¹⁷

Black Studies has reflected the same themes, perhaps in an intensified manner, over the last fifteen years. Coming as it did as a response to perceived racism in U.S. society and in the wake of King's assassination, Black Studies was aimed at institutionalizing an academic experience with "education for liberation" as a central goal. This explicit statement of its political posture was a direct challenge to the "apolitical" claims of institutions of higher education. Students questioned war-related research and the involvement of college professors with the C.I.A., and as consultants for multi-national corporations with questionable activities abroad and at home. To them, it was proof that the university was not "neutral," but only a politically oriented institution with the image of being "value free."¹⁸

The plight of the Black community during this period was widely popularized by the Watts rebellions and other outbursts, and then by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Commission named after the former Illinois governor who was later convicted of a felony), whose pronouncements came on March 1, 1968, just one month prior to the assassination of King:¹⁹

This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal. . . . Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally un-

known to most white Americans. What white Americans have never fully understood—but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.

It was precisely within this context that a new generation of Black scholars emerged and sought to shape Black Studies so that it took up "the liberation tasks," to quote Dr. Drake, that were so much on both the national and Black community agenda of that period.

Almost simultaneously, there emerged in higher education *radical movements* in almost all social disciplines. The Union of Radical Sociologists, the Union of Radical Political Economists, the Union of Marxist Social Scientists are representative of the trend. New radical journals also appeared: *The Insurgent Sociologist*, *Radical America*, *The Review of Radical America*, *The Review of Radical Political Economy*, *Radical Criminology*, *Antipode* (in geography), and *Radical Anthropology*.²⁰

Thus, the Black Studies movement has historically been close allies with a developing radical tradition in U.S. scholarship. By radical here, we mean a critique of U.S. society which focuses on the unequal distribution of economic, political, and social power, and the resulting patterns of exploitation and oppression.

In most instances, radicals took up the study of Marxism, and introduced Marxist categories to the study of U.S. society: class and class struggle, capitalism and imperialism, revolution (versus reform) and socialism as an avenue of fundamental social change as a step in solving such problems as racism, poverty, exploitation and male supremacy. Radicals encouraged an

activist orientation and recognized, in the words of Alkalimat, that "science is inevitably a hand servant to ideology, a tool to shape, if not create, reality."²¹

This brief description is illustrated in the summations of how a radical tradition emerged in established disciplines. The editors of *Radical Sociology* make the following points:²²

Political and racial assassination, the adoption of genocide to implement foreign policy, the federal government's abandonment of the civil rights movement, military intervention in Latin America and Asia, a program of domestic pacification via the War on Poverty, the destruction of communities for commercial purposes in the name of urban renewal—these were the events which helped to destroy the illusion . . . that the Kennedy Administration/New Frontier would address . . . the more fundamental question of the allocation of power and resources in American society . . . Long neglected terms—racism, monopoly, capitalism, and imperialism—began to re-enter the language of political debate. Many argued that these terms were ill-suited to dispassionate analysis and measured discussion. . . . For those who sought to understand what America had become and where it was headed, 'rhetorical' terms such as exploitation and oppression, when elaborated and concretized, served well as basic organizing concepts, and provided new perspectives for the emerging radical analysis and practice.

Perhaps the best statement of the radical critique among the reviewers is found in Lloyd Hogan's "The Political Economy of Black Americans." He states:²³

I shall argue in what follows that Black social scientists must break away from the existing traditions in their fields. The problem at hand which needs sound scientific treatment is the problem of Black people in the U.S. Such a treatment must be guided by a

comprehension of the historical forces which generated the conditions under which Black people now find themselves. . . . Of signal importance one must study the essential role of the state and all the other social institutions as controlling mechanisms for buttressing the systems under which Black labor has been exploited in the past. But these studies cannot be completed without attention being focused on the final outcome of these people and the new social order which they must inevitably create as they struggle for liberation from economic exploitation. This will be the final chapter of an all encompassing black political economy.

A similar thrust is shared by Cole in her review of *Anthropology syllabi*:²⁴

Black Studies courses in Anthropology should describe the History of Anthropology, with special attention to its association with the rise of imperialism and colonialism. In an article published in 1968, Kathleen Gough described anthropology as the 'Child of Imperialism,' a point which has been developed and expanded in the works of such Black anthropologists as Diane Lewis, William Willis, and Anselme Remy.

Although the discipline of anthropology was born in the 18th century, it came of age in the 19th century, precisely during the period of imperialist penetration of the cultures of people of color in Africa, Asia and the Americas. This was no mere coincidence, for anthropology served the needs of certain European and U.S. powers to know more about the people they subjugated . . . the better to rule them. Those who teach anthropology from a Black Studies perspective have the responsibility to present students with such information, thereby documenting, for example, how British social anthropology in Africa was tied to Britain's colonial interests; how the concentration of U.S. anthropologists among native American peoples of the U.S. directly and indirectly assisted U.S. government forces; and the extent to which sometimes knowingly, and often un-

knowingly, anthropologists have supplied information on the traditional cultures of Third World societies which has been used as the basis of policies which are not in the interest of these peoples.

Black Studies often had the result of encouraging mainstream scholarship to critique itself. Similarly, there is a more pronounced impact that Black Studies and the Black experience have had on developing radical critiques. For example, many young white scholars, active in the Civil Rights and later the anti-war movements, went on to develop significant radical interpretations of U.S. history that have been acknowledged by the mainstream.²⁵

American historians interested in tracing the rise of liberty, democracy, and the common man have been challenged in the past two decades by other historians, interested in tracing the history of oppression, exploitation and racism. The challenge has been salutary, because it has made us examine more directly than historians have hitherto been willing to do, the role of slavery in our early history. Colonial historians, in particular, when writing about the origin and development of American institutions have found it possible until recently to deal with slavery as an exception to everything they had to say. I am speaking about myself but also about most of my generation. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who have insisted that slavery was something more than an exception, that one fifth of the American population at the time of the Revolution is too many people to be treated as an exception.

In a 1967 speech before the American Psychological Association, Martin Luther King provides a glimpse of how the civil rights movement posed questions about the Black condition to social scientists. The pursuit of answers to these questions led many scholars toward radical alternatives outside the

bounds of conventional solutions, many never to return. After summing up the importance of urban riots, the Vietnam War, high unemployment and civil disobedience, King cites "political action" as one key area that could benefit from social science inquiry:²⁶

In the past two decades, Negroes have expended more effort in quest of the franchise than they have in all other campaigns combined. Demonstrations, sit-ins and marches, though more spectacular, are dwarfed by the enormous number of manhours expended to register millions, particularly in the South . . . A recent major work by social scientists Matthews and Prothro (*Negroes and the New Southern Politics*) concludes that 'the concrete benefits to be derived from the franchise—under conditions that prevail in the South—have often been exaggerated' . . . that voting is not the key that will unlock the door to racial equality because 'the concrete measurable payoffs from Negro voting in the South will not be revolutionary.'

James Q. Wilson supports this view, arguing, 'Because of the structure of American politics as well as the nature of the Negro community, Negro politics will accomplish only limited objectives.'

If their conclusion can be supported, then the major effort Negroes have invested in the past twenty years has been in the wrong direction and the major effort of their hope is a pillar of sand.

Ralph Bunche once observed: "The study of the political status of the Negro is, in itself, a partial record of the shortcomings of American democracy. I think that we should at least raise some questions concerning the seeming inability of American democracy to 'democ' and the essential reasons for this failure."²⁷ Almost a response to Dr. King's concern, it was in studying the persistence of exploitation and racist oppression which characterized the Black experience that led many social

scientists to develop this radical critique, and makes this body of theoretical work a key component to cover in Black Studies courses.

The radical tradition of social science in its recent and older manifestations has its strength in exposing the political essence of current and prevailing trends. It points one's analysis toward class forces, anchors all analysis in the very structure of the capitalist system of imperialism. It serves to politically re-orient scholarship and provide a working class basis for a partisan social science. Black Studies approaches these matters on a moral and expressive basis; the radical tradition can help it develop a set of concepts that is in synchronization with universal tools of a progressive social science *and* focused on the particularity of the Black experience.

BLACK INTELLECTUAL HISTORY HAS BEEN RICH

The issue of Black intellectual history and the intellectual heritage of Black Studies is key. Prior to the 1960s, only a handful of Black scholars taught at predominantly white institutions of higher education.²⁸ Because Black Studies was mainly a movement on these campuses, often lacking was a thorough appreciation of the outstanding work that had been done by Black scholars, who were most often based at predominantly Black institutions. This lack of knowledge created a situation where a substantial number of younger scholars developed without a thorough grounding in these important works of these pioneering generations of Black scholars. We often ended up polemicizing against what we considered biased, racist treatments of the Black experience, but without the ability to stand on the shoulders of our intellectual and academic forerunners, seeing the terrain

that they had traveled, and being able to chart more carefully an agenda for further intellectual work.

This is unfortunate since it is precisely in the work of older Black scholars that we find the clearest expressions of the themes and issues which Black Studies was attempting to introduce.²⁹ For example, Black scholars have historically adopted the "scholar-activist" stance central to Black Studies. DuBois launched the Atlanta University studies "not only to make the truth known but to present it in such shape as will encourage reform."³⁰ Woodson endeavored to "turn his historical training to the best racial account."³¹

In reviewing the life and work of Allison Davis, St. Clair Drake suggests that Davis saw the role of the Black scholar on three levels:³²

- (1) make some contribution to the general theoretical work in his discipline;
- (2) decide upon some aspect of the social structure in which to become expert at the empirical level, and
- (3) select a problem that contributed to "racial advancement, as we used to call it. Today we call it Black Liberation."

Even John Hope Franklin echoed similar sentiments in a 1963 essay called "The Dilemma of the American Negro Scholar":³³

I now assert that the proper choice for the American Negro scholar is to use his knowledge and ingenuity, his resources and his talents, to combat the forces that isolate him and his people, and like the true patriot that he is, to contribute to the solution of the problems that all Americans face in common.

Our point here is that Black intellectual history gives us the best intellectual foundation for the Black Studies enterprise, but it has not been given proper

attention in Black Studies courses.

It is precisely this contradiction between the importance of the work and the contributions of Black scholars to the legacy of intellectual tradition of Afro-American Studies and to all of higher education, and the negative reception that this work received in higher education that goes to the very heart of why Black Studies emerged as turbulently as it did in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While this has changed somewhat, there is still a need for Black Studies as a field of study to "return to the classics," to develop a systematic summary and critique of the contours of Black intellectual history and the foundation of Black Studies.

It was this recognition that we were encouraging when we attempted to describe "the classical tradition" of Afro-American scholarship in developing the third edition of *Introduction to Afro-American Studies* (1975).³⁴

A work of Black social analysis is considered a classic when it: (A) definitively summarizes the existing knowledge of a major Black experience; (B) represents a model of methodology and technique that serves to direct future investigation; (C) draws from the analysis theoretical concepts and oppositions that contribute to our general theoretical grasp of the socio-economic and political history of the USA and Afro-American people; (D) stands the test of time by not being proven incorrect or inadequate and replaced by a superior work; and (E) guides one to take an active role in struggle to liberate Black people and fundamentally change the nature of American society.

Our point here is that there is a rich body of work done by Black scholars and this work represents an indispensable component of Black Studies courses. This recognition is shared by several of the reviewers of syllabi in the IBW project.

POLICY AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Black Studies was deeply concerned about helping to resolve social problems that existed for Black people and the entire society. There was a great sense of immediacy because as a new field of study, it sought to help change the world, not just to understand it. There was thus an explicit policy thrust to Black Studies in its initial stages. Several universities made an explicit recognition of their policy orientation and demand for immediacy and relevance that was a part of the thrust for Black Studies.³⁵

Few topics are of greater importance or more dramatic relevance than those that concern the forces that are driving our society to a recognition of the situation and the contributions of Black people in the United States, past and present. And few needs are more compelling than the need of providing for the future leaders of Black America the most comprehensive, relevant, and disciplined education possible . . . It is instructive that a program of Black Studies was developed by purposive and intelligent Black students, who laid it before us for our consideration. That very process can itself be exemplary, for students, faculty, and administration alike. . . . Black Studies have provided a highly appropriate example of how a curriculum can be made relevant to social needs. Northwestern University lies near and in a great city, which may one day be governed by Black leaders. The University is already committed to a study of the City and to an investigation of the total environment of urban man. . . . What the Black students have proposed represents an important development, which is fully consistent with the intellectual purpose of the institution.

Although the problems of Black people are receding priorities on the national agenda, we would argue that these problems are as urgent as they

ever were. There is a real increase, not a decrease, in the significance of racism in the recent period. Even the Justice Department has issued a special report highlighting increases in racist attacks.

A "new illiteracy" is threatening with the rapid computerization of many functions in today's society, and the increased emphasis on quantitative skills.³⁶

The recent report of the U.S. Army and the Educational Testing service regarding lower scores for Blacks on standardized tests is a recent expression of racism, perhaps more subtle, especially in light of the proven cultural/class bias of standardized tests. The Black community and social institutions continue to be torn apart by various "gentrification" or urban revival schemes. Finally, in the economic arena, there is a widening of the income gap between Blacks and Whites and within the Black community—as over twenty percent of Blacks and fifty percent of Black youth are "officially" reported as unemployed.

Thus, it is the continuing responsibility of every field within Black Studies to understand the contemporary situation of Black people and to explore the policy implications of the knowledge produced in the field of study. This is nowhere more relevant than right now when there is a major policy shift in the country that is having a big impact on Black people. We have to understand the relationships between the shifts in public policy as political changes, and also changes in the very structure and functions of the capitalist system.

BLACK LIBERATION MOVEMENT

The brochure from the 1982 Sixth Annual Conference of NCBS contained this statement:³⁷

The main contradiction in the work of intellectuals is between the scientific

character of research and the political context for scholarship. Black Studies must be concerned with truth (about society and nature) *and* power. Matters of truth must be left to science, but changing the world is a matter for the Black Liberation Movement. BLACK STUDIES deals with both.

It is this dual character that was reflected in the conference theme: Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility: Science and Politics in Black Studies.³⁸

The oppressive and exploitative conditions of Black peoples—racism, poverty, discrimination—have had an impact on Black intellectuals. Because of this, there is a consistent emphasis and effort to contribute to the understanding of the solution of these problems among Black scholars.

James Turner makes this point in his essay reviewing syllabi of Black Sociology courses, quoting a work which is useful in summing up the Black intellectual tradition in this field:³⁹

In examination of the intellectual attraction of sociology to Black scholars, James Blackwell and Morris Janowitz report in their book, *Black Sociologists*: 'From the earliest years of the discipline in the United States, Black sociologists were not only scholars, they engaged in social and political protest against the treatment of Blacks. The pattern of scholarly endeavors on the one hand, and civic presence in the larger society on the other, was set by W.E.B. DuBois and carried forward by Charles S. Johnson and E. Franklin Frazier. To be a Black sociologist also entailed civic activity.' They saw in sociology the intellectual tools for redefinition of race relations and in turn a positive element for social change. It is from this tradition that Black Studies intellectuals inherit the legacy of activist scholarship in the present period.

The reverse is also true, that intellectual activity in the context of the Black

liberation movement, by "scholars" and "non-scholars," has produced some of the most insightful and provocative analyses of the Black experience to date. For example, the current discussion of race and class as concepts basic to understanding the Black experience did not originate with the debate over Wilson's *Declining Significance of Race* as the *New York Times* would have us believe. The sharpest and most productive recent exchanges took place as polemics inside the African Liberation Support Committee, the leading organization in the Black liberation movement in the 1970s.¹⁰

Earl Thorpe in *Black Historians* argues that the role of the scholar-activist, often denigrated as an intrusion on scholarly activity and productivity, can have just the opposite effect:¹¹

It is questionable whether historians produce better works in the calm atmosphere of dispassionate observation, or when fired by a zealous cause or crusade It may be that before American Negro historiography can again produce men of the stature of DuBois and Woodson, it will have to get caught up in another crusade.

There is one last vantage point for us to argue that Black Studies courses, especially but not exclusive of those in the social sciences, should include a study of the Black liberation movement. And this is the fact that the *object* of the Black liberation movement—that which it aims to transform—is also the *object* of Black social analysis—that which it aims to explain. Turner also makes this point in his essay.¹²

Sociology in Black Studies must look critically at the system of contemporary American capitalism and its historical roots; and ask the salient questions about the nature of the systemic subjugation and exploitation of Black people. We need to understand the

structural roots of large-scale and relatively permanent unemployment in the Black community, and the consequences for the quality of human life and social network in urban ghetto areas. What are the causes of persistent disproportionate poverty of Black families, and relegation of Black workers to secondary categories in the industrial labor markets? Black social scientists in Black Studies are challenged to develop theoretical clarity about why the American social experience has at times meant that freedom, success and prosperity for some depends upon the enslavement/oppression, failure, and impoverishment of others. Social injustices are usually embedded in the institutionalized patterns of relations and the infrastructure of society: 'Social justice itself is a structural question.' What this means is that before sociologists can proffer a remedy to redress a given social ill there must be an explanation of the structural context in which these wrongs are generated. This will require more integrated study of the economic structures, political structures and cultural structures of society and the institutional alliances between various structures. Such an analysis will enable us to perceive, and therefore conceive, more clearly the racial, sexual, age, class and the ethnic divisions of society.

IN CONCLUSION

We have demonstrated here that Black Studies has, over the previous fifteen years, organized a substantial body of intellectual thought, has organized its trends, issues and insights into formal curricula, and, finally, has organized its practitioners (i.e., its instructors, theoreticians, writers) into institutional and professional association on a nationwide basis.

A great debt has been acknowledged to the intellectual forerunners of formal Black Studies in academe, and their legacy is valued and dignified by the current standard-bearers in this discipline.