Black Studies Core Curriculum

by the National Council for Black Studies, Inc. 1981



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With a Preface by Dr. Joseph J. Russell Executive Director, NCBS Indiana University

and

Foreword by Dr. Perry Hall Committee Chairperson, NCBS Wayne State University



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REPORT OF THE CURRICULUM STANDARDS COMMITTEE

TO THE

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR BLACK STUDIES

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PREFACE

by
Dr. Joseph J. Russell
Executive Director, NCBS

The question of what constitutes an academically sound Black Studies Curriculum has been answered in various ways by a variety of persons over the past several years without closure. About one year ago, the National Council for Black Studies placed the curriculum question on its "top priority" list and named a nationally represented committee of scholars to develop a "collective" core curriculum for Black Studies. In the pages that follow, NCBS is most pleased to share the final report of the Curriculum Standardization Committee which was formally adopted by the Executive Board in July, 1981. We especially call the reader's attention to our wish "to provide a standard model which operates as a yardstick for determining what is to be included or excluded in a program of study as well as providing criteria for criticizing and evaluating alternative pedagogical models. . ." in Black Studies.

Our hope is that this Black Studies curriculum model will excite the imagination of Black Studies chairpersons and significant others as they grapple with the challenges of maximizing the learning potential inherent in the discipline of Black Studies. While we are certain of the discipline's contribution to teaching, research and service, it is quite likely that the struggle for racial harmony will also be greatly enhanced by the cognitive skills of Black Studies scholars and students.

FOREWORD

The immediate objective of the Curriculum Standards Committee of the National Council for Black Studies is to articulate the rationale and particulars for a core curriculum for a model Black Studies program. In the course of the Committee's deliberations around that objective, several concerns were raised which were seen as intrinsically important to be addressed in relation to the achievement of that objective. Similarly, the task of curriculum standardization itself was seen variously as a function of wider and more basic notions regarding the nature of Black Studies as a program of study in higher education.

Accordingly, the overall goals of standardization which emerged from the Committee's deliberations are seen as follows:

- I. ARTICULATE THE RATIONALE OF A CORE CURRICULUM IN BLACK STUDIES.
- II. OUTLINE THE ACADEMIC SUBSTANCE OF A CORE CURRICULUM
 IN BLACK STUDIES.
- III. IDENTIFY THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE AND LITERATURE WHICH DEFINES THE PARAMETERS OF BLACK STUDIES.

- IV. IDENTIFY THE SKILLS AND METHODS OF BLACK STUDIES AS WELL AS THE RELATIONSHIP OF BLACK STUDIES TO SKILLS ASSOCIATED WITH GENERAL EDUCATION ON THE POST-SECONDARY LEVEL.
- V. FACILITATE THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF BLACK STUDIES
 AS A DISCIPLINE OF STUDY IN U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION

The tasks of this report will be to speak substantively to the first two of these goals, and to make general recommendations regarding the others.

I. ARTICULATE THE RATIONALE FOR A CORE CURRICULUM IN BLACK STUDIES

It is important to identify the context in which the concept "core curriculum" has surfaced historically, the purposes it has been designed to realize, and to make explicit its underlying presuppositions.

A. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

- 1. Historically, a core curriculum has emerged as part of the legitimation process by which a new and fledgling discipline seeks to demonstrate that it incorporates a body of material (x) that is discreet, distinct and not reducible to anything more fundamental. Central to this understanding is the conclusion that each discipline has a structure which is unique to it even though part of its structure may include components that are also part of the structure of other disciplines.
- 2. Historically, a core curriculum has also emerged as part of a synthesizing activity that aims at the reformation of a discipline by providing an organic unity and centering where the discipline is regarded as chaotic and topsy-like.

3. Historically, this synthesizing activity is also evident in efforts to establish an authorized certification/accreditation apparatus. In this sense, a core curriculum seeks to formulate the sine qua non for a given discipline that articulates the minimal skills, intellectual training, etc., as these relate to proficiency and/or advancement in the field. If we allow for the distinction between what is "essential," "desirable" and "enriching," as items of descending rank order, then the core curriculum gives content to the category of the "essential." In this sense, the core curriculum seeks to identify what skills are essential for participation in the field or what constitutes adequate preparation for the discipline in question.

B. GENERAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

 Logically, a consensual determination of the function, scope and goals of Black Studies must precede the development of a rationale for a core curriculum. This follows from the fact that a core curriculum is advanced as indispensable for the attainment of some goal--acquisition of skills; inculcation of appropriate, affective and cognitive data required for competency in a given field, transmission of a cultural tradition, etc. Based on this understanding, the rationale for a core curriculum reduces to the demonstration that (x) is the most effective means to a given end. The content and validation of the core curriculum is determined by reference to the goal or purpose to which it is engaged.

- 2. A core curriculum model affirms that the subunits which comprise it exhibit an inner coherence and organic connectedness which permits their modular linkage and sequencing.
- 3. In a core curriculum, synthetical structures are built into the sub-units of the curriculum itself rather than allowing the student to produce the synthesis personally through his or her selective and subjective choice.
- 4. A core curriculum is prescriptive and normative.

 It seeks to provide a standard model which operates as the yardstick for determing what is to be included or excluded in a program of study as well as providing criteria for criticizing and evaluating alternative pedagogical models. In all of this there

is the implicit claim that all learning experiences and skills are not co-equal, thus necessitating the formulation of some rank order apparatus of criteriology which the core curriculum seeks to address.

C. RATIONALE FOR A CORE CURRICULUM

- 1. GOALS. The basic rationale for a core curriculum in Black Studies follows from its goal-oriented character. These goals can be interpreted in several ways:
 - a. Training for a professional or scholarly career in Black Studies, or other careers for which Black Studies is an integral part.
 - b. Liberation of the Black community.
 - c. Enhancing self-awareness and esteem.
 - d. Providing a nuclear description of the Black Experience that functions as an indispensable component in general education and liberal studies programs, etc.
- OTHER PERSPECTIVES. An examination of Black Studies from other perspectives also dictates the pedagogical model of the core curriculum.

- a. The purpose of Black Studies to provide
 a comprehensive description of the Black
 Experience dictates a holistic approach, and
 this in turn dictates the systematic development of over-arching interconnections of the
 materials.
- b. Black Studies inaugurates an unflinching attack on institutional oppression/racism with the goal of total eradication of racist ideology in institutions. Thus, it is clear that the effective execution of this corrective purpose requires an understanding of the nature, history and institutional expression of that which is attacked and how it operates. This becomes one of the basic sub-units of the curriculum.
- c. Insofar as Black Studies questions the adequacy, objectivity and universal scope of other schools of thought, it assumes a critical posture. Moreover, its status as a newly emerging discipline, as well as its corrective purpose, forces Black Studies into a critical posture. Effective execution of Black Studies' critical function requires the identification of a minimal set of critical skills, cognitive and

effective information in which again the core curriculum seeks to inculcate.

e. The concern to establish an accreditation apparatus requires the identification of the foundational information, skills, etc., which the core curriculum specifies.

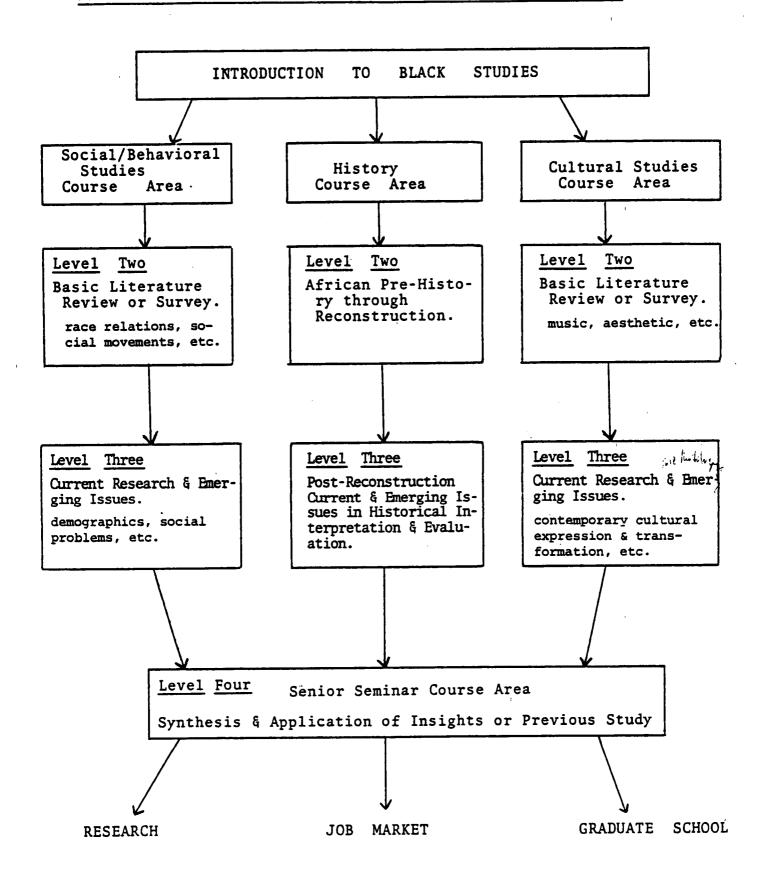
II. OUTLINE THE ACADEMIC SUBSTANCE OF A CORE CURRICULUM IN BLACK STUDIES

A. OVERVIEW (SEE DIAGRAM)

- FIRST LEVEL. An introductory course should be offered at this level which provides an overall framework for the study of the Black Experience.
- 2. SECOND AND THIRD LEVELS. At least one course should be offered at each of these levels in each of the following areas (a total of six courses: two in each area):
 - a. HISTORY
 - b. SOCIAL/BEHAVIORAL STUDIES
 - c. CULTURAL STUDIES

In these course areas the second level course should be designed to review basic literature and to present basic or classic perspectives relative to the area. The third level course should be concerned with examining these areas from the viewpoint of current research and emerging issues.

3. FOURTH LEVEL. A seminar should be offered at this level which concerns itself with synthesizing insights of the previous study and relating them to practice and advanced study.



B. CURRICULUM OUTLINE

Following below, in outline form, is a description of what that core curriculum should look like. In each course area the outline will identify topics and content areas indicative of what should be covered at each level. In addition, the outline will articulate key constructs which express the overall objectives of each area. The term "key constructs" is used here to refer to the centrally important concepts, frameworks or perspectives which should serve as organizing principles, around which should be determined the structure and style of presentation of the substance of each course area.

- 1. INTRODUCTION TO BLACK STUDIES (AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES):
 - At least one course should be offered at the first level. The course should offer an overall framework for the study of the Black Experience. In addition, it should survey and introduce topics and content areas which will be covered in other parts of the core curriculum.
 - a. TOPICS AND CONTENT AREAS. The introductory course should cover basic information regarding the roots of the Black Experience from the following perspectives:

- 1) HISTORICAL This section should include such topics as: the African past, the slave trade and slavery, slave resistance, Civil War and Reconstruction, rural Sharecropping era, migration and urbanization, the Civil Rights and Liberation movements.
- 2) SOCIOECONOMIC The Black Experience in the labor force, in unions and in businesses, government programs and policies, social and institutional relations, social and economic classes and conditions.
- 3) CULTURAL Topics include Africanisms, folklore and literary traditions, past and contemporary music, visual arts, language, church, philosophical and aesthetic frameworks.
- 4) PSYCHOLOGICAL Topics include socialization forces and processes, the family, interpersonal relations, social and personal alienation, the question of identity.
- 5) BLACK LIBERATION Topics include community leadership, institutionalization of positive Black images and values, as well as the building of Black institutions, development of philosophies and ideologies for progress, change and liberation.

b. KEY CONSTRUCTS.

- as historically rooted in an African past and an African background and now constitutes an American, or Westernized experience which has been largely characterized by racism, exploitation, discrimination and oppression.
- 2) The Black Community in all its forms--institutions, culture and consciousness--has survived the oppressive social and political forces, but has been altered or transformed by these experiences.
- 3) The study of the Black Experience is to develop means for achieving liberation-freedom from oppression-and self-determination for Black people.

2. HISTORICAL STUDIES COURSE AREA:

a. TOPICS AND CONTENT AREAS.

1) SECOND LEVEL - At least one course should be offered at this level. Topics would include: the African origin of human life and civilization, the rise and fall of African empires, significant events in the concurrent history of the West and other societies, slave trade and slavery, rebellions, the Civil War and Reconstruction.

2) THIRD LEVEL - At least one course should be offered at this level. Topics would include: post-bellum rural/agricultural and early urban experiences, migration, urbanization, industrialization and imperialism, social movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, current and emerging issues in historical interpretation and evaluation.

b. KEY CONSTRUCTS.

- 1) Africa--the cradle of life and civilization-has, for all periods, been an important determiner of and contributor to social, cultural, political and economic evolution of human civilization.
- 2) Distortions, omissions and falsifications in the traditional presentation and interpretation of the history of Africa and its descendants have served the ends of oppression and its perpetuation.
- 3) The viewpoint offered in a fairly presented study of the historical experience of Blacks contributes profoundly to the history of humanity.

3. SOCIAL/BEHAVIORAL STUDIES COURSE AREA:

- a. TOPICS AND CONTENT AREAS.
 - 1) SECOND LEVEL At least one course should be offered at this level to present accepted literature and basic or classic perspectives in topic areas such as the following: race relations, colonialism, imperialism, socialization, social relations within the Black community, social and political movements and ideologies.
 - 2) THIRD LEVEL At least one course should be offered at this level to review current research and investigate emerging issues in areas such as: demographics, economic forces and conditions, international relations, social conditions and problems in the Black community, intra- and international social, political and economic development.

b. KEY CONSTRUCTS.

- Black social reality is seen as evolving in context with the overall development of human social relations.
- 2) Changes and developments regarding the settings, conditions and relations characterizing the

- experiences of Blacks have reflected important developments in the dominant forms of social organization.
- 3) Study of contemporary and historical conditions, factors and forces shaping human social reality from the point of view of the Black Experience offers profound insight into human affairs.

4. CULTURAL STUDIES COURSE AREA:

- a. TOPICS AND CONTENT AREAS.
 - 1) SECOND LEVEL At least one course should be offered at this level to present accepted literature and basic or classic perspectives in content areas such as: African-American folklore, philosophy, literature, music, aesthetics, Africanisms in churches, religious and spiritual beliefs and practices as well as in secular practices and institutions.
 - 2) THIRD LEVEL At least one course should be offered at this level to review current research and to investigate emerging issues and perspectives in areas such as: contemporary cultural themes and transformations, modern literature, language, music cultural institutions

and practices, other sources of Black ethos, its interaction with mainstream forces and institutions (including film, television and mass media), implications thereof.

b. KEY CONSTRUCTS.

- Black culture is comprised of a shared ethos, based on an historical African background and world-view, and shared experiences of racism, exploitation and oppression.
- 2) Changes and developments in the form of manifestation of the shared ethos of Blacks have reflected the evolution and transformation of settings, conditions and relations which have characterized the experience of Blacks.
- 3) Study of the character and evolution of human cultural constructs from the perspective of a transformed African world-view offers profound insight into human affairs.

5. SENIOR SEMINAR:

A seminar of at least one term should be offered at this level. Such seminars would concern themselves with synthesizing the insights of previous study and relating them to practice—advanced study, research and field work.

- TOPICS AND CONTENT AREAS. Topic areas for this a. seminar could range widely. Emphasis here will be placed on development of skills and intensification of focus with regard to objects of study and fields of application. To this end, classic studies of the Black community, such as DuBois's The Philadelphia Negro and Atlanta Studies, Drake's Black Metropolis and Bond's Negro Education in Alabama, might be utilized for their contributions of method, content and focus in the study of the Black community. Topics and activities could also include social and public policy studies, investigation of educational and social problems in the community, local Black history and culture. study and practice in local community institutions and settings, African-Afro-American studies, relations, exchanges, etc., other field studies and trips, social and economic development and other areas.
- b. KEY CONSTRUCT. The key construct of this area of course work is: Insights offered in the study of the Black Experience can be creatively applied to the task of understanding and resolving the contemporary problems, conditions and forces which will shape the reality and the destiny of the Black community.

C. CURRICULUM RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. MINIMAL REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE CURRICULA FOR ACCREDITATION PURPOSES SHOULD BE AS FOLLOWS:
 - A. AN INSTITUTION MUST OFFER AN INTRODUCTORY SURVEY COURSE.
 - B. AN INSTITUTION MUST OFFER COURSES IN AT LEAST FOUR
 OF THE SIX AREAS SPECIFIED ABOVE FOR THE SECOND
 AND THIRD LEVELS.
 - C. AN INSTITUTION MUST OFFER A SENIOR LEVEL SEMINAR.
 - D. FOR ACCREDITATION PURPOSES, TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS
 MUST OFFER COURSES IN THE AREAS SPECIFIED FOR
 FIRST AND SECOND LEVELS.
- SIMILARLY, MINIMAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR A NCBS-SANCTIONED MAJOR OR MINOR IN BLACK STUDIES SHOULD BE AS FOLLOWS:
 - A. A STUDENT MUST COMPLETE THE INTRODUCTORY SURVEY

 COURSES, IN AT LEAST FOUR OF THE SIX AREAS SPECI
 FIED FOR THE SECOND AND THIRD LEVELS, IN ADDITION

 TO COMPLETING A SENIOR LEVEL SEMINAR.
 - B. IN A TWO-YEAR INSTITUTION, A STUDENT MUST COMPLETE
 THE INTRODUCTORY SURVEY IN ADDITION TO COMPLETING
 COURSES IN THE AREAS SPECIFIED FOR THE FIRST AND
 SECOND LEVELS.

III. IDENTIFY THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE AND LITERATURE WHICH DEFINES THE PARAMETERS OF BLACK STUDIES

The legitimacy of the course concepts outline above, and of the overall concept of a core curriculum will ultimately rest on recognition and identification of the existing and emerging literature which contains definitive knowledge and information about the Black Experience. While we know of no expressed consensus regarding such a body of literature, the fact that certain materials are widely used by teachers of the Black Experience suggests that the basis for such consensus does exist.

This committee therefore recommends that the Executive Board of the National Council for Black Studies establish commissions or task forces to identify, for each area, the specific scholars, contributors and their works which are considered to contain and preserve definitive knowledge and information. These commissions would identify the core literature, books and articles which majors and minors in Black Studies should be familiar with. This could constitute a "Great Books" list for Black Studies. In addition, works should be identified as ones to which students should have access, to augment their regular text materials and courses of study. This will mean specifying their inclusion in the Black Studies library, or in the general library of an institution.

We further recommend that NCBS take steps to identify journals where information from practicing scholars involved in the study of the Black Experience is currently being published. In this regard, the committee notes that one effort which NCBS has already sanctioned will address this task of identifying specific journals, including the topical focus and publishing guidelines of each journal.*

It should be noted that this task of identification may ultimately encompass a far wider range of topics and content areas that those addressed in the outline of the core curriculum. All the branches, specialties and sub-specialties of the study of the Black Experience must be represented in such compilations.

Commissions could also utilize such compilations to select and create text books and materials for all areas of Black Studies curricula.

^{*}NCBS in conjunction with the Illinois Council for Black Studies and the University of Illinois-Urbana, will publish such a guide this spring.

IV. IDENTIFY THE SKILLS AND METHODS OF BLACK STUDIES AS WELL AS THE RELATIONSHIP OF BLACK STUDIES TO SKILLS ASSOCIATED WITH GENERAL EDUCATION ON THE POST-SECONDARY LEVEL

We recognize that a variety of skills and methods may be associated with each area of study in Black Studies curricula. This is implicit in the various classic and contemporary works which are recognized as contributions to the study of the Black Experience.

We recommend that NCBS initiate efforts to provide guidelines and illustrations for use of various skills and methods for teaching and researching various areas of Black Studies. These efforts might take the form of special panels, seminars and other programs, publications or other forms considered appropriate by NCBS. In this regard, NCBS might usefully consider panels and programs which emphasize methodological approaches to investigating and presenting materials in each of the areas of the core curriculum. Perhaps such activities could be programmed as part of NCBS's annual meeting.

V. FACILITATE THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF BLACK STUDIES AS A DISCIPLINE OF STUDY IN U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION

The committee recommends that, if approved, the core curriculum, as outlined here, be adopted as a conceptual model for the Accreditation Implementation Committee to guide its efforts to identify acceptable programmatic and institutional structures to house certifiable Black Studies programs. In that regard, most practitioners in the area agree that departmental status will, in most cases, be eventually necessary to insure long-term survival of Black Studies in higher education. At this point most views stop short of advocating the requirement of departmental status for recognition, certification or accreditation, advocating instead that departmental status be conceived as a goal toward which progress should be made.

However, many believe that Black Studies must claim and exert status as a discipline of study -- as opposed to a inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary program -- if it is to enjoy institutional survival. This concept of Black Studies as a discipline raises questions similar to those implied in other parts of this report. That is, is Black Studies a discipline by virtue of unique methodology? -- or perhaps by content? -- or perspectives? Resolution of issues and questions such as those raised in this report regarding the content and perspective, as well as the skills and methods of Black Studies, may clarify this question of the disciplinary status of Black Studies.

Rationale for the consideration of Black Studies as a discipline unto itself will appear to be strengthened with the adoption and effectuation of a core curriculum. Moreover, institution of a core curriculum will aid the long-term survival of Black Studies in several other ways; among them:

- A. Providing the basis and guidelines for transfer of credits in Black Studies between instituions.
- B. Providing the basis and guidelines for identifying and developing approved textbooks and materals, especially in core curricular areas.
- C. Providing the basis and guidelines for distinguishing Black Studies from other disciplines. Presumably, such distinctions can be identified in terms of content, method, perspective, or all of these characteristics.

Further, the committee has noted that history and literature departments are most likely to have courses geared toward the Black Experience. In this regard, the suggestion was forwarded that specific institutional strategies be formulated and recommended for implementation for programs which are in the process of instituting core curricula. The objective of these strategies would be to seek resolution of potential problems of "academic turf" between Black Studies and other academic disciplines and departments. It was also

suggested that NCBS seek the cooperation of predominately Black professional organizations associated with these content areas.

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR BLACK STUDIES

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James B. Stewart, Assistant Professor of Economics, Director, Black Studies Program, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania. B.S., 1969 (Mathematics), Rose Hulman Institute of Technology; M.A., 1971 (Economics), Cleveland State University; Ph.D. (Economics), University of Notre Dame, 1976. Recent publications include "Introducing Black Studies: A Critical Examination of Some Textual Materials," UMOJA, Vol. 3, No. 9 (1979), pp. 5-17 and "Black Studies and Black People in the Future," Black Books Bulletin, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 20-25 (In Print).