

COMMENTS ON THE STANDARDIZATION

OF

AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES CURRICULUM

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## THE STANDARDIZATION OF CURRICULUM

In terms of standardization, basically see this in this kind of a four-fold table, 2 by 2 tables as being the main focal points of the process. (See Table I). One distinction is between those things which have to do with organized institutional aspects of education and those which we more explicitly speak to curriculum and content of education. While it is easy to see these things as separate and distinct, obviously everything interpenetrates here. You can't see one as separate and distinct from another although each has its own integrity as a unit. One aspect is the concrete manifestations inside our programs and this other aspect is the theoretical question of pedagogy and the question of paradigm. With regards to the administrative level, what we're talking about here are the rules and procedures by which we're able to remain in the institution and carry out our tasks. The text book is the concrete manifestation of the content and it's a technical aspect of it. We started there because we felt that it was the tyranny of publishing companies that so often dictated not only who could be published but therefore what you could use in the classroom. We took it upon ourselves to develop this.

The question of pedagogy obviously is key. Johnnetta Butler's dissertation is about this. Others have taken this up the work of Paul Friere and others who raise the question of how is it that you get involved in a process of teaching whereby you can achieve certain intended ends, in his case the question of liberation. How do you get people who are formally uneducated to learn quickly, particularly the essential political knowledge that enables them to act in their environment and other questions that are

Table 1

STANDARDIZATION

Form

	Concrete	Theory
Institution	Administrative	Pedagogy
Curriculum	Text	Paradigm

very important. All of this has to do with standardization. But we want to concentrate on this question of paradigm and theory, the essential and most rational content of a curriculum that enables us to arm our students with what we consider to be the most essential and most fundamental aspects of an education.

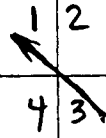
Thus, this session is not so much focused here on the details of our history, but the lessons of our history and those lessons are best summed up in a framework which constitutes the most rational assumptions we bring to our experience. In other words, how do we teach people to want to be involved necessarily in the liberation struggle. Obviously, the most political form of this is at the level of being politically conscious, people who want to get involved in some form of change. Whatever their politics are, they consciously want to get involved in change. The question, however, is also how do we teach people who are not necessarily conscious of wanting to make change, how do we teach them in such a way that they are prepared and therefore predisposed to be critical about their environment, to interact in such a way that they want to get involved in change and support of the Black community. This is where we are at now. We came through the 1960s where people were consciously wanting to get down with change. That's no longer true and a lot of the approaches and what we've written and how we've appealed to people basically fall on deaf ears. It sounds like you're talking some other language. Students want to hear discussions about careers, employment opportunities, and income--things like that. We're trying to structure knowledge in such a way that it has a logic to it, that it has a basis to it that leads people in a progressive way toward a desired end.

Intterms of the question of the paragigms here is another set of distinctions I think is important ot deal with (See Table II). There are three contractions: (1) There is a sense of information that we can perceive and that constitutes what generally would be called the realm of the empirical and as such the sense of what is true or correct or right is determined by some act of verification. If you say something is there--that it exists--then presumably you can test for it or you can point to it or you can get access to it and you call it something. This is the question of concrete fact. (2) The issue of cause and effect, or some explanation about something in the concrete workd, is where this question of a theory that relates a set of concepts that are close to the facts themselves and that you attempt to develop some sort of rational explanation. (3) But at a higher level of abstraction two other problems emerge that are very important. One is the question of definition which is not a question of an empirical and verifiable fact. Fundamentally a definition is an assumption. Now to say that includes a whole realm from irresponsible or eclectic or random or irrational definitions versus some coherent rational set of definitions that gives you a framework to operate in systematically. The most developed explanatory set of definitions and relationships that you establish is what we're calling a paradigm. In a real sense we would argue there are no facts outside of a paradigm. This is like saying there are no facts outside of a paradigm. This is like saying there are no facts without a theory because you cannot talk about a fact independent of some broader sense of definition and explanation. It is important to establish these things because a lot of times people want to say "Look, stop all that talk, let's get to the facts!" as if there's you know like almost in a Durkheimian sense, I guess, that the facts are some stubborn stuff that

Table 2

EMPIRICAL FRAME WORK

	(Verification)	
Concept	Concrete (Fact)	Abstract (Definition)
Explanation	Theory	Paradigm



## IDEOLOGIES

### 1. Liberation

- a. Pan-Africanism
- b. Nationalism
- c. Marxism
- d. Feminism (African)
- e. Integregationism (?)

### 2. Academic

- a. Pan-African
- b. Afro-American
- c. American

exist over there independent of anything else. It is really this contradiction between the paradigm and this empirical research that constitutes, we think, the essential life of Black Studies.

In this instance, by contradictions we are talking about the conceptual opposites that serve over the long haul as the dynamic that informs and sets the context for everything else that occurs in Black Studies. For example, it is a paradigm that allows for different theories to contend within it. It is a paradigm that represents the essential definitions, and this sets the basis for the broadest empirical research that then informs everything else that's happening in Black Studies. What we're searching for at a theoretical level are a set of concepts and theoretical propositions that would allow for a lot of the diversity in Black Studies to coexist. At the same time, we understand that the way Black Studies is pushed forward is by the various theories that coexist within the field is to get down in terms of what it conceives of and what it can identify and what it can find at the level of facts themselves. Furthermore, these definitions eventually have to be brought in line with this overarching (paradigm) conception as the dialogue and debate continues.

How do paradigms change? Theories change in a different way than paradigms change. Basically, we would disagree with Thomas Kuhn. Kuhn's book that talks about paradigms called The Structure of Scientific Revolution seems to argue that, almost in a kind of mechanical sense, that there were these paradigms and that one paradigm would be replaced by another paradigm. In fact, a paradigm is, in part, a political question. The question of change of a paradigm has to do with how power is articulated to influence people to adopt a framework to carry out their work. If we look at Black



intellectual history, we can discern the development of a paradigm that has yet to be rationalized and stated intentionally as a coherent paradigmatic theoretical statement. We think that there is a lot more unity in Black intellectual history that has otherwise been identified.

Furthermore, only being clear on our paradigm now can the energy of young people with potential research activities as part of their life can we the work. It's only by rationally stating this then we can have this develop in such a way as to make much greater contributions. What is happening now is either people are trapped in various kinds of context pursuing abstract definitions (Table II, quadrant II) without necessarily being conscious of what they're doing. Or many people are wandering around pursuing empirical studies with arbitrary pragmatist orientations toward theory, coming up with an arbitrary set of definitions in order to get through graduate school or to write a book or whatever. They're not brought into a broader framework and then enabled to fit whatever facts that are being generated. Thus, we don't have the basis for either clear statements of theoretical unity or a basis for cumulative facts. Simply put, this means that in Black Studies there is no statement clear statement of a paradigm.

I went to Rutgers University recently and the program calls itself Africana Studies. Nobody could say what that meant or what the basis was, or at theoretical level, or what its coherence--its all arbitrary. At the University of Illinois, people say "Stop talking about definitions; we did that. Let's just talk about what each of us want to do." On the other hand, in Black Studies there are no empirical cumulative collections of data against which ideas must be tested, against which theories must be tested, etc. The fact is that in the long run we think that this is what will

develop Black Studies.

This is why what's happening at Yale for example is very important. I'll get to that when we start talking about different kinds of approaches in Black Studies in relationship to this. But if you go to Yale, now what is happening is almost everybody on that faculty is about generating data against which everybody else would be judged--whether it's Frederick Douglas' paper or whether it's antebellum newspapers or whatever it is. In other words, who controls data? That's the capital of intellectual work I mean if you control it, then everybody's got to come to you to get it or you have to generate it some other way. If you control that data then the funding agency, etc. will have to come to you because there's not enough funding and therefore a secondary analysis is the way people have to go. Thus, only a few places would get funded to generate the data, everybody else would get a much smaller amount of money to go and read what they've collected. In terms of ideas, a paradigm (referring to Table II) is the guiding understanding you have the world and these are the facts of the world that he proposit to explain the paradigm and yet it's a dialectical thing. You can't see the facts without this, but without the facts that might end up into religion or something. That is the dynamic that we're trying to get to. This workshop is essentially about paradigms. We've tried to bring people here who got a great command of facts, we represent different theories. But even with the differences, hopefully through discussion we'll be able to begin to articulate something at the level of paradigm and then double back and in that process come with more intellectual coherence to the issues raised in the NCBS report--organic unity, internal coherence, logic, and the like. All of this was to clarify what

we mean. Obviously we need as much help as we can get in clarifying this.

Speaker Two: I'm sure we are looking for one paradigm. With a lot of different theories. In other words, can we begin to reach basic consensus on how we generally approach the Black experience in terms of the substance of the response but what basic questions we ask. For example, being against segregation was the unifying theme. The vast majority of Black people were against segregation. But that was a perceptual and experiential thing. When you got to talking about why there was segregation, when did segregation start or what else it was related to, the more you tapped into the more rational content of reflecting that concrete experience. All kinds of differences emerged.

The question we're raising is at a theoretical level of professionals in what is called Black Studies. Can we begin to fashion a framework that can begin to organize our work, that can begin to organize our curriculum development, that can organize our research and then, frankly, can begin to organize our policy orientation. That is the applied aspect of our work, if you want of our it in those terms, or the political aspect of our work. In a sense, the issue is how we can develop greater ideological unity.

Speaker Two: Okay see that's I guess that's where I'm confused. Abdul:

Yeah, no, no, no. Speaker One: I think one of them said that all western philosophy to Plato and so if you gonna read Plato you basically understand the western mind and we was talking here like the

Abdul: I wouldn't want to comment on that statement about Plato (everyone talking together) Speaker One: He still talking about you know a split up

human being. Abdul: I'm talking about some kind of fundamental and concrete limited conception because there are many different experiences, different disciplinary training, different theoretical orientation, different ideological

orientation, different levels of consciousness about all of that you know that's all understood. Isn't that the exciting aspect of Black Studies what we're doing here? In other words, we're calling for the big picture in which we can operate and begin to forge unity. That big picture is the unity that will facilitate diversity and difference. Let me be more explicit about our understanding of the historical periodization of Black intellectual work. It is not in the 20th century that we're able to move from the point of essentially refutation, the DuBois postscript chapter in Black Reconstruction--"The Propaganda of History"--and that kind of analysis to much more of a theoretical or even a descriptive empirical work that Charles Johnson and most of the people in the 1930s and 1940s represented. Their work was fantastically rich and dynamic and filled with all kinds of theoretical insights and ideas. Now we think it's possible to actually move to a much more systematic, a much more rigorous and much more intentional theoretical position. In order to do this, we must understand how we can state and achieve the greatest level of unity and give coherence and direction to Black Studies. And by Black Studies I don't mean the administrative unit; I mean the intellectual activity that Black people carry out to try this new scientific and the humanistic forms of knowledge to understand the of the Black experience. It's a bold move.

The first question is what is the stuff that constitutes a Black experience? Here's what we've come up with so far. There are four levels of analysis: (1) biological; (2) economy; (3) society/culture, and (4) consciousness. (See Table III).

Let me briefly describe this chart and relationships between level, units and change. In a philosophical sense, each level of analysis constitutes different forms of matter. Matter is organized on the basis of the

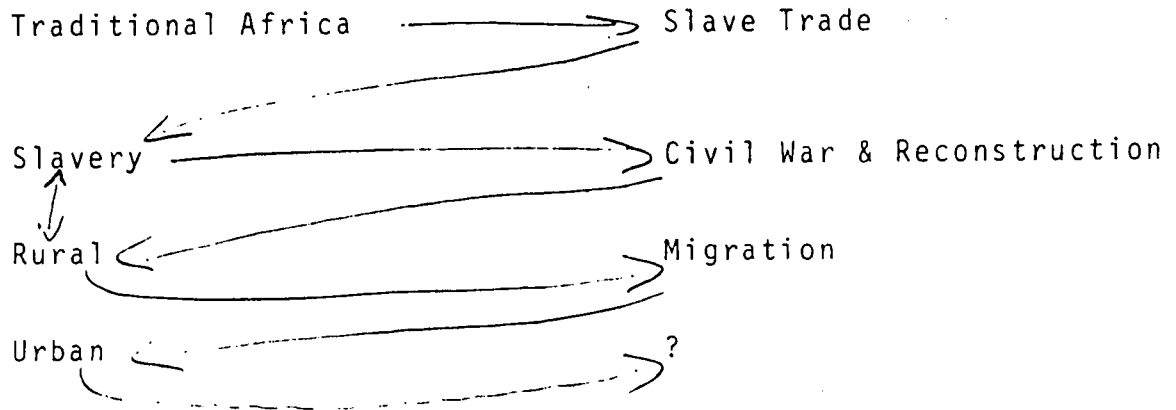
WHAT IS THE STUFF OF BLACK EXPERIENCE?

Level	Unit	Change
Consciousness	Ideology	Macro/Micro
Society/Culture	Nationality	History
Economy	Class	
Biology	Race	E/R Genetics

# LOGIC OF CHANGE

## SOCIAL COHESION

## SOCIAL DISRUPTION



concrete forms and logical relationships of the stuff that makes it up. Those sets of relationships or concepts that are most germane to the Black experience in each of these levels of analysis are what we are calling units of analysis. For example, not all biology at the level of how it impacts on human beings can it be reduced to race but it's that concept of race--that unit of analysis--which is central to understanding the Black experience. Remember also that what we're talking about is that material stuff that exist independent of our consciousness. That is to say, the ways in which something called race has been interpreted and explained particularly in terms of its role in history is different from talking about the physical makeup of color and anything else associated with physical differences among human beings.

At the first of these four is the biological or the question of nature. This is to say that the Black experience is a human experience in a fundamental biological sense. At this level, the unit of analysis that we have historically been dealing with is the concept of race. We know that there is this biological level although increasingly we know we don't understand it fully. It has several manifestations, and one that we know about is sickle cell anemia. That is to say physical biological manifestations that are purported to be differentially distributed and associated in some non-random way with what are generally called racial groups; whatever the precise definition of race we agree to. Part of a historic error made by Peoples College is that we continue to liquidate this and we didn't take this into consideration that a lot of people in the Black community do take this as an important level to take into consideration.

The reason why we think it's important to have this level of analysis

is to first of all recognize that there is a great deal of work going on. Secondly, in all of the things that are going on there are some good things or things that at least are question marks and a lot of things that we think are real bad. The problem is, however, without including this level of analysis, Black Studies will not study what knowledge does exist about this and when we come in touch with somebody who runs a melanin theory, for example--the more melanin you have the smarter you are--we do not have access to existing scientific information to even have a discussion.

The whole point of race being an important level is to understand that there is, as far as change is concerned, a natural physical and biological evolutionary change taking place. But there is also the potential for revolutionary change, and that's the importance of science. There is an already demonstrated capacity for human activity called science to intervene and begin to escalate the pace of biological change. I mean in part you're talking about DNA research--genetic engineering--and in part you're talking about nuclear research and Three Mile Islands. In other words, there are certain logical scientific possibilities that exist at this level of analysis called biology. This has tremendous implications for the Black experience.