

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 a 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 Center'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 and

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 the assassination of Martin Luther King, there was a significant increase in Black student enrollment in the late 1960s. However, the University was unprepared for this large quantitative increase in Black students, particularly because it resulted in a qualitative change in political movement within the campus. Indeed, not only had individuals come from the Black community to the campus, but they brought their political movement with them. In this way, historians must understand how the external force of the Black Liberation Movement outside the University, became manifest as an internal force within the University. It is important to point out that the external factor was relevant to the extent that it was able to become an internal factor.<sup>7</sup>

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.

The University basically had given a "green light," money was available, and students were available as well. During this period a great deal of experimentation occurred. Not only did the experimentation come from the desires of students, but, by and large, these desires were manipulated by campus factors, publishing houses, and political forces. Each campus incorporated the Black Studies activists into local campus administrative and cultural style. Therefore, what developed were departments, centers, programs, and committees.

The publishing houses manipulated the material to print and therefore controlled the material basis for Black Studies curriculum. This is particularly true of the reprint type of publication which quickly flooded the market and provided a spontaneous, eclectic, ahistorical, and weak framework of Black Studies. And, last, the Black Liberation Movement (of course) recruited student activists, won them over to a "doctrine" and used them as instruments of short run political objectives on and off the campus. Out of this process, while inherently chaotic and manipulative, there

developed a growing critique of both the established disciplines in their treatment of the Black experience, as well as what was becoming clear as an historically evolved Black intellectual tradition.

TABLE 1

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK STUDIES:  
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE (1960s, 70s, 80s)

1. ORIGIN - This represented social innovation in the University based on student activists using social disruption as an extension of the Black Power oriented Black Liberation Movement. The main demand was to establish a Black Studies program.
2. STAGE 1 - The first stage was a Black Studies movement in which various patterns emerged. This was a period of experimentation on campus, state, and regional levels; money and students were available but staff, program, and scholarship required development.
3. CRISIS - With a cutback in money and a new student pragmatism, survival emerged as the major question; further, this survival is against the attack on Liberal Arts Education, and a general societal resurgence of racism.
4. STAGE 2 - The consolidation of Black Studies as an academic profession based on an emerging paradigm of unity which can be the basis of standardization, professionalization, and institutionalization.

And, of course, precisely when the process of developing a collective, intentional self-consciousness was reaching a new threshold, crisis began to redefine the rules of the academic game being played. What made the crisis so devastating is that it was not a crisis special to Black

Studies, but rather was more generally a crisis facing the campus and the community in general. The economic and political crisis facing the U.S. has fundamentally reversed the progressive trend in this country. Rather than expansion, there is outback; rather than surplus, there is now scarcity.

Within this general economic crisis there has been a resurgence of racism, now moving beyond the institutional level back to the societal level.<sup>8</sup> 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 policy makers in the University, there is vocationally-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.

### Current Level Unity

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 individual programs and practices, but now must be organized as a coherent and stable community of people, organizations, and activities.

#### TABLE 2

#### STAGE 2: FOUR ASPECTS OF INSTITUTIONAL UNITY IN BLACK STUDIES (MAJOR EXAMPLES FROM 1982)

##### 1. BLACK STUDIES PRACTITIONERS

- A. Primary - Faculty and students in higher education formally engaged in production, distribution, and consumption of Black Studies knowledge (approximately 1 1/2 million people).
- B. Secondary - General Black intellectual (non-academic) activity in the media, the arts and culture, politics and Black Liberation movements, etc., (approximately 4 million people).

##### 2. PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION

- A. National - The National Council of Black Studies (founded 1976).
- B. Regional - The New England Council for Black Studies (founded 1977).
- C. State - The Illinois Council for Black Studies (founded 1979).

##### 3. JOURNAL LITERATURE

- A. Primary - The main 26 journals are described in Guide to Scholarly Journals in Black Studies (1981).
- B. Secondary - Material on the Afro-American experience published in all sources is listed in The Afro-American Studies Index including over 2,000 author entries and 6,000 subject entries for 1979.

#### 4. STANDARDIZATION

- A. NCBS, Black Studies Core Curriculum (adopted 1981).
- B. NCBS, National Conference Handbook (under review 1982).
- C. Institute of the Black World, Black Studies Curriculum Development Course Evaluations (3 volumes, forthcoming, 1983).

As Table 2 Indicates, there are four aspects of institutional unity. The current period can best be described as Black Studies in transition from Stage 1 to Stage 2 in the midst of crisis (see Table 1). In fact, the crisis makes Stage 2 a necessity because in no other way will Black Studies survive as an academic entity in higher education. First, it is important to identify the constituency--the constituency of people who make up Black Studies. While some might argue for the continued use of the movement definition, "Black Studies is all Black people who are interested in learning about themselves and fighting for Black Liberation," we believe that the past 15 years of practice in the "field" enables us to identify more precisely a group of faculty and students associated with higher education who are identified with Black Studies activities as the primary practitioners. It is necessary, however, to go on and specify that there is a broader category of secondary constituents constituting general Black intellectual workers, people concerned with the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge regarding the Black experience particularly as manifested in an applied context

(journalists, librarians, bookstores, writers, cultural workers, artists, etc.) In general, Black Studies is the practice of Black intellectuals, especially those formally connected to Black Studies.

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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

During the current phase of the Black Studies Movement, a major organization that has emerged is the National Council for Black Studies.<sup>11</sup> 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 difference 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.<sup>12</sup> 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 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 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 three 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 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.

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

TABLE 3

## 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 Recon- struction	A. Basic Litera- ture 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 Interpreta- tion and Evaluation	B. Current and Emerging Issues (contemporary cultural ex- pression and transforma- tion, etc.)
Level 4	Senior Seminar Course Area		
	Synthesis and Application of Insights or Previous Study		

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.

#### Aspects of Curriculum Development

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.

TABLE 4

ALTERNATIVE INTELLECTUAL FOCI IN BLACK STUDIES COURSES

1. Theoretical Review of Literature
  - A. Critique of mainstream work
  - B. Review of radical thought
  - C. Black intellectual history
2. Summation of Practical Experience
  - A. Empirical data analysis
  - B. Policy and contemporary issues
  - C. Black liberation movement

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. The main point is to be able 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.

Theoretical Review of the 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."<sup>14</sup>

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."<sup>15</sup> 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..."<sup>16</sup>

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, should be radical critiques, and (3) Black intellectual history.

#### Critique of Main Stream Work

In an unpublished essay, St. Clair Drake summed up the relationship of the rise of Black Studies to mainstream scholarship:<sup>17</sup>

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.