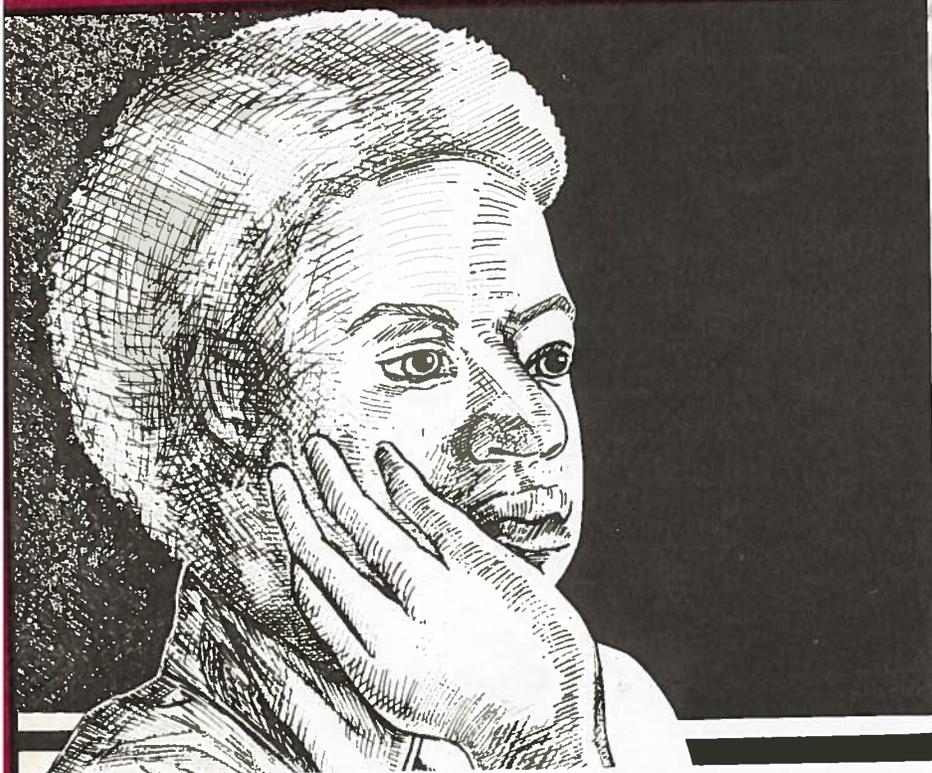


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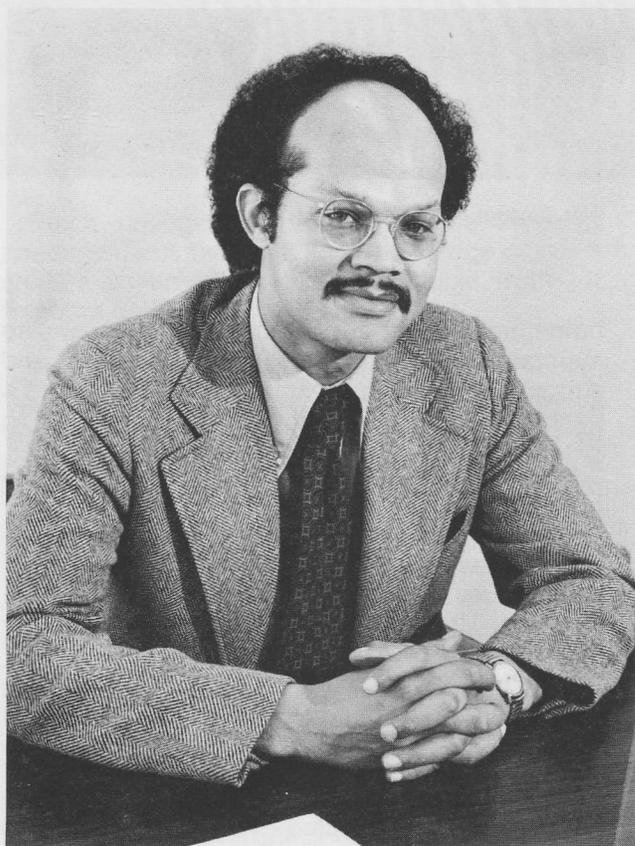


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Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility: Notes On A Theory of Black Studies

By
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and articles, among them "Resource Allocation and Funding" in *Black English and the Education of the Black Children and Youth: Proceedings of the National Invitational Symposium on the King Decision*, edited by Geneva Smitherman (Detroit: Center for Black Studies, Wayne State University Press, 1981). He is a member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Black Studies*. Dr. McWorter has studied and travelled in various areas including the Peoples Republic of China, East Africa (4 countries), West Africa (6 countries), and the Caribbean (mainly Puerto Rico, Haiti and the Virgin Islands).

The contemporary history of Black Studies since the 1960s has been in three distinct stages: *innovation*, *experimentation* and *crisis*. We are beginning with this period, although, we could have included W. E. B. DuBois and his Atlanta University Studies; Charles Johnson at Fisk, E. Franklin Fraizer at Howard; or Carter G. Woodson. The rebirth of Black Studies in the 1960s was the unintended consequence of a rapid increase in college enrollment of working class Black Youth, in a historical period influenced by Black power politics. Black studies was intended as a way to rapidly increase the research and

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why black studies

questioned. Black Studies are accused of offering an easy way for graduation to weak black students who would not have made it otherwise; they are accused of discriminating against other ethnic groups and of being definitely too political. Moreover, they are often accused of duplicating already existing courses in other departments.

The quality of Black Studies departments and programs in predominantly white colleges and universities is a matter that deserves special consideration. It seems that according to the white man's standard, minorities, especially Blacks, must put forth more effort in order to be recognized. In the case of Black Studies, this situation is even worse: black people had struggled to establish them and are still struggling to keep them. In such an atmosphere of insecurity where any peccadillo can be regarded as a crime, where eyes are always focused on Blacks since they stand out so well against the white mass of their institutions, a tremendous amount of courage, perseverance, abnegation and sacrifices is required if a good performance is to be expected.

Black students on many campuses, for example, have been accused of being dumb, of having no adequate background to enter a university. No doubt that there is a considerable number of unqualified black students in many institutions of higher learning; however, it is important to note that in this deplorable situation, the emphasis has always been put on the results, not on the causes. When we know that there are Blacks not

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study on the Black experience with the objective of contributing to positive social change. The cutting edge of this academic innovation was creative social disruption, militant action by students and community activists in order to increase the number of Black faculty, Black courses, and Black cultural activities on campus and in the community.

Once the first wave of campus programs had gotten underway (1967-69), a broad pattern of experimentation began. That lasted about a decade. For the most part, this experimentation was unavoidable because of a previous history of neglect or distortion. There was no available supply of faculty, no approved list of courses, and no established models to emulate. However, in less than 15 years, the basic resources for an established academic discipline and scholarly profession have been developed.

Further, the third stage, crisis, raises serious questions about the continued existence of Black Studies, even though now is when the past decade is about to pay off. This crisis has three (3) main aspects:

- a. *political*: erosion of support, rise of opposition on and off campus;
- b. *economic*: budgetary cutbacks, pressure of inflation; and
- c. *educational*: realignment of priorities and tightening of review process for individual faculty tenure and program evaluation.

There is a serious limitation on the ability of

Black Studies to solve the economic crisis. The objective for Black Studies Professions in the economic area seems to generally be to compete for relative parity, even if by remaining equal with whites it means no growth or a cut. Further, since Black Studies turns out to greatly (often mainly) contribute to the overall affirmative goals of a campus, the rationale for economic support is far reaching.

The main and necessary response to the crisis by Black Studies has two aspects: political and professional. The political response must be to engage Black Studies professionals in efforts to influence public policy. For example, the Illinois Council for Black Studies has held a statewide meeting, that included a session with the Deputy Director of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. This public agency is the main advisory body to the governor, state legislature and governing bodies of all public and private higher education (ICBS, 1981). Also, there must be attempts to maintain relations with the broader aspects of the Black community.

The professional response must develop and maintain self-imposed standards. These standards must mandate that Black Studies meet the core values of the university (quality teaching, scholarly publication, service to campus and community), and serve the policy end of contributing to solving the problems of Black people facing the entire society: Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility.

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woefully small. Moreover, while the problems of Providence's black community at no where began to match those of larger ghettos in New York, Chicago, Louisville, Memphis, Miami or Detroit, they were sufficiently grave to give the fledgling black studies program pause. The task was two fold. First, there was a need to develop a framework for an ongoing relationship with the black community, and second it was necessary by means of quality research to systematically expand knowledge of the black experience.

In 1973, faculty in the Program developed a thrust which met these concerns, by organizing Afro-American Studies around two, related dialogues. The first dialogue was built on work undertaken by Rites and Reason, a black performing arts organization based at the University which brought together people from the

community and the university. The faculty agreed to formally incorporate Rites and Reason into the Afro-American Studies Program—it took two more years before the Brown administration could be persuaded to agree to this sensible plan—and launched thereby what is now called the research-to-performance method. Research take place as at any other university and according to the canons of individual academic disciplines. In the course of the Program's work over the past nine years, Brown faculty, undergraduates, and graduate students have been involved in research as have persons from other colleges and research institutions who have come to Brown to work on special projects.

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