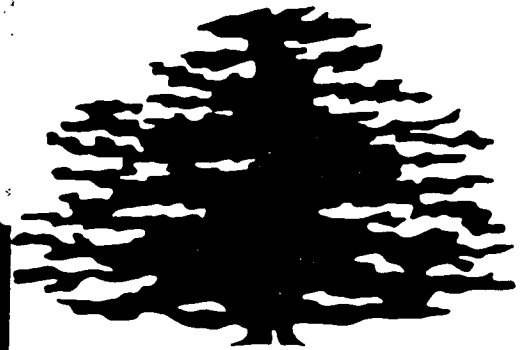
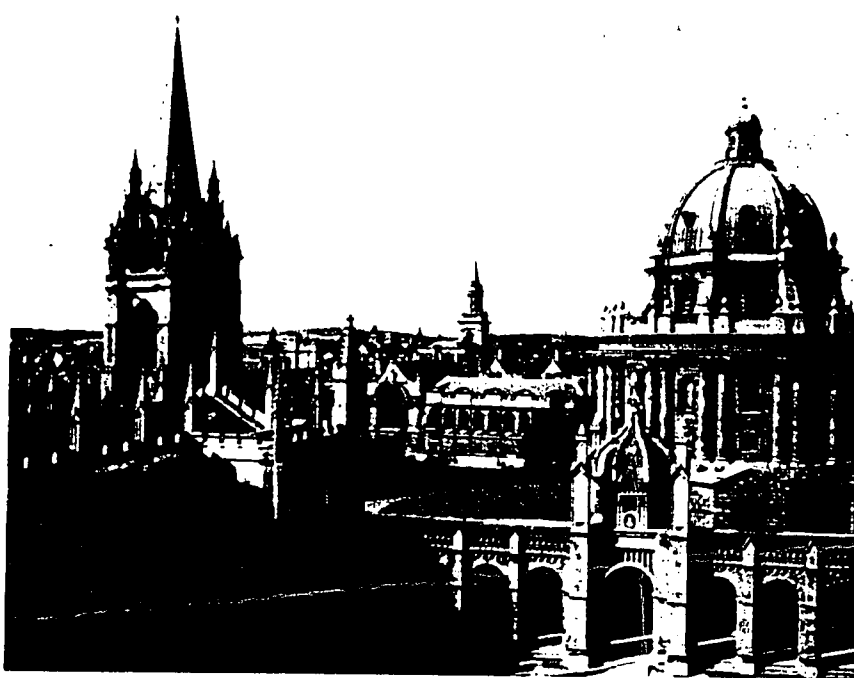




AFRICA WORLD REVIEW

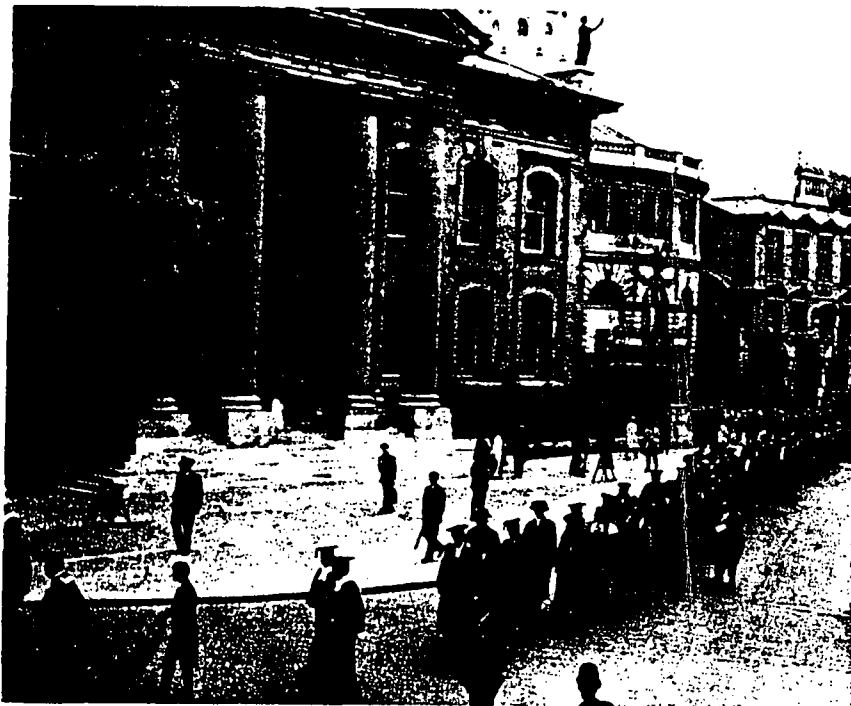
May-October 1992

Price: £2.50; \$5.00; 10DM; 10 Naira; Z\$3.00; 500 Cedis; 30F; E£10.00



SOAS

the centre for Asia and Africa



African Political Thought
Black Studies and Black Power
Women in History
SOAS and Imperialism
Cecil Rhodes: The Robber
Consultants in Africa
Art: Africa and the West
Islam and Socialism
African Writers in Exile

Knowledge & Imperialism

The Return of the Baby Essay

Black Power in U.S. Education: Ideology, Academic Activism and the Politics of Black Liberation

In the USA, Black studies continues to be an arena of radical ideological struggle regarding Black Liberation politics, consciousness, and culture. Black youth get their radicalized ideological orientation from courses in Black studies as much as anything other than mass forms of popular culture. Black intellectuals are concentrated in Black studies more than in any other institutional context. Black studies programs are located in every urban area and in most colleges. And, more money is in Black studies budgets to support ideological discourse than in any other institutional context that serves Black people with the exception of the church. In this article, Abdul Alkalimat, Professor of African-American studies, Northeastern University, Boston and Associate editor of the AWR (USA) argues that Black studies faces the same crises that is facing the Black liberation struggle at this time. This is because the USA has undergone a paradigm shift, from an "industrial society" and the main underlying dynamic of all politics is the crises of adapting to the new conditions that are yet to fully mature. The Universities are revising their curricular and redefining the content of what it means to be educated. The Black community is being torn asunder by the massive shifts in the technical division of labor, and forced into savage conditions of survival by the systematic liquidation of the welfare state. It is this context that defines the crises facing Black studies and the Black liberation movement. Alkalimat insists that it is essential that this be understood, "for if we don't we face the danger of irrelevance and a period of backwardness, but if we do there is an opportunity to make great leaps toward the radicalization of a new generation that will give leadership to the Black liberation movement of the 21st century".

Black studies was initiated in the 1960s as an expression of the Black power movement, and contained within it the main elements of the radical Black tradition of the African American people. This radical Black tradition has five aspects: *Panafrikanism, liberation theology, nationalism, feminism, and socialism*. These points of ideological focus redefined oppression, and mobilized resistance. At no point have black people in the US been without an ideological basis of self-defense. Ebbs in the struggle have led to a "turning inward" and produced ideological dogmatism, while dynamic periods of crisis and change have led to active ideological struggle in the form of "great debates" that have tended to dominate political discourse in the Black community.

The Great Debates

The great debate of the 19th century was "The Emancipation Debate" in which Black people explored the necessity of freedom from slavery, and clarified their three basic options: emigration to another country, negotiation of reforms, or fight for revolutionary change. In the end, it was the option that was chosen was for Black people to actively fight to free themselves. The debate led to action.

The great debate of the early 20th century was "the self-Determination Debate" led by WEB DuBois, Booker T Washington, and Marcus Messiah Gar-

vey. The focus of the debate was on a policy orientation for the Black community. DuBois stressed radical action for political rights, while Garvey and Washington argued for a more independent road of community development based on a nationalist paradigm.

Negro Studies Movement

Black intellectuals worked in segregated social institutions, with the radicals concentrated in schools, publications, and agencies for social action. This was the period of the "Negro Studies Movement." DuBois edited journals, published books and established a committed scholarship, such as *The Philadelphia Negro* (1889), *Black Reconstruction* (1935), and *The World and Africa* (1947). After becoming the first Black person to be awarded a Doctorate degree, DuBois established, at Atlanta University, the first comprehensive social science research program to focus on the Black experience.

This movement was given mass institutional form by the "father of Negro history", Carter G. Woodson. Like DuBois, he earned a PhD in History from Harvard University (1912), and then went on to become the greatest populariser of Historical studies in the black community. He founded Negro History Week in 1926, and in a publishing company he founded (Associated Publishers) he initiated a series of historical studies that remain classics in Black Studies. In fact his 1923 text *The Miseducation of the Negro* remains a best seller even today!

There were many other scholars who based their work outside of formal academic setting, in the community, both

because the mainstream refused to accredit their expertise, and because they in fact desired a mass Black audience anyway. J.A. Rogers published a column in the major Black newspapers combining little known facts with illustrations. Arthur Schombeg, a Black Puerto Rican bibliophile, utilized his personal collection to set up the world's greatest collection of books and materials on African peoples in the New York Public Library bearing his name.

And, Langston Hughes, went from community to community sharing his art and winning people to the literature being created by Black scholars and artists.

Finally out of the general radicalization of the 1930s depression, a group of Black Marxist-oriented Professors at Howard University formed the Joint Committee on National Recovery. This group cooperated with the Communist Party to form the National Negro Congress, a group that linked Black radicals to the organization of the CIO and Industrial Trade unionism. This was a short lived left tendency among Black intellectuals, but it was a precedent for things to come.

The Self-determination debate ended in the 1950s. The anti-communist hysteria of McCarthyism drove the left out of "public" politics, and the 1954 Supreme Court decision for the radical integration of public schools rejuvenated the civil rights movement and greatly overshadowed the nationalist paradigm.

Proletarianization

The underlining dynamic that led to the end of this debate was the proletarianization of Black labor. The demand for unskilled Black agricultural labor had been

undercut by the 1944 introduction of the mechanical cotton picker in the Delta of Mississippi. This gave a great impetus to the rural-to-urban migration, the greatest internal mass migration in the history of the USA. White people in the USA were urbanized shortly after 1910, while for Blacks this took place in the 1940s. Living in the city meant an industrialized environment if not a factory job, and this new economic condition forced a new social arrangement. The first generation of Black people born after this urban transformation began to experience great changes as part of their basic socialization. They experienced the 1954 Brown decision to racially integrate the schools as participants, which for them was an experience of jubilation second only to emancipation. They were the first generation to watch Black political protest on television, specifically, the Montgomery Bus boycott led by Martin Luther King (1955-1956) and the infamous struggle to integrate Central high School in Little Rock, Arkansas (1957-1958). Everyone saw what had been unspeakable, older Black men and women kicked and brutalized for claiming their right to citizenship.

From civil rights to Black Power

This generation became a force "for-itself" when it unleashed the students sit-ins from the Black colleges in the deep south (1960-1961). The Students Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) introduced a new level of consciousness into this struggle. Its success from the mid-1950s to the 1960s included not only changes in local segregationist practices, but important national legislation as well that which ended *de jure* segregation, specifically the civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

However, at the time of this national focus on the fight against racist segregation in the south, the Black proletarian communities in the urban north continued to experience the double-edged sword of *de facto* segregation and poverty. They broke out strong, not with non-violence but with massive urban insurrections, such as in Harlem, New York (1964), Watts, Los Angeles (1965), Chicago (1965), Newark (1967), and Detroit (1967).

As a result, the main arena of action shifted from the south to the north, from civil rights to Black power, and a new debate emerged that dominated political discourse in the Black community, "the Black Liberation Debate". This new debate was forced on to the national media when SNCC raised the slogan of *Black Power* on a protest march in Mississippi after James Meredith had been wounded by a racist assassin on June 6, 1966. But

the fact is that this debate had long been germinating in the north since the 1950s, and had heated up in community dialogues and confrontations between Black nationalist ideologues and militant civil rights activists.

Between King and Malcolm

The main personalities of this debate were generally acknowledged to be Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Both of these great leaders were expressions of the radical Black tradition. King was the undisputed spokesperson of the civil rights movement and Malcolm X was the embodiment of nationalism. They both shared a deep concern for Africa. It should be remembered that King attended the independence ceremonies of Ghana in 1957 as a guest of Nkrumah whereas Malcolm X made a tour of many African countries in the early 1960s. Other similarities between them included the fact that they were both ministers (though in different religions) and sons of Baptist ministers as well. Finally it must be said that neither was as outstanding as they might have been as advocates of a militant radical Black feminism.

Gates wants us to examine the text and not the context and Asante wants us to primarily concern ourselves with ancient Egypt for our orientation. Neither of these approaches helps to clarify the crisis facing Africa nor that facing the American people. Both represent an ideological retreat by a new Black middle class that has been unable to find the courage to link up with the masses of Black people fighting to survive

Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965, and in 1966 the Black Power slogan was raised. Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968, and during the 1970s great efforts were made to expand the Black middle class. This is the specific context for the origins of Black studies.

After King was killed there was a great increase in the college enrollment of Black youth, urban proletarian youth, usually the first in their family to go to college. They were thrust into the institutional racism of a 'white' college environment with few if any Black faculty members and staff and they revolted. They did not respond in the name of Martin Luther

King, rather they responded in the spirit of Malcolm X.

Malcolm had inspired the rebirth of a strong positive Black identity and a strong identification with Africa. Furthermore, his identification with Third World revolutionary movements especially China, Vietnam, Cuba and throughout Africa, greatly influenced the rebirth of a left-wing Black militancy. As a complex leader who embodied diverse set of beliefs, however he failed to live long enough to assist in building forms of united front action that could sustain an operational unity linking all Black militant activists together. This is a prerequisite for a revolutionary or radical movement.

In the aftermath of the mid-1960s northern urban insurrections and programmatic expressions of Black power the movement split into two wings 'the cultural nationalists' and the revolutionary nationalists'. The unified fight was against the racist university in fighting to create a Black studies program while the internecine fight was over which tendency was going to dominate in determining the content of Black studies and control the budget. Black activists won the first battle but the universities won the second one. Black studies programs were established but neither set of radicals could sustain their leadership and the academic mainstream has advanced its challenge for power and control once again - this time in Black face!

Black Studies Radicalism

The history of Black studies is now virtually 20 years old in most places. These years reflect a diversity of national, regional and local institutional dynamics. However the national trends are the best overall way to understand Black Studies because this is the context for local action.

The influence of the Black Panther Party and the Congress of African People set the general ideological climate for the early Black studies programme in the late 1960s and 1970s. This was a time of confrontation. At a meeting of the mainstream African Studies Association in Canada, the African-Americans in attendance rejected mainstream white leadership. This leadership had been tainted by the charge of unacceptable ties to the US state Department. Further, the Black power academic activists were no longer prepared to put up with this form of neo-colonial domination any longer. They simply protested and left.

There were two main ideological points; they no longer accepted the mainstream academic distinction between Africans on the continent of Africa and the African diaspora and they no longer accepted a politically neutral scholarship

To educate
the man is to
educate an
individual.

To educate
the woman is
to educate
and liberate
a nation



Malcolm X

instead wanted a committed scholarship designed to liberate and unite African peoples everywhere.

Challenging White supremacy

Clearly this new direction was antithetical to the mainstream and therefore a new organisation was developed. The African Heritage Studies Association (AHTSA) was founded in 1969 at Howard University. During this same year *The Black Scholar* was started in San Francisco, California and quickly became the main publication for all of Black studies. The main concern was to link theory and practice in the fight for Black liberation and therefore it played a role in tying together the activist and the academic both in struggle and in carrying out scholarship.

One of the main forms of struggle that emerged in this period was developing political, moral and material support for the liberation movements in Africa especially in the fight against Portuguese colonialism (Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique). Beginning with the establishment of Africa Liberation Day in 1972, as a major day of protest (following the lead of the OAU) a major focal point of unity was reached by the Nationalist and Pan-Africanist militants and a significant group of independent Marxist forces associated with the Black Worker Congress and the Peoples College.

A high point in the link between activists and Black studies came in 1974 when many of the key posts were abolished. This led to a series of joint meetings including a national forum at which a joint leadership spoke. However ideological differences over Marxism and radical activism led to a series of splits that fractionalized the movement nationally.

While this was going on another tendency was emerging. *The Journal of Black studies* was founded in 1970 at UCLA, and the National Council of Black Studies (NCBS) was later set up in 1976 at the University of Indiana. This was a step toward the professionalisation of Black studies, but in a very specific way. Both of these institutions were not created as part of the radical negation of the mainstream or through direct active

struggle. Neither of them has any links with militant activism at the community level. The more convenient connection here was with Black elected officials who were mobilized to provide perks and privileges.

An Ideological Retreat?

What happened to both AHTSA and NCBS came as a result of their moving into a niche that insulated them from the dynamics of the Black liberation movement. They fell into idealism, ideological dogmatism and a careerist machine of circulating leadership posts and awards among a small group of loyalists.

Their avoidance of the mainstream led to a counter attack by the academic mainstream who liquidated rebels through the 'tenure process', both making it difficult to get the PhD degree and making it difficult to get a 'permanent job'. Instead two distinct dynamics have emerged. On the one hand, a gradual process of hiring and tenuring a new generation of Black studies professionals more oriented to the mainstream is being developed as the main tendency. This has included many expatriates from African and Caribbean countries. On the other hand, is the development of Afrocentricity and the emergence of ideological dogmatism.

Afrocentricism

This distinction, between the new mainstream professionals and the Afrocentrists is revealed dramatically by Henry Gates at Harvard University and Molefi Asante at Temple University. Both rely on a theoretical orientation towards Africa. Gates in *The Signifying Monkey; A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (1988) wants to create a theory of critical reading as a tradition through the trope of Esu-Elegbara from Yoruba culture in Nigeria. He suggests this is linked through Exu (Brazil), Echu Elegua (Cuba) Papa Legba (Haiti) and the African-American 'Signifying Monkey'. Asante in *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (1990) posits ancient Egypt as the main point of departure to the field he calls Afrology, the true Black studies.

What unites both of these approaches is that they are not interested in the rela-

tionship between their ideas and the historical context of social and political conflicts in which they live and work. Gates wants us to examine the text and not the context and Asante wants us to primarily concern ourselves with ancient Egypt for our orientation. Neither of these approaches helps to clarify the crisis facing Africa nor that facing the American people. Both represent an ideological retreat by a new Black middle class that has been unable to find the courage to link up with the masses of Black people fighting to survive.

At this stage in Black studies the crisis exists because the intellectuals lack a clear radical critique of the society and program of action that links them with a fighting mass movement. The crisis is made worse because of the silence of progressive African intellectuals in the Black studies discourse

There is a left rump in Black studies that tries to maintain the committed scholarship of Dubois but it is not consolidated into an influential tendency at this historical juncture. There are many individuals but limited programmatic efforts. One notable exception is a Graduate Summer School in Black Studies starting in July 1992 at Northeastern University in Boston. Teaching will be done by A.M. Babu from Tanzania, G.G. Darah from Nigeria Osvaldo Cardenas from Cuba and a group of progressive African-Americans.

At this stage in Black studies the crisis exists because the intellectuals lack a clear radical critique of the society and program of action that links them with a fighting mass movement. The crisis is made worse because of the silence of progressive African intellectuals in the Black studies discourse. There is a critical need for a discourse in which everyone participates.

What is the debate that should be held in the 1990s? Why is there no connection between the radical debates in Africa and the Black studies discourse in the USA? How can we regroup and move forward a debate and coordination of action programs as well. The answer to these questions will determine whether Black studies intellectuals will continue to be relevant or will fall by the wayside. If we are to initiate a new long march, now is the time for us to begin. ■