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TO: Executive Board, National Council for Black Studies

FROM: Gerald McWorter (Abdul Alkalimat)

DATE: 2/28/84

RE: Resignation as Vice-Chairperson

This letter is the formal confirmation of my resignation as the Vice-Chairperson of the National Council for Black Studies. I am taking this opportunity to send this letter on the eve of the current elections because I am making a protest on a matter of principle. This open letter to NCBS is but a brief discussion of the issues involved. It is intended as a call to action for everyone who sincerely wants to rebuild a viable Black Studies Movement in the years and decades ahead.

I voiced my intentions to wage a campaign against this election or resign when the illegal actions which led to this were initiated. But there was some indication that the forces of good will on the Board wanted to prevent this injustice from happening. Few voices of opposition have been heard from publicly. Most of the board has remained silent. There is no middle ground.

I want to summarize the two main reasons why I decided some time ago not to launch a campaign and to resign. The issues must be clarified for all who want to know:

(1) The current election is illegal. The election in Chicago cannot and was not overruled by an explicit decision or vote by the membership. Under its constitution, NCBS conducted a legal election in Chicago on March 18, 1982 and the Executive Board validated this election during its annual July meeting in Princeton. The board also set up a committee to revise the constitution. The full committee never voted on the proposed revision, and its report was not mailed out to the entire membership prior to the national conference in Berkeley.

At the Berkeley, the constitutional reforms were rushed through a rather heated meeting of the board, and then introduced for the first time at a meeting of the general membership which was delayed until the board's approval was secured. Minutes later, a vote was taken amidst great confusion and several people expressed unreadiness--virtually no one had clarity as the chair rushed through the vote. Disagreement with this description can be clarified by reviewing the tape of the meeting or a transcript which the executive director (or I) can provide. It reveals that even at the last minute the chair interpreted the vote as not fully binding.

The main thing about the vote, however, is that it was ruled as retroactive by the Executive Board in the seclusion of the Educational Testing Service facility in Princeton, and cancelled the vote in Chicago in 1982. It is as if graduation requirements were changed and, rather than applying to the next class of entering students, were applied to the class nearing graduation. Or if a lowering of the speed limit is made retroactive and those who have ever exceeded the new limit were also guilty. This is preposterous! And this action by the leadership of NCBS is equally so. It is a flagrant violation of its constitution, and literally spits on the professional integrity of this organization.

(2) The main reason I decided to resign, however, was not the political matter described above. Such could be interpreted as crying over a political loss. My election in Chicago was legitimate and fair. And I am sure many would attempt to characterize the vote in Berkeley and the Princeton maneuvers as fair and democratic.

The most basic reason for my decision not to fight to retain the Presidency is that NCBS as it is now constituted is no longer viable and effective as the national Black Studies organization. It has lost the promise it once had and it appears to me that continuing to fight to aid in regaining this promise is futile.

I contend that the only lasting accomplishment of NCBS so far is the national report on curriculum standards. Though not published by the organization until two years after its passage, it has been popularized and utilized around the U.S. almost, in spite of the organization. The 6th Annual Conference in Chicago in 1982 is NCBS's model conference. This will be denied by some, but it is obvious to anyone who examines the materials from all NCBS conferences.

NCBS is not now on the cutting edge of any of the questions and issues that press upon us, or the Black community, including, regrettably, the importance of our own survival as Black Studies in the U.S. higher education. Here I am stressing the absolute necessity of raising the level of professionalism and productivity. My efforts in this regard have met repeated rebuffs from NCBS leadership, often without persistent effort, follow through, and concrete results by those who repeatedly stood in the way. In no way is this intended to minimize much important work going on in many local areas, but it is to emphasize the important role of a national organization if Black Studies is to effectively address national issues that affect us all.

I am not above criticism in my work, even the most scathing criticism if it is merited. A case in point is my failure to submit on time the financial report from the 1982 conference. The report submitted, however, was as detailed as any in the history of the organization. My effort to publish the proceedings from the 1982 conference was bold and aggressive. Perhaps there was some misunderstanding of my proposal, though part of it was adopted as board policy. But my intentions were not malicious. I sought to establish a precedent by having NCBS as one of the first Black scholarly organizations ever to produce full proceedings from such a significant conference in a timely fashion. Though the leadership objected, none of the members and scholars whose papers were included objected to this historic effort. Now nine years after the founding of NCBS, two years after Chicago, and a year after Berkeley, we await the regular publication of NCBS conference proceedings which have been so long promised.

In short, we are not above criticism and correction where we are in error. But we oppose criticism as a cover for idleness and donothingness which hampers the forward motion of Black Studies and Black people. NCBS is still not able to answer satisfactorily the question repeatedly posed by existing and potential members: "What do you get for your NCBS dues?"

We are working hard to achieve a higher level of professionalism and productivity as an alternative in Black Studies. (1) We uphold the essence of the Report on Curriculum Standards, and we will soon complete core curriculum texts to make this a living and viable resource. We have attempted to involve the leadership of NCBS in this effort. (2) We have developed a state of the art international newsletter for Black Studies call THE AFRO SCHOLAR. It is being widely circulated around the world. Several of my initiatives while on the board of NCBS--the draft conference handbook based on the experiences of the 1982 Chicago conference and The Guide to Scholarly Journals in Black Studies--have been widely used and even adopted by other professional organizations.

Our plan for trying to rebuild the Black Studies Movement is based on these two things and initiatives. We want to get in touch and talk with everyone who is interested in rolling up their sleeves and getting down on the basic work that has to be done. Those who will only consider the facts and the products of hard work will want to join our efforts if they desire to see concrete results.

As I have stated, I started to campaign to overturn this illegal election and rise to the chair as outlined in the constitution in force when I was elected by a very wide margin (more than 2 to 1) in Chicago. But it is clear to me now that such a struggle is not merited by the actions and potential of NCBS as it currently operates. I have therefore taken a stand and choose to walk away from NCBS now that it has refused to uphold even the minimal standards of professional integrity and productivity.

We intend to keep coming to these meetings, however, especially to share our continuing productivity for use, criticism, and improvement by serious colleagues. Colleagues associated with Peoples College and our work in Black Studies are here at this conference as we have been for more than 15 years--as participants in such important Black Studies developments as the Yale Symposium on "Black Studies in the University," the founding of the Institute of the Black World, and many others. We still want to work with all honest forces who are genuinely interested in rebuilding Black Studies. We want to realize the goal that we coined in 1975 for a California conference and now widely used in the field: **ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN BLACK STUDIES!**