

INTRODUCTION

When Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, it was a tragedy for the whole country. It was a tragedy and a crisis of special proportions for Black people in this country. Three reactions ran in rapid succession through all of the Black communities of the country. The first was a heightened sense of loneliness, hopelessness, and alienation. The feeling was quite general and quite generally expressed, that if the American, white racist society would not respond to the eloquent, moral, and scholarly work represented in the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., and his special pleadings on behalf of his people, and all humanity, then certainly life would be grim without him. The second type of reaction was rage expressed overtly by only a small proportion of the people who actually felt it, but still in sufficient proportions to cause a major crisis in many communities in the country. Following this sense and expression of rage was a third response which was perhaps more constructive. Black people in every community, and every social status, and in almost every type of organization, group or institution began to express the view that if white people could not take the initiatives to incorporate Black people in the society as equals under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., they were not likely to take these initiatives now and that, therefore, Black people must band together in spirit and action in order to take initiatives on their own behalf. The view grew rapidly and is still expanding throughout Black communities that no one Black or white leader or group of leaders will be able to deliver the Black people from their subordinate position in the social structure. The sense of commonness of status, condition, and future on the part of Black people was heightened. Thus, joint action among Black people on their own behalf has been intensified.

Among the institutions which became the targets of this concerted action and intensified demands were the educational institutions. They were perhaps more vehemently attacked than some other institutions in society, in part, because educational institutions have been more intransigent than economic and political institutions for example; but in major part, because Black people have come to view education as the major source of their achievement as a people. Thus, the universities, colleges, high schools and grade schools were approached with demands by Black students often in cooperation with Black faculties and community people and often in collaboration with large numbers of white students.

These demands have resulted in the establishment of Black Studies programs, departments, etc. all over the country. As a result of this plethora of programs and the geographical diversity, it was the opinion of many Black scholars that some mechanism should exist which would facilitate communications between these programs. This would allow us to share our common problems and seek common solutions in the interest of national unity and peoplehood.

REPORT ON BLACK STUDIES DIRECTORS SEMINAR

Sponsored by the Institute of the Black World
Atlanta, Georgia
November 7-9

On Friday, November 7, 1969 at approximately 10 o'clock, 35 Black Studies directors from the East, Midwest, Northwest, and Far West assembled at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia. These directors were present to discuss the problems they were experiencing in implementing Black Studies at their respective institutions. The Seminar was also held to acquaint these directors with the Institute of the Black World.

The seminar began with a welcome statement by Dr. Vincent Harding, Director of the Institute. He informed the directors that the Institute had as one of its primary areas of interest, the emerging discipline of Black Studies. He informed the directors that the Institute was committed to being of assistance to and assisted by their programs. That is, the Institute could serve as a clearinghouse of information about all Black Studies programs and personnel. It could offer assistance at some point in the near future in developing the problematical areas of curricula, course content, bibliographical materials, and periodic evaluations of the programs in existence. He stated further that one of the primary tasks which the Institute and its associates would undertake would be that of defining Black Studies, i.e. what it should be and where it should be going. Dr. Harding then outlined briefly the purpose of the Institute and how it came into being.

He stated that the Institute represented the culmination of a dream which grew out of his intellectual and emotional identification with the great Black intellectual giant, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois. He noted that Dr. DuBois had wanted to initiate 100 years of study of the Black experience from his base in Atlanta. In addition, Dr. DuBois had envisioned the Atlanta Center as the home of the Black University. Dr. Harding noted that the Institute was an initial step in the realization of this dream. Dr. Harding then proceeded to introduce the Institute's staff. One can see from the diverse range of interests represented by each staff member what types of activities the Institute will be involved in as well as its purpose and the purpose and function of Black Studies.

The first staff member introduced was William Strickland. Bill's major area of interest is policy studies. He noted that Black intellectuals and Black Studies must be about 1) redefining Black people's problems, 2) exposing the fallacies of white and "Negro" solutions to our problems, 3) after study and redefinition, we must develop strategies and "operationalizers" to implement the solutions we have arrived at, and 4) coming to the intellectual defense of our community. He noted further that we must re-evaluate our allies to determine those who can and cannot be trusted. And finally, we must contact our older Black radicals who for one reason or another are not in the country now. We must give our heroes their proper due. He concluded by noting that we are now in the first stage of our movement toward liberation--the re-analysis of our problems and proposed solutions by whites and "Negroes".

The next staff member introduced was Stephen Henderson. Steve is interested in developing and analyzing the cultural elements of our people--especially the blues and the concept of soul. He is now involved in attempting to re-structure the Black colleges' curricula in Humanities by saturating this area with Black courses. Another of his concerns is the grasping of the Black man's image from white men.

Following Steve Henderson, Dr. Harding introduced Joyce Ladner, a beautiful Black sociologist and the only female on the staff at present. Joyce indicated that she was here to fulfill a dream to initiate the establishment of a Black Empire. Her major areas of interests are: 1) the creation of a Black Sociology which involves the development of analytical tools and concepts which are of use to us in our study of our community, 2) conducting a Symposium on the Black family which will (a) critically analyze the "pathological" model found in the white literature, and (b) the creation of Black social policy derived out of our experiences in our communities as they exist; and 3) she is interested in studying the role of the Black woman in America and Africa.

The next staff member introduced was Sterling Stuckey. Brother Sterling is a historian who is interested in doing research in a number of areas. These include: 1) an oral history project because he feels that the folklore of Black people is at the base of Black literature, Black music, and Black history; 2) the documentation of the post-1954 period of the Black Liberation movement, 3) the documentation of our remaining intellectual Fathers, 4) writing Black History texts for high school and junior high school students, 5) researching the images of Africa in the minds of Black Americans, and 6) analyzing the cultural nature of white people. He is interested in demonstrating how the white man's bestial domination and subjugation of Black people has had the effect of destroying the man's humanity.

The next staff member introduced was Brother Chester Davis. This Brother's major area of interest is pre-college education. He is now concentrating his efforts toward the development of a new educational philosophy for Black children. His current areas of research include: 1) Black pre-college curriculum development, 2) the use of the Institute as a clearinghouse for those people dealing with the problems of Black education, 3) working with Negro colleges on teacher education. Brother Chet feels that we must extend our teaching techniques to include the Black children's community as a source of educational information. Black children must be taken from the classroom into their communities and note how what they are learning in the classroom is related to the conditions that exist in their community.

Before introducing the final staff member and speaker for the evening, Brother Vincent lead us in a beautiful Hymn. The words of the Hymn were, "We are building up a new world, Black Folks must be Strong". This song has the same format as the grand old Black Spiritual "We are Climbing Jacob's Ladder". This powerful spiritual set the tone for Brother Lerone Bennett's powerful spiritual discussion on the "Quest for Blackness".

It is impossible for this report to capture the spiritual force induced by this discussion, however, we shall present a few of the remarks which highlighted this presentation. Brother Lerone began by noting that the Institute of the Black World is for and about Black people. He then proceeded to define the topic of the discussion. He stated that Blackness is the truth which stands at the center of the universe. Thus, Blackness in our historical and contemporary

struggle is the search for this universal truth. Blackness, then, is becoming; it is not here yet. As he put it, "We are looking through a Black glass whitely." We have not found Blackness. Black Studies is the search for Blackness--for the truth; and there, in it, lies the key to our liberation. He went on to say that at this point in history, western philosophers do not know what man is or what potential man has. How could it when three-fourths of the men in the world are not allowed to be men? As you can see from these few illustrative comments, the Brother was into a very deep thing. Upon the completion of this dynamic and provocative speech, there was a moment of total silence. The spiritual impact was so strong that all of us were unable to move or stir. Then Sister Bernice Reagon, a beautiful sister who has recorded an album of Black music--spiritual and secular if such a dichotomy exists in Black music--initiated a beautiful, moving, soul stirring hymn. Need I say more about the first night?

On Saturday morning, November 8, we had our first panel presentation and discussion. The panel moderator was Brother Lerone Bennett. The panelists were Brother Armstead Robinson, a graduate student at Yale University and Brother Basil Mathews, Chairman of the Department of Sociology, Talladega College. Brother Armstead reported on the condition of Black Studies as it existed when he was gathering information last summer. Brother Basil presented a paper on "The Philosophical Basis of Black Studies Programs".

Brother Armstead began by noting that Black Studies--as he perceives it--does not exist. He stated that the Brothers and Sisters--students and faculty--are pimping Black Studies. One group for collective A's without studying and the other group for paychecks without presenting well thought out, creative, innovative approaches to the study of the Black experience. What he found, in essence, was by and large a group of academic charlatans. He went on to say that at this point in time, Black Studies is in a very precarious situation. It's only chance of survival seems to lie in the strength and tenacity of a few committed individual directors. The Brother went on to say that he did not see the type of seriousness and commitment necessary to realize the vast potential of Black Studies. If this situation does not change, Black Studies will fail and we will fail in our struggle. In other words, Black Studies must succeed. He also noted that for him Black Studies is a total educational experience of Black people--from the cradle to the grave. Thus, there are only marginal gains that can be attained from Black Studies on white campuses since college represents only a brief period in the total life experience of an individual. Brother Armstead went on to say that the ultimate goal of Black Studies--from his perspective--is to create a generation of Black people who are comfortable and secure in their Blackness. Thus, there would be no "identity crisis" and this generation of Black people could devote their total efforts toward the liberation of our people.

Brother Basil Mathews began his presentation by raising several provocative questions. For example, can Black Studies exist in a white environment? Can white teachers teach Black Studies? Can Black teachers teach Black Studies? How does Black Studies differ from white studies? Brother Mathews went on to

say that he did not have the answer to these questions. Yet, it is the solution to these questions which reflect the philosophical basis of Black Studies. He noted that the Black man in western culture is white, often biologically and always culturally!! Thus, if we are to realize the potential of Black Studies, we must broaden our scope to include the history and philosophies of Africa; and the West Indies could serve as an intermediary link between Blacks in America and Blacks in the Mother Country. This is so because Blacks in the West Indies and Latin America have retained more of their African culture than Blacks in America. Thus, if we study the history, culture, and philosophy of these Black people, we can gain some insights into African culture as well as some understanding as to what happened to our forefathers who landed on the shores of the U. S. The consequences of the slave experience can be grasped more extensively so that we will know where we are and what caused us to be there (here?).

This session was terminated after much discussion. We should add that the Institute is planning to publish a transcript of the Seminar which will be sent to the institutions which participated. This transcript should be available between now and Christmas. It will include all the papers presented at the Seminar.

At 12:30, November 8, we had the second panel presentation and discussion. The moderator for this session was Brother Chester Davis of the Institute. The panelists were Brother James Turner, Director of the Afro-American Institute at Cornell University and our own Brother Andrew Billingsley, Acting Coordinator of Ethnic Studies here at Berkeley. Brother Turner spoke of the situations of both Cornell and Northwestern since he was involved in both and Brother Billingsley discussed the Ethnic Studies situation here at Berkeley.

Brother Turner began by comparing the situation with what went down at Cornell. He noted that initially at Northwestern, the Black students were not sure what they wanted. They felt dissatisfied and discontent because there was nothing at the University--including their classroom work--which reflected their presence. It was like they existed but did not exist. So they decided to do something about that situation. We all know that story.

However, once the University acceded to the students' demands, the real hassle began. The Black Students were asking, initially, just for courses with "Black in" the description, i.e. Blacks in the Civil War, etc. The point that Brother Turner was trying to make was that initially Black Students had only a very vague ambiguous notion of what they wanted. Yet, as the whites reacted by attempting to control what the Black Students wanted, the Black Students became more aware of what it was they wanted. At least, they knew what they didn't want, which was white control over their courses, and their choice of instructors. This situation was different from that of Cornell. There the Black Students had a very good idea of what they wanted. The hassle developed around the issues of control, implementation, and finances. Brother Turner concluded by indicating that their program had been able to "rip off" most of the things they had demanded and that the program was moving along fairly well.

Brother Billingsley began by raising some crucial questions. They were, 1) What do we offer as an alternative to the educational standards, criteria of evaluation of students and teachers, and techniques of teaching? 2) How do we get our students to understand the seriousness and complexity of the problems we are confronted with? Brother Billingsley then proceeded to discuss the situation of Black Studies here at Berkeley. He focused on the problems we have been confronted with: 1) lack of adequate funds, 2) lack of adequate facilities, 3) student apathy, 4) difficulty in getting personnel--faculty and staff.

The discussions after this panel presentation were mostly problem-oriented. That is, the Directors presented the problems they had experienced and how they had solved them or were attempting to solve them. Since this was the general format of the other panels, except the final one on evaluation, we will list the title of the panel and the panelists. We will then present a brief summary of the types of problems discussed as these problems proved to be pervasive and overlapping.

The next panel discussion began at 6 o'clock, November 8. The panel focused on the problems and strategies of staffing and curricula. This session's moderator was Stephen Henderson of the Institute. The panelists were: 1) Brother Robert Johnson, Director of Black Studies, Indiana University; 2) Brother Sterling Stuckey, Institute of the Black World; and 3) Sister Lillian Anthony, Director of the Department of Afro-American Studies, University of Minnesota.

At 10 o'clock, November 8, the panel focussing on the problems and strategies of funding and autonomy commenced. The moderator for this panel was Brother William Strickland of the Institute. The panelists discussed: 1) Staffing: Most of the directors had and were continuing to have problems with finding honest, sincere, creative staff people. As noted previously, a number of "qualified" people are pimping our Black Studies programs. Another problem in staffing was that of getting the people hired and accepted by white administrators; 2) Autonomy: Most of the directors felt that white administrators were distrustful of Black Studies programs. Thus, they attempted to control the programs through various bureaucratic strategies, i.e. allocating inadequate funds, withholding approval of staff and personnel appointments, allocating less than the desired or necessary space for offices and classrooms, withholding accreditation of classes, etc. ad infinitum; 3) Curriculum: Most of the directors admitted that their programs, regardless of structure, were mostly random offering, "Black in" courses. Most of the programs simply had not had enough time to develop a comprehensive, well-organized curriculum which was based on some goal or objective. Most of their energies to this point had been concentrated on surviving; 4) Black Students: This proved to be a pervasive problem which was unexpected by most of the directors. It was assumed that since students asked for the programs they would take them seriously. Apparently most Black students do not. Directors, almost universally, reported that students were refusing to study using the rationale of "that's the white man's thing". It was concluded that this may be the case. However, if we want to develop alternatives, greater amounts of time energy and creative ability are required, not apathy or indifference. It was, also, pointed out that when Black students are in white classes, they do the white

man's traditional, irrelevant work. Thus, it seems that the projected goals of Black Studies as set forth by the students themselves and the reality of their behavior in class negate or contradict each other. It was noted that this type of behavior could stifle and kill Black Studies and seriously impede the struggle for Black liberation.

The final panel discussed procedures for the evaluation of Black Studies programs. The moderator for this panel was Sister Joyce Ladner of the Institute. The panelists were: 1) Brother Ed Beckham, Associate Provost at Wesleyan University; 2) Brother Douglas Davison, a graduate student here at Berkeley; and 3) Brother Roy Bryce-Laporte, Director of Black Studies at Yale University. This panel emphasized the necessity for constant evaluation and research of Black Studies programs by Black people. This is necessary in order to insure the respective institutions that their programs are accomplishing what they said were their goals and objectives locally, and to note if these local goals and objectives coincide with the goals and objectives inherent in the concept Black Studies. That is, the concept of Black Studies has imbedded in it certain goals and objectives--the ultimate of which is the liberation of Black people. This concept has not been precisely defined, but we do have an understanding of the things we do not want Black Studies to stand for. As our understanding of Black Studies and the goals of the Liberation became clearer and more precise, we will be able to define and implement Black Studies programs more effectively.

On Sunday afternoon, November 9, the Seminar assembled for the last time to discuss the necessity for future meetings, and to evaluate this meeting. It was the general consensus that this had been a fruitful meeting and that we should have more.

The Seminar was terminated after a very moving reading of Brother Vincent Harding's forthcoming paper entitled "Beyond Chaos". Brother Harding noted that we have to determine the ultimate goals of education--education for what? Are we talking about education for the creation of a new society for all, for Blacks, or for Africa redeemed? Once we determine what our goals are, we can determine where, and what context is best for our educational institutions. Thus, Brother Harding noted further we are at the first level of struggle. We are struggling now to see what it is that we have to struggle for. This often results in chaotic times. However, Brother Harding admonished us to remember the words of Trueblood in Ralph Ellison's literary classic The Invisible Man. In the novel there is a passage between one Mr. Norton (white eastern businessman trustee) and Trueblood. Mr. Norton was astonished at the chaotic experiences and conditions that Trueblood had related to him. Mr. Norton thus exclaimed to Trueblood, "You have lived in chaos and you weren't destroyed?" As Black people we have inherited chaos, we live in chaos, and it seems like it's going to be that way for some time. But remember Brothers and Sisters, we have to "feel all right". We were born in struggle, we live in struggle. At this point in history, Blackness is struggle. So, feel all right!! Right On!

CONCLUSION

The conference was very fruitful and we are sure that every participant left stronger in his commitments to the struggle, for that is necessary for those who are "Disciples of Blackness". We all must be, if Blackness is to triumph and it will and must. However, we feel that there were some areas which needed further discussion. One notable area of omission was the exclusion of Black Studies directors at predominantly white institutions in the South and Southwest; the University of North Carolina has a Black Studies program, Florida A & M, and Vanderbilt, to name a few. Another area not fully discussed has to do with the Institute's role and function. Brother Herman Blake noted that Black scholars should not use our communities as laboratories for research in the manner of white scholars. But, that we should be primarily concerned with performing some service to our communities while doing the actual research. The service should possible take priority over the research process. We feel that this conception of research should be discussed more fully and possible methods of implementation developed, if concerned Black scholars accept this perspective.

We departed firmly convinced that Black people, as a people, constitute the last best hope for civilizing our society. Assuming this, the analysis, the understanding, and the appreciation of the Black experience in historic, contemporary and future perspective, may help us to preserve and enhance this sense of Black Peoplehood which is emerging. For, surely the experience of Black people in this society is a most amazing testimony to the strength, adaptability, resilience and capacity for survival and growth, which is the essence of the human potential. This experience and this lesson has evolved in the midst of the most hostile, indifferent and inhumane society man has ever known. At the center of this Black experience, and largely responsible for its success, has been the Black community. Rather than continue to describe the Black community as if it were a negative "pathological" experience and causal nexus for the difficulties which Black people experience at the hands of a racist, militarist, colonialist, hostile and indifferent society, we would all learn much more and civilization might have a better chance of rebirth if we, as professional educators, could lead the way to a new analysis, understanding and appreciation of the Black community and the contributions it has made to the long historic stream of Black Peoplehood and its potential for the reformation of the whole society. Thus, Black is Beautiful! Black is Strong! Black is Truth! Black is Good! and the Black community is the essence of the Black Experience.

CAN YOU DIG IT!!