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IBW and Education for Liberation
IBW AND

EDUCATION FOR LIBERATION

With an IBW historical overview by
Vincent Harding

and an essay by Lerone Bennett, Jr.

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INSTITUTE OF THE BLACK WORLD
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Revised Second Edition
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Preface to the Revised Second Edition

When this Black Paper No. 1 first appeared in April, 1970, it bore the title, The Challenge of Blackness. Later its theme was expanded and formed the basis of Lerone Bennett's book of the same name, published by Johnson Publications.

The original Black Paper has been out of stock for some time, but as demand for it is still great we are happy to publish this revised second edition. It contains a brief postscript which brings IBW's history up to date, but its text is otherwise unchanged.

Under its new title, IBW and Education for Liberation, it becomes part of the series of Black Papers which the Institute of the Black World now publishes jointly with Third World Press.

Atlanta, Georgia
August, 1973

IBW
INTRODUCTION

It is almost axiomatic that many of the significant documents of Black struggle in America - like the documents of authentic movements toward freedom everywhere - grow out of specific and concrete moments of confrontation and need. So it is with The Challenge of Blackness.

On the evening of November 7, 1969, Lerone Bennett stood before a small group of Black Studies Directors and consultants gathered in Atlanta and set forth this statement. The situation was electric, filled at once with expectation and no little apprehension. For most of the Directors had just begun their first academic year in the maelstrom of the struggle for Black education on white campuses. They had come to Atlanta at the invitation of the Institute of the Black World, and — even so early in the year — they already nursed a score of wounds, recognized a strange set of confusions and betrayals on their campuses, and sought more answers than they could ever expect.

It is not the purpose of this Introduction to re-live that seminar (the first of its kind in the nation), for its results will soon be available elsewhere - and a portion of its spirit was evoked in the February, 1970 issue of Ebony. But it is essential to identify the context. The Challenge of Blackness was a personal distillation and clarification by Lerone Bennett of the collective experiences of the staff of the Institute. It was an attempt to begin a creative encounter among that staff, its Associates and the Directors of some 35 Black Studies programs.

These persons had been invited to Atlanta because the Institute, then only three months into its own full operation, had already identified the issue of Black education on white campuses as one of its single concerns. During the previous summer a task force of Black students, faculty and others had interviewed persons and examined the documents related to some 200 Black Studies programs. We then attempted to identify that very small segment which seemed to hold some clear promise as possible models on which the thousands of Black students in northern schools could build in their movements towards an education appropriate to our struggle. Essentially, the Directors who were invited to the seminar represented that small group of programs, scattered in schools from Massachusetts to California.
The concept of Black Studies had already come under attack from a variety of sources: whites and Negroes who tended to fear its political implications (as opposed, of course, to the political implications of White Studies), and Black persons who feared the power of the system to co-opt the still undefined field if it were placed within too easy reach of whites. Other Black persons considered most of the projected programs - at least as they were being publically outlined - as totally irrelevant to the needs of the Black community outside the campus.

Brother Bennett attempted there, and attempts here, not so much to answer these arguments as to set the larger philosophical stage for the struggle to define our own experience - including the struggle for an authentic Black Studies. At the same time he also attempts to outline briefly the role of the Institute in such an authentic context. The rest of this Introduction is largely an expansion of that aspect of his essay.

The idea of the Institute grows naturally out of Bennett's declaration that “we believe in the community of the black dead and the black living and the black unborn. We believe that that community has a prior claim on our time and our talents and our resources, and that we must respond when it calls.” The IBW came into existence as a result of our commitment to the hopes and plans of the dead yet living fathers in the Black intellectual community, most notably W.E.B. DuBois. Based as we were in the Atlanta University Center schools, it was not difficult for us to remember and recount his work at the beginning of the century toward a research center which would develop a hundred-year study of the Black Experience.

Beginning in the fall of 1967 Stephen Henderson (then chairman of the Department of English at Morehouse) and I talked through many a long night about the ways in which the work of DuBois could find a renaissance in the context of the steadily growing demands that the Negro Colleges and Universities become Black-oriented institutions. Encouraged by a number of brothers elsewhere (including Lerone Bennett), we began to put some of the thoughts on paper, suggesting the possibility of an Institute for Advanced Afro-American Studies in Atlanta, perhaps as part of the Atlanta University Center.

It was at that moment that every thought was shattered (and some where reshaped) by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Another brother, a special, unmatched brother, had joined the all-too-large community of the Black
Martyr-dead, but the intensity of the living community's response could not be buried. Across the nation, the revived interest in the study of Black life and culture - which had been given peculiar impetus by the presence of Malcolm - became with the murder of King a clamorous demand, a special focal point for all the Black student groups on hundreds of campuses.

Almost immediately after the assassination Henderson and I attempted to draw the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Atlanta University Center schools together in a set of demands on the Black and white leaders of the nation. We developed the concept of a "Martin Luther King, Jr. Confrontation-Forum" which would bring the leaders of the Black Community across the nation to Atlanta to speak honestly to Black students about their own sense of the Black Agenda for the post-MLK era. The white Presidential aspirants were to be called back to Atlanta to speak not in the platitudes of funeral marches but in the hard, solid words demanded by an angry black community. For reasons too lengthy to elaborate here, by June, 1968 the plan had failed - partly as a result of the assassination of Robert Kennedy and the hesitation of others. Nevertheless, the idea was a forerunner of the Institute's concern for the setting of a Black Agenda and an intimation of its demands that Black education and Black politics be inextricably joined towards the liberation of Black people. The experience of those months was also a reminder of the way in which DuBois had grown disillusioned with the idea that knowledge and education are in themselves efficacious for freedom. It kept us alerted to the constant need for organized, political action as a context for the development of such research as we planned.

Soon after the funeral of Martin King, I was approached by the Widow to take leadership in the creation of the Martin Luther King Library Documentation Project - planned as the major documentation center for the post-1964 Movement. I eventually went on a part-time schedule at Spelman College, where I was chairman of the Department of History and Sociology. It seemed clear to me that we needed now to live in that terrible tension which expects destruction tomorrow but which builds nevertheless for our grandchildren. In the course of developing a Documentation Center it became clear that a larger, multi-faceted, living Memorial would be an even more appropriate remembrance of a man whose life had so gripped the nation and the world. It was in the midst of those discussions of a larger Memorial Center, late in the summer of 1968, that I proposed to Mrs. King and others that the Institute for Advanced Afro-American Studies be included as a part of
the King Memorial Center. There was immediate and enthusiastically positive response to the idea.

By that time Stephen Henderson and I had been joined by others in our work of conceptualising such an Institute. Gerald McWorter, one of the most brilliant young black scholars in the country, was coming from Fisk to teach sociology at Spelman. A. B. Spellman, the poet and foremost authority on jazz, was also in Atlanta and would soon begin an all-too-brief teaching career at Morehouse. Council Taylor, one of the handful of gifted Black anthropologists, was visiting for the summer and the 1968-69 academic year in the Atlanta University Center. On a commuting basis, William Strickland, former director of the Northern Student Movement, also shared the task. Together we became the official Planning Staff of the Institute, now a projected element of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center. Later Lawrence Rushing of the Atlanta-based Southern Education Program joined us.

By the fall of 1968 we had produced the first full draft of our proposal for what the Institute should be. By that time, too, we had already run into a variety of difficulties in our negotiations towards some logical working relationships with the schools of the Atlanta University Center. The out-spoken commitment on the part of several of us towards radical change, towards Black solidarity and towards Black control of Black institutions gave many persons a great deal of difficulty. Then when two members of our planning staff were deeply involved in a lock-in of the trustees from several of the Atlanta University Center schools - partly in order to raise profound issues about the future of the Center - the Planning Staff of the still a-borning Institute came under severe attack. This time it emanated not only from the Atlanta University Center, but also from the Board of Directors of the King Center - two of whom had been among the locked-in AU Trustees.

By that time the Institute Planning Staff had proposed to the Board a Governing Council which was accepted in toto. It includes Walter F. Anderson, Margaret Walker Alexander, Lerone Bennett, Horace Mann Bond, Robert Browne, John Henrik Clarke, Dorothy Cotton, Ossie Davis, St. Clair Drake, Katherine Dunham, Freddye Henderson, Vivian Henderson, Tobe Johnson, Julius Lester, Frances Lucas, Jesse Noel, Rene Piquion, Eleo Pomare, Pearl Primus, Benjamin Quarles, Bernice Reagon, William Strickland, Councill Taylor, E. U. Essien-Udom, C. T. Vivian, Charles White, and Hosea Williams. (That Council helped move us towards a name which could be more descriptive of our purposes: The Institute of the Black World.)
Part of the ensuing struggle focused on the powers and the relationships between the Board of Directors of the Center and the Governing Council of the Institute.

In the course of the controversy, the Planning Staff was pressed to reexamine certain basic assumptions concerning its mutually shared political and philosophical views, concerning its relationship to the King Center and a variety of related issues. As a result of that staff discussion, by the end of the summer of 1969, three members of the Planning Staff (McWorter, Spellman, and Rushing) had decided to resign. However it was clear to us all that the resignations were not an example of conflict between “good” and “bad” guys. Rather a group of committed Black men had decided, for the time being, in an atmosphere of mutual respect, to try different pathways in the long struggle. Indeed, we all agreed that we would attempt to stay in close touch with one another and to compare notes on the varying directions we had chosen, always keeping open to the possibility of new insights coming from the brothers who had chosen a different way.

When the fall began the remaining members of the Planning Staff were joined by four additional senior staff persons, to make an operational senior research staff of seven persons: Lerone Bennett (History), Chester Davis (Pre-College Education), Joyce Ladner (Social Science Research), William Strickland (Policy Studies); Sterling Stuckey (History) and me. By that time the struggle of the previous months had clarified issues of authority, autonomy and control within the King Center. At the same moment the continuing staff and Governing Council were constantly experimenting with the degree to which the varieties of opinions within the Black experience could be brought together in a real unity of work and commitment.

Meanwhile, the summer research seminar on Black Studies had carved out its projected task of surveying the programs across the country. It attempted to understand the context in which these programs were developing (i.e. their relationship to the surrounding Black community, their sense of self-definition and direction, and the political struggles - of every kind - surrounding them). The Black Studies Directors Seminar in November grew largely out of that work.

Since the November seminar the Institute has continued to move towards a definition of its own best directions. It has made painful mistakes on a variety of administrative, political and personal levels. At the same time a certain shape seems to
be developing. The focal commitment of the IBW is still to respond to the need of the peoples of African descent to control the definitions of our experience - past, present and future.

The main burden of our historical research is on the earlier struggles of Black peoples towards manhood, freedom and liberation from European domination. The focus of our analysis of the present situation is on the search for an unromantic, systematic understanding of our own colonized condition in America and elsewhere so that we may move to reshape it out of a position of authentic knowledge and strength. Our planning towards the future places much emphasis on the development of the educational and political systems which will prepare our children and build their community for their phase of the long struggle. So the communion among the Black dead, the Black living and the Black unborn goes on. (So, in turn, we struggle in the Institute to move from the privatism of western intellectual work towards that collective vision which must inform the creativity of all oppressed people.)

In even more concrete terms, since the November Seminar we have invited Margaret Walker and the late Horace Cayton (his lecture in Atlanta was one of his last public appearances) to share publically and privately their reflections on their own work, on the life and work of their intimate friend, Richard Wright, and on the current state of the Black community in America. C. L. R. James, one of the major historians and theoreticians of the struggles of African people, spent two weeks in residence and offered our first Annual W. E. B. DuBois lectures. (These will be published as part of our series of Black Papers.) Meanwhile, Harry Haywood, one of the key Black revolutionary thinkers and organizers in the 1930's and 1940's, is in residence, and is - with the assistance of Bill Strickland - working on an autobiography. Beyond these more structured visits there is a constant flow of students and other members of the Black community passing through the doors of the Institute seeking relationships, assistance and direction. We are often painfully aware of our inadequacy to meet any of those needs.

On January 17, 1970, the Saturday after Martin King's birthday, the official Opening of the Institute took place, bringing to Atlanta Black people from all over the nation and several parts of Africa and the West Indies for a “Celebration of Blackness.” Its coalescing of art and politics, its gathering of so many of the varieties and gifts of black people, was a statement of hope concerning the future of the Institute, a reflection on some of the lessons it had learned.
Since that time the central collective work of the IBW has been on the preparation and organization of a major volume, tentatively titled *Black Studies and the Struggle for Black Education*; and on the planning for a series of Black analysis and strategy sessions focused on the development of a Black Agenda for the rest of this decade, and beyond. At the same time, Senior Fellows are working on such individual and collective research and writing projects as: "The Meaning of Martin Luther King, Jr.," "The Search for a Religion of Blackness," "Black Radicalism in America," "Black Teachers and the Struggle for Black Education," "Racism and the Concept of Integrated Education," "A Critical Anthology of Blues Poetry," "The Black Family and Social Policy," "Black People in the Cities in the Seventies," "Black Womanhood," "Toward a Theory of Black Political Economy," and a multi-volumed *Dictionary of Black Biography*.

A number of semester-long research seminars have grown out of these research projects, and students from the Atlanta University Center and elsewhere participate. Outside of the A. U. Center, a major link has been forged between the Institute and the Black students and faculty of Wesleyan University in Connecticut. Other ties are continually being established with Black people on a variety of northern campuses. Negotiations are now in process for a set of relationships with Howard University which may have profound implications for the future of Black education. In the midst of all this, the Institute has had to struggle to stay alive financially, depending on a variety of Black and white sources of funding while it devised strategies and approaches for building the broadest possible base of support in the Black community.

We assume, however, that struggle of ever kind is central to our heritage and that there is no blackness without it. This was certainly the experience of our fathers; it is the central message of the present moment, and it is a focal point of the legacy we shall leave to our children.

The Institute of the Black World exists to develop that Black legacy so that we shall not be ashamed to pass it on. But it exists even more to enter with our brothers into the coming phase, the phase beyond survival, to participate in the movement towards prevailing. That commitment and that struggle are at the heart of Lerone Bennet's *The Challenge of Blackness*.

Vincent Harding, Director
Institute of the Black World
Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center
Atlanta, Georgia
March, 1970
IBW AND EDUCATION FOR LIBERATION

(Note: From Bennett: The Challenge of Blackness, Chicago: Johnson Publications, 1972.)

The Institute of the Black World is a center for defining, defending, and illustrating blackness.

The Institute, as its name suggests, is by, of, for, and about the Black peoples of the world. This means that the Institute is about the truth of this world. For we see blackness in America merging with the blackness and the browning of the Third World and becoming the world. Which is another way of saying that blackness is a truth which stands at the center of the human experience, and that all who reflect the rays of that dazzling darkness reflect a truth which is close to the truth of man. For if truth, as Jean-Paul Sartre noted, is the perspective of the truly dispossessed, then the black man is the truth or close to the truth.

We of the Institute of the Black World believe that the black man is the truth or close to the truth, that blackness constitutes the truth of the truth, and that Black Studies is the revelation of that truth and the search for the true meaning of blackness.

What is the true meaning of blackness? It is too soon to say. Let us say, provisionally, that blackness is that universe of values and attitudes and orientations which rises, like dew, from the depth of our ancestral experience and pulls us toward the distant shores of our destiny. Let us say, provisionally, that it is also a totalizing and enveloping force, an ambiance, and a milieu. But let us also say that there are depths beneath the depths in blackness and that the first challenge of blackness is the challenge of defining blackness. We believe that this challenge will require the long and careful collaboration of many minds, and that we can no longer afford the luxury of doing our own little things in our own little private pastures. By this we mean to say that we believe in the community of the black dead and the black living and the black unborn. We believe that that community has a prior claim on our time and our talents and our resources, and that we must respond when it calls.
We have come together in the Institute of the Black World because we believe at this particular moment that the exigencies of blackness require a collective and communal effort to define and control our experience, and from within that perspective we say that the first challenge of blackness is the challenge of defining it. That challenge, of course, raises the whole question of agency. Who is going to define? We say, without reserve or apology, that blacks must define and control blackness.

As we look back on our own experiences, and as we read the reports from various colleges, we see the extraordinary potential of Black Studies. But we also see blackness and Black Studies threatened by politicians, conservative administrators, and the hostility of the white culture structure. We also see the bad faith of some Negroes who don’t believe we mean what we say, and the indifference of some students and teachers who want to play. So we think we owe it to black men and women, now dead, and to children yet unborn to come together at this crucial hour to pool our experiences and our collective knowledge. But let me say here at the very beginning that the Institute of the Black World does not say that it has the truth, but that it is seeking the truth. We believe that no one man has the answer, but we believe that all of us, working together, can produce an answer.

I will not anticipate the results of the collective quest, but I will say that blackness is a challenge to our will and determination and vision. The Institute of the Black World is moving to meet the challenge on six levels.

We are moving, first of all, to create the basic tools, the organic conditions and possibilities, for in-depth work in the field of Black Studies. And by all this, we simply mean that we are trying to create the bibliographies, the card indexes, the tapes and the special collections of books and documents that will make further work possible and profitable.

We are moving, secondly, to create a new pool of clarifying concepts which will permit us to see and handle our own reality. In our opinion, the question of concepts is decisive. The overriding need of the moment is for us to think with our own mind and to see with our own eyes. We cannot see now because our eyes are clouded by the concepts of white supremacy. We cannot think now because we have no intellectual instruments, save those which were designed expressly to keep us from seeking, from pondering our history and our future.
It is necessary for us to develop a new frame of reference which transcends the limits of white concepts. It is necessary for us to develop and maintain a total intellectual offensive against the false universality of white concepts, whether they are expressed by William Styron or Daniel Patrick Moynihan. By and large, reality has been conceptualized in terms of the narrow point of view of the small minority of white men who live in Europe and North America. We must abandon the partial frame of reference of our oppressors and create new concepts which will release our reality, the reality of the overwhelming majority of men and women on this globe. We must say to the white world that there are things in the world that are not dreamt of in your history and your sociology and your philosophy.

Carter Woodson raised the question in the thirties (in *The Mis-Education of the Negro*), and it needs to be raised once again: "By what right do we, the victims of Western civilization, grant a privileged position to the values and concepts of a civilization which defines us as anti-values?"

Blackness is a challenge because it raises the whole question of values and because it tells us that we must rise now to the level of teaching this profoundly ignorant and profoundly sick society. And in order to do that, we must create a new rationale. We must create a new rationality, a new way of seeing, a new way of reasoning, a new way of thinking. Our thinking, and the scholarship which undergirds that thinking, is Europe-centered, white-centered, property and place-centered. *We see now through a glass whitely,* and there can be no more desperate and dangerous task than the task which faces us now of trying to see with our own eyes.

Beyond all that, we must redefine the whole concept of knowledge within the perspective of our own needs and interests. Contrary to the European assumption, knowledge is action, not contemplation. There can be no knowing without doing. And to know, that is to say, to *dig,* is to *do.* Knowledge that is only contemplation is at best of aesthetic value, which is to say, that it is useless in a situation of oppression.

We must conceive, conceptualize and fight for a new rationality based on a new philosophy of education, conceived broadly as an instrument for social and personal change.

A new philosophy of education would charge scholars with the responsibility of finding solutions for poverty, war, injustices and oppression.
A new philosophy of education would conceive of black schools as centers of applied knowledge and guides to action, would relate learning to black culture and the black community, and would develop the capacities for growth in the context of the live problems of the day.

We are moving to deal with that question. We are moving to deal with the whole question of philosophy and orientations and concepts. And we are moving, thirdly, toward a new relation to the black community, for we believe that the black community must help define what an intellectual is and what intellectuals should do. Not only that: we believe that the black community is an informal educational medium which must be utilized to transform the thinking and acting of black Americans.

Our fourth concern is the creation of a new cadre of organic intellectuals who will live and think within a perspective of blood and pain and want.

Our fifth concern is the whole question of the institutionalization of the black experience. On this level, the challenge of blackness is the challenge of making blackness a presence in the land, the challenge of making it more than a theme for rapping, the challenge of giving it visible body and form so that black people can plug into it and absorb the energy we need to fulfill our purpose.

We are moving, finally, to redefine American experience in order to remake American society.

We are committed to these major tasks and others. And we are committed within the perspective of struggle. We reject the traditional distinction between culture and politics. We say that struggle and scholarship, the streets and the classrooms, demonstrations and images are - and must be - related. We say further that there is a politics of thinking as well as a thinking of politics, and that to teach the good society without trying to make the existing bad society good is to teach and accept the bad society. And so we are not hung up over the European distinction between politics and culture. We have returned to the wisdom of our African fathers, who recognized that men also vote by dancing, singing fighting, and making love.

Let me say that we are committed to these tasks because we believe blackness is a total challenge, and because of the fact that at a certain level, basic conflicts of interests express
themselves as conflicts of rationalities. We see the rationality of blackness as a total challenge to the world. Out of our arrogance and ignorance, we speak of the Renaissance, which should be called the white Renaissance. For the Renaissance of man, the Renaissance of all mankind, has not yet come. We do not know yet what man is. How could we know, when three-fourths of mankind have been excluded from the definition of man? The role of the black man at this critical moment is to join hands with all the "wretched of the earth" in order to define for the first time the full dimensions and the full height of man.

And that means that everything is up for grabs, that everything remains to be said and done. In the field of history, for example, people are always talking about "integrating" Negro history into American history. What these people don't recognize is that American history does not now exist and that it is impossible to integrate into a mythical whole that was created by ignoring the two most essential parts, the African and the Indian elements. So we are obliged to remind America that American history does not exist, and that it cannot be created if we do not start all over again and view American history from the standpoint of the Blacks and Reds. The method of nowadays in history is to take a white syllabus and create an instant Negro syllabus by adding the words, "The Negro in." For example: "The Negro in the Colonial Period" or "The Negro in the Westward Movement." But the Negro did not live in some of these periods. In fact, it is even doubtful whether whites lived in them. George Washington and George Washington's slaves lived different realities. And if we extend that insight to all the dimensions of white American history, we will realize that blacks lived a different time and a different reality in this country. And the terrifying implications of all this (terrifying to whites) is that there is another time, another reality, another America, if you please.

We cannot deal with black experience until we realize that the black experience raises fundamental questions about the total historical process, and that it requires a radical re-evaluation of our ideas about history and man. In its essence, the black experience is a radical re-appraisal of a society from the standpoint of the men on the bottom. And this means that blacks have experienced violation and violence and exploitation as their truth and as the truth of the American experience. Because of who they are and what they have been through, because of the irrefutable evidence of their scars, they are the creative negation of all the placid myths about American society. For if black reality is not what America said it was, then obviously America is not what it claims to be. Blackness is a challenge, then, to America and to all its institutions and values.
We can see that challenge in its clearest form in the educational field. For blackness raises total questions about the meaning of education in a situation of oppression. And in the light of that challenge we can see clearly that an educator in a situation of oppression is either an oppressor or a liberator. I am not speaking now of subjective dispositions and attitudes; I am suggesting that this is an objective requirement of the system. And I am suggesting that blackness confronts the cruel exigency by raising dangerous questions about the meaning of education in America. Blackness is a challenge to the educational system because it is impossible for an institution to have a viable Black Studies program if that institution does not confront itself and re-evaluate what it is doing and what it has done to perpetuate racism and ignorance. And this requires a total confrontation with the meaning and the limitations of white-oriented education.

On the level of race, the white-oriented educational system assumes the superiority of whites and their system of values and includes blackness only as a negative pole of reference. In white-oriented schools, black are taught to despise themselves and their possibilities. In white-oriented schools, we are educated away from ourselves - away from our people, away from our rhythm, away from our genius, away from our soul.

The point is that blacks ought to be educated from the inside, from the center of themselves. For in the final analysis, what we seek is not in Plato or Aristotle. What we seek is our wholeness, our authenticity, our truth. And our truth is not in the white American libraries. If we do not carry our truth into them, what we will bring out will be false.

This is an elementary idea. And yet some men oppose it. One Negro leader went so far as to say that it is folly for black youths to concentrate on Black Studies. He suggested that black students should learn "what the white boys are learning since they are going to be operating in a white world after their graduation."

With all due respect to the proponents of this idea, I must say that it is a curious and destructive one. For education is creation, not limitation. White students are learning some things in America that black students don't need to learn. And white students are not learning some things that black students must learn if they are to survive.
One should also note that the statement ignores the special gifts and insights of black people. If black boys and girls had only learned what white boys and girls learned, America would have nothing to sing and nothing to dance. If black boys and girls had only learned what white boys and girls were learning, there would be a vacuum in the dreaming and desiring of man.

If Charles Drew and Daniel Hale Williams had only learned what the white doctors were learning, American medicine would be poorer.

If Benjamin Mays had not learned something different, he wouldn't have anything new to say to Martin Luther King, Jr.

And if Martin Luther King, Jr. had only learned what the white boys were learning, he wouldn't have been able to extend the horizons of the world.

We need an education adapted to our needs and interests and requirements. And it is neither separatist nor militant to say so.

Blackness challenges our easy acquiescence in the myths and lies of this society. It challenges us to renew ourselves and to rise to the level of circumstances by creating new black institutions. Most of all, it challenges all “salvageable” Negroes and blacks to forget petty differences and to come together at all levels to do now what must be done. We must return now to the old and honorable rule that special skills create special obligations. Above all else, we must move from an ethic of individualism and profit to an ethic of communal and collective responsibility. The question of individual excellence is not at stake here. What is needed now is excellence dedicated not to ego or profit but the development of the black community.

I have tried to list some of the dominant challenges of blackness, as I see them. I have not meant to suggest that we of the Institute have mastered these challenges and that we have easy, one-two-three answers for packaging and distribution. I meant only to suggest that we see these challenges as total demands on our time and energy.

Blackness is a personal challenge. It is a challenge to respect ourselves and to take the black experience seriously. Here at the Institute of the Black World we not only praise black manhood and black womanhood, but we live it by speaking to each other without reserve or false modesty, without
pettiness and the childish desire to score points. We feel that if blackness is worth studying it is worth living, and that he who does not try to live it has no business trying to teach it.

The challenge of blackness is the challenge of living today in tomorrow's truth. It is the challenge of situating oneself now on the terrain of what Brother Vincent Harding calls the "New Land." It is the challenge of internalizing and carrying around with us the reborn black community. It is the challenge, as our fathers used to say, of letting our light shine, not only because it is our light, but also because in the world in which we live, the black light we reflect is the only light left.
Postscript

Lerone Bennett’s 1969 essay, *The Challenge of Blackness*, and Vincent Harding’s *Introduction*, which placed that essay in the context of the historical beginnings of the Institute of the Black World, lay the groundwork for an experiment that is still being conducted. The experiment is IBW itself.

Since the Spring of 1970 and the first appearance of this Black Paper, a number of IBW plans centering on the Black Studies Movement necessarily have changed, because the history of the Black Movement in the United States has changed. The publication of *Black Studies and the Struggle for Black Education*, for instance, is no longer projected as such, nor is the production at this time of a multi-volumed *Dictionary of Black Biography*. Instead, much of the thought that shaped these and other long-range projects has been directed toward what can be accomplished in conjunction with, and in response to, current movements in the black community as they unfold. The Attica rebellion of September, 1971, the subsequent heightening of development of the black prison movement, and, in another sphere, the National Black Political Convention at Gary, Indiana, of March, 1972, have been especially important in this regard.

So new elements have displaced, or been added to, ones IBW originally projected. The Institute has developed, for example, a major ongoing vehicle for sharing our analysis of current events with those interested in our work. This is our monthly news column, *Black-World-View*, which is made available now through some thirty black newspapers, journals, and radio stations across the country, and which is also published in monthly mailings to our constituency. In addition, in the summer of 1971 IBW experimented with new forms of collective research and analysis and a lecture series (the Summer Research Symposium), which were designed to study the significance of the Black Movement of the 1960’s and to assess our own roles in the continuing black struggle. Following that, some members of IBW, acting as individuals, were able to bring the Institute’s perspective to the National Black Political Convention of 1972, in the form of suggestions for a Black Agenda for the Seventies. We have also begun a study of the Attica uprising and its relation to the black street rebellions of the 1960’s.
What these new projects reflect is the ever-present need to respond to changing conditions of our time, in this case by breaking out of the mold of Black Studies. What is continuous is that need for black self-definition and self-determination which creates new molds and new breakthroughs as the black struggle is waged. The forms have changed and are constantly subject to further development, but the bases for the experiment are firm. These are the principles on which IBW was founded, basic premises about the black experience which have to do with our people’s special vision of life. The principles say that not only does a black perspective on world history, culture, and politics exist; not only is that perspective valid; but it is the only perspective by which we can see history and our own times correctly and thereby know the truth of humankind. It is this knowledge which will enable us to take up our own specific tasks in the ongoing struggle towards the new man and woman and a new society. It is to this liberating black vision that *IBW and education for Liberation* has attempted to speak.

The Staff,
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