

# A CONCEPTUAL PROPOSAL FOR A DEPARTMENT OF BLACK STUDIES

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American college education is in a state of crisis. All over the country there is erupting a volcano of student alienation and resentment—doubly so in the case of black students, the group with which we are here most directly concerned.

Black students are products of experiences which robbed them of a sense of collective destiny and involvement in the educational process. This is a many-faceted problem, but the fundamentals of its solution will incorporate the stepping up of the meaningful and significant participation of black students in college life and its goals.

The black studies idea originated with the black students, the Black Student Union at San Francisco State College. It not only reflects their cries—echoed by others across the country—for relevant education; it also represents the greatest and last hope for rectifying an old wrong and halting the decay now gnawing away at American society. It is, then, more far reaching than appears on the surface, and indeed this cannot be otherwise, inasmuch as any educational system arises to care for what is felt to be a society's educational needs.

While San Francisco State College, spurred by its black students, has pioneered perhaps the first program of promise to solve the problem, there is detected about the country a growing irony: the probability that other institutions, for various reasons in the years ahead, will pass us by. In one sense, this is as it should be; in another, it is not. In any case, black studies presents a challenge, in one way or another, to San Francisco State College and its imitators.

Many persons, white and Negro, cannot understand the necessity for a black studies program. Indeed, conversations with academicians across the country on the education of Black Americana, suggest that even those persons who have accepted the basic idea of black studies do not fully understand its need. They see the goal as the mere blackening of white courses, in varying number and degree. They omit in their program the key component of community involvement and collective stimulation. Thus their program is individualistic (aimed at "rehabilitating" individual students and potential students

by means of pride in culture, racial contributions generally, and regenerated dignity and self esteem); they fail to see that the springboard for all of this is an animated communalism—more about this later—aimed at a black educational renaissance.

Many well-intended efforts to rectify the situation under discussion accordingly are doomed to inevitable failure. They comprise piecemeal programs which, being imported, are based on an external perspective.

An eminent Negro professor proposed to a trouble-shooting college committee recently that the problem could be solved by increasing drastically the ratio of black (by which he meant “Negro”) students and professors. The students for the most part would be admitted with the expectation that, excepting those salvaged by tutorial efforts presently in vogue, they would eventually flunk out, merrier for having acquired “at least some college.” Although his proposal in principle should have been inaugurated long ago, let alone now, it is not the answer to the problem which he (and we herein) are trying to solve. As a matter of fact—and one must endorse the professor’s suggestion in fact though not in theory insofar as to do otherwise would appear to condone current tokenism—there is tenable fear that such an approach may be used as a play to appease the black community while avoiding genuine solutions to the problem.

A representative from a wealthy foundation recently proposed to give full financial assistance to the “talented tenth” and to hire black persons to recruit such students and inform them of the availability of such aid. Unlike most persons, he at least realized that providing aid, while permitting persons accustomed to discriminatory treatment to remain unaware and suspicious of its existence, is only slightly better than providing no aid at all.

Be that as it may, a talented-tenth approach (in this case based frankly on “verbal facility” as the major indicator of college potential) is largely superfluous to the educational needs of the black race as a whole. Talented-tenth students, for whatever reason, have escaped the programmed educational maladjustment of the black race, just as some trees survive the flames of a forest fire. Besides, many persons with more verbal facility than the author may fail the test (in some cases) or, having passed the test, drop out of college or flunk out (often one way of dropping out) or disdain the rush to college in the first place.

Such a program, though noble on the surface, offers supertokenism at best, but neglects the important ingredient of motivation growing out of collective community involvement. It is individualistic in its orientation and only indirectly, therefore, of collective consequence.

Another fear now in the air asserts that the black studies program will comprise “a college within a college,” owing to its “deplorable separatist leanings.” Even if it be so that black studies would ring more separatist in tone than Latin American Studies, Oriental Studies, and the like, this is not the issue. The question of separatism is, like integrationism, in this regard essentially irrelevant. The goal is the *elevation* of a people by means of one important escalator—education. Separatism and integrationism are possible approaches to that end; they lose their effectiveness when, swayed by dogmatic absolutism, they become ends in themselves. It will be an irony of recorded history that “integration” was used in the second half of this century to hold the black race down just as segregation was so instigated in the first half. Inte-

gration, particularly in the token way in which it has been practiced up to now and the neotokenist manner now emerging, elevates individual members of a group, but paradoxically, in plucking many of the most promising members from a group while failing to alter the lot of the group as a whole, weakens the collective thrust which the group might otherwise master.

A related question frequently raised revolves around the participation of white students in the program. The anger must be ambivalent inasmuch as the program has to be aimed primarily at the black student, particularly in its motivational activities involving the black community. At the same time, it is recognized that, so long as some white graduates continue to work in the black community, they and the black community will benefit from their exposure to a least some portion of black studies. This could result in the reeducation of white society.

The danger is that white students will flood black studies courses, leaving us with a black studies program peopled predominantly by white students. One way to draw white students off (or/and care for the surplus) is for existing departments to increase their offerings in blackness as they are doing now under the guise of "dark" (or, as sociologists say, "color-compatible") courses. This would probably result in greater benefit to the white students' needs anyway and most certainly would offset the apparent sense of threat in the minds of conventional departments. It may be necessary eventually to distinguish black education for blacks and black education for whites. There is no insurmountable incompatibility or mutual exclusiveness between black studies and ethnic group courses in other departments. Indeed they are easily reinforcing and could make a major contribution to better "race relations" or, as politicians are fond of saying now, "the effort to save the nation" in decades ahead.

Black studies represents a last-ditch, nonviolent, effort to solve a grave crisis, a particular crisis. To try to solve all problems at once is to risk weakening its impact on central crisis, although, like a stone tossed into a lake, the resulting waves might reverberate from shore to shore. Likewise, we recognize the need for a coalition, somewhere ultimately, of endeavors to improve and increase the educational participation of all ethnic groups. It is only that the assault must be both intraethnic and interethnic, for we cannot afford to lose the motivational ingredient of intraethnic *esprit des corps* and community involvement.

## REDEFINITION OF STANDARDS

A vital issue in the quest for institutionalization of the black studies idea—particularly in its early stages—is that of "standards." Bear in mind, to begin with, what current standards evolved in large part from a need to restrict the overflow of recruits (the principle of exclusion) into existing professional riches. This gave rise to occasionally ludicrous requirements. The late social theorist, Thorstein Veblen, author of *Theory of the Leisure Class*, might hold that the liberal arts approach grew out of the leisure class mentality, where it was prestigious to be nonproductive and to waste time and effort in useless endeavor. Hence footnoting minutiae and the like. When middle class aspirants began to emulate these codes, the principle of exclusion evolved. However, now we are faced with the educational enticement of a group conditioned

by way of the cake of time and custom to being excluded. How do we transform them into an included people? For example, a law school graduate with high honors might fail the "bar" exam (pun intended) because of political views, or fail the oral exam for teaching certification because of an unpopular approach to teaching. Or make mostly A's in required courses only to fail the homemade (unstandardized) "comprehensive" exam. Or pass everything required except the "language" exam. It is widely known that languages studied for graduate degrees are quickly almost totally forgotten and are rarely of any use after graduation. Much of the motivation for the retention of this and even more useless requirements apparently stems from the "leisure class" origin of the "liberal arts" approach where, as Thorstein Veblen explained, prestige was attributed to "nonproductive" or wasteful useless endeavor.

In any case, the requirements for the most part were devised to serve the functions of exclusivity rather than recruitment. Not that recruitment efforts did not exist, but they have been heretofore aimed at individuals inclined to receive them. Now we are facing the necessity for collective recruitment from a group victimized as a group in the past by racist policies of exclusion from the educational escalator.

On the college level, the two most salient "qualifications" for professional rank today are the possession of a Ph.D. and a string of "scholarly" publications. While we endorse such criteria, up to a point, it is essential (particularly in light of current shortage of such credentials on the part of black candidates) to examine and stress the desirability of freedom to depart from those criteria without risking the suspicion of "lowering standards." That the Ph.D. is not necessarily synonymous with teaching effectiveness is accepted by most persons confronted with the question. Less understood is the question of publication.

Consider two candidates for a position in history, one qualified a la conventional standards, the other not. Never mind the fact that articles outside the liberal-moderate perspective have slim chances of seeing the light of day in "objective" scholarly journals. More ludicrous is the fact that the black historian, in adhering to the tradition of "footnoting," is placed in the unenviable position of having to footnote white slavemaster historians or historians published by a slaveholding society in order to document his work on the slavery era.

## RECRUITING OF BLACK STUDIES FACULTY

White administrators frequently complain that they cannot find black professors (i.e., "qualified"), and this is often a legitimate complaint. A black studies program, however, would not be bound by this problem, certainly not nearly in the same degree. There is a keener interest in such a program on the part of potential professors who are black than there is making a move for a conventional professorship. Already, many have volunteered to come to San Francisco State College, but, because of our current lack of funds for the program, none has been chosen.

We speak here of black individuals with Ph.D.'s and, in some cases, creditable publications or, in many cases, high publishing potential. Remember also that the redefinition of a "qualified" professor (honoring teaching effectiveness and enthusiasm more than qualities determined by degrees held and other

quantifiable "credentials") will permit dipping into the larger fund of qualified black professors without doctorates.

The question arises as to the participation of the white professor. The much-considered answer is that their participation, at least during the early, experimental stages of the program, must be cautious and minimal. However, the impracticality of recruiting sufficient number of black professors may well cause this idea to give way. Any white professors involved in the program would have to be black in spirit in order to last. The same is true for "Negro" professors. Besides, white professors are permitted—indeed urged—to increase course offerings on minority groups in regular curriculum from which white students (and interested Negroes) might benefit.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

To develop the key component of community involvement, it is necessary to inspire and sustain a sense of collective destiny as a people and a consciousness of the value of education in a technological society. A cultural base, acting as a leverage for other aspects of black ego development and academic unit, must accordingly be spawned and secured.

Students and other interested parties will be organized into Black Cultural Councils which will sponsor cultural affairs (art, dance, drama, etc.) in the black community and establish black holidays, festivities and celebrations. For example, a Black Winter Break could begin on February 21 the day they shot Malcolm X, run past George Washington's birthday and end with February 23, the birthday of the late black scholar, W. E. B. Du Bois. This could approximate the Jewish Yom Kippur.

Black information centers will be set up to increase communication, interpersonal contact, knowledge and sociopolitical awareness. In this connection, a black community press, put together by the hands of members of black current events clubs and students taking courses in black journalism or/and black communications, would seem highly beneficial. In any case, the black information center would engage in research, accumulate useful data, materials, and information to be disseminated along with advice on social problems and individual affairs such as social security benefits.

Propaganda aimed at motivating black children to acquire education—indeed to induce dropouts to return to school—could emanate in large part from this source. At the same time, campaigns (drop-back-in-school drives) would be waged, modeled on methods of voter registration, to rescue black school dropouts. Those returning to school, and others in academic trouble, will receive intensive tutorial aid from qualified black college students.

For the direction of this and other educational efforts, a Bureau of Black Education could be established to provide black scholars mutual aid and stimulation, and to organize black textbook and syllabi writing corps. Much teaching, however, especially on the college level, would disdain current racist textbooks in an effort to escape the confines of perfunctory learning and utilize the laboratory of life.

There is a need for professors relevant to the needs of black students, professors with whom they can identify and take as models of emulation, professors who have the capacity to inspire students to search for knowledge and social mobility. A teacher needs three—must have at least three—qualifica-

tions: 1) an effective relationship to learners; 2) relationship to the content of the school's program; 3) and depth in understanding how learning takes place and of the art-science of instruction.<sup>2</sup>

Much of this—and more—could be stimulated in part by faculty unity. Along with conventional departmental meetings, faculty unity and cross-fertilization will be developed by means of: 1) a program of exchange lecturing, where one professor lectures to the class of another; 2) chain-teaching, sometimes interdisciplinary, where several professors assigned to a course rotate at respective stages in the course; and 3) the central lecture with subsidiary discussion sessions particularly for interdisciplinary courses.

Central lectures might be held in church auditoriums so that individuals in the community could partake of them. Persons known to be making a significant impact on American society in the areas under study could be recruited as guest lecturers, or salaried part-time lecturers, in an intensive effort to utilize the resources of the black community while simultaneously increasing the community's sense of involvement in the educational process. In the latter connection, it will be useful to establish some kind of off-campus college extension, ultimately, with special emphasis on adult education and where mothers and others might receive correspondence courses. The courses would be geared, in the case of mothers, to improve their ability to exploit the educational potential of their special relationships with their children, preparing some of them to people a program of associate-teaching in the elementary and preschool levels. Such preparations could be rounded off by on-the-job-training. Most of the foregoing is in no way new.

Finally, to wed and cement community and curriculum practicums and apprenticeships in connection with course work would seem invaluable. This would tend to increase the commitment of black students to the community while simultaneously permitting them to "learn to do by doing" and comprising a flow of volunteer assistance to cooperating functionaries in the community—i.e., businessmen, politicians, leaders, social workers, community organizers, teachers, preachers, educators, and the like.

### THE BLACK STUDIES CURRICULUM—A FIVE YEAR PLAN

To insure the measurement of significant results, the black studies program must comprise at least a five-year plan. The initiation of the program is to be accomplished in two stages: (1) Phase I, involving the pulling together of some of the currently experimental courses into a new department by September 1968; and (2) Phase II, the inauguration of a major consisting of an integrated body of black courses revolving around core courses such as black history, black psychology, black arts, and the social sciences. Such a curriculum has been constructed, but certain rough edges are still being ironed out, and, because it is not essential to this conceptual proposal, it is not being presented here. Phase II could follow by September 1969. The administration at Yale University, for example, recently approved such a major (African and Afro-American Studies).

However, Yale's program omits the key components of student field work, as a part of the course requirements, in the black community. This is an old idea on the surface, but as here conceived, it further involves an effort to transform the community while educating and training the student. For ex-

ample, students in black history might be required to put on panel discussions for younger children in church basements, elementary and junior high school classes, and so forth. A class project might be the formation of a black history club. A class in community organization could form civic clubs, while individual students served apprenticeships under community organizers. Students in black journalism, black economics (business), education courses (teachers), black politics or what not, could do the same. Thus education is made relevant to the student and his community while the community is, so to speak, made relevant to education.

In this direction (bearing in mind the anticipated growth of the college population generally) we propose the admission of 300 additional black students in the school year 1969-70, 500 in 1970-71, 1,000 by 1971-72, 1,500 more by 1972-73, and 2,000 by 1974-75. These numbers should be adjusted, of course, to suit the developing needs for educational and socioeconomic parity on the part of the black race.

### STUDENT SCREENING

Criteria complementary to, or/and exclusive of, currently standard tests will be used to determine college potential of black students. These are to be developed, using available consultants, by the admissions wing of the black studies program.

Remedial and tutorial work will be necessary as well. However, special care will be taken to safeguard against the situation, such as recently became apparent at a predominantly Negro college in Washington, D.C., in which many students were failing remedial courses while passing courses in the regular program for which remedial courses supposedly were preparing them.<sup>3</sup> Also, in spite of a high flunkout rate arising largely from an open-admission policy and a desire to "raise standards" (using proportion flunked as the major index), more students with a "C" average or above failed to return to school each year than in the case of those with less than a "C" average.

Professors and staff also must be added at appropriate rates, beginning with three professors by September 1969, and accelerating to a full departmental staff with each succeeding year.

The specific content of the curriculum follows herewith. Although it is much of it expressive (geared to ego-identity building, etc.), the utilitarian function has by no means been omitted; it can be expanded as knowledge of its implementation accumulates. The black race woefully needs concrete skills, in a technological society, both for individual mobility and community development.

While the black studies program—as our model indicates—would not preclude electives outside the black curriculum, even for majors, it would seek to care for a wide range of academic training in the humanities, the social and behavioral sciences. Though most persons enrolled in black studies courses would not be majors, those graduating as such could become probation officers, preparation for careers as lawyers, social workers, teachers, scholars, professors, research scientists, businessmen, administrators, and so on. They would, other things being equal—we feel certain—quickly emerge and predominate in the upper echelons of the black community.

Aside from the matter of intensified motivation (and increased commitment) to the struggle to build the black community) students who have mustered even a smattering of black studies courses would be advantaged in their postcollege work in the black community. They would be armed with early involvement and experience in the community superior to that of students not so trained. Like their Chinese, Greek, Jewish, and other pluralistic counterparts, those employed outside the black community would possess a keener sense of security as individuals and would be better equipped to present the black perspective. This would benefit the black community indirectly and perhaps assist those members of the white community who, like the black studies program, seek, in a roundabout way, a better society for all of its members.

*Tentative Black Studies Major For Fall, 1969*

Core courses:	<i>Units</i>
Black History . . . . .	4
Black Psychology . . . . .	4
Survey of Sciences: Method and History . . . . .	4
Black Arts and Humanities . . . . .	4
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 Black arts concentration:	
The Literature of Blackness . . . . .	4
Black Writers Workshop . . . . .	4
Black Intellectuals . . . . .	4
Black Fiction . . . . .	4
Black Poetry . . . . .	4
Black Drama . . . . .	4
The Painting of Blackness . . . . .	4
The Music of Blackness . . . . .	4
Sculpture of Blackness . . . . .	4
	<hr/> 36
 Behavioral and social sciences concentration:	
Black Politics . . . . .	4
Sociology . . . . .	4
Economics of the Black Community . . . . .	4
The Geography of Blackness . . . . .	4
Social Organization of Blackness . . . . .	4
Development of Black Leadership . . . . .	4
Demography of Blackness . . . . .	4
Black Counseling . . . . .	4
Black Consciousness and the International Community . . . . .	4
	<hr/> 32

References

1. The Outstanding Young Teacher, for Washington, D.C., in 1966, as chosen by the Junior Chamber of Commerce, the World Book Encyclopedia, and American University's Department of Education, moved recently to another city, armed with a master's degree plus 30 additional hours accumulated in meeting the requirements

of other school systems in the past, only to be told that she must pass the National Teachers' Exam in her field. She informed the personnel officer that she had passed the test in her field plus one other. Then she was told that she would have to take five additional courses in order to "qualify" for teaching credentials.

2. Robert H. Anderson, *Teaching in a World of Change* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966).
3. There is no documentation for this. It was privately shown me in the registrar's office by a former employee of the registrar's office. However, it was publicly bemoaned at a faculty meeting on the problem that many students were passing regular courses while flunking remedial courses.