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## Black Studies: A Report for Librarians

*The purpose of this paper is to provide background information about black studies and to clarify attitudes, black and white, toward black studies, in order to interject some reality into what can be an emotionally and intellectually confusing area for whites. It concludes with a consideration of some possible alternative futures for academic libraries when their institutions acquire a black studies department.*

### INTRODUCTION

**B**ECAUSE THE MAJORITY of librarians in America's college and university libraries are white, and because the issue of black studies is emotionally as well as intellectually charged, it behooves us to make an honest effort to understand as well as we can the issues involved in providing services to this new area of the curriculum.

Confrontations with others are always difficult. Confrontations with one's self are more difficult still, and to find within one's self that same racism that one deplors in principle is a sobering discovery. But in order to weed out one's own racist tendencies (if indeed this is possible), one first has to know what racism is and where it comes from. I'm not speaking now of out-and-out prejudice which, in a sense, is more easily dealt with since it is more obvious. What I am speaking of is a white, middle class cultural phenomenon, insidious in its pervasiveness in all facets of life in white America. According to Alvin Poussaint:

This society doesn't just discriminate against the black man, or think that black is bad. This society is always teaching white superiority to their white children; this occurs intuitively, without people thinking about it very much. It begins, of course, in the mass media, in families, in schools, on television, because white people have all the controlling status and power roles in this society. And this is the way reality is depicted to both black and white children on television, in the schools and churches. On TV almost all of the heroes, even in the cartoons, are white people. God is white, Santa Claus is white. . . . This type of intuitive feeling of superiority in white people makes it very difficult for them to relate in noncondescending, non-paternalistic ways to black people. Sometimes this is obvious, and sometimes it is much more subtle.<sup>1</sup>

Once one begins to see it in all the media, one becomes aware of the gross unfairness of such brainwashing, not only to blacks, but also to whites, since it performs a mind-closing function that teaches us that black is bad and white is good in a way we don't even question. Therefore, each one of us must begin to understand his or her own racist propensities, not so that we can indulge in paroxysms of guilt, but so that we can begin to change attitudes, both our own and those of others:

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What, you may ask, does this have to do with libraries and with library services for black studies?

Colleges and universities are now beginning to develop courses, programs, and departments of black studies. It is important that libraries begin actively to explore possibilities for library services to such a department. In doing this, they can perhaps reevaluate their services to the entire university. In the words of Nathan Hare:

The white student will use it (black courses) as a basis for demanding a change in his own curriculum, as he is doing now, and we can bring about an impact, if we're successful, on the entire cemetery of American education as it exists today.<sup>2</sup>

This is not a matter of sitting back and waiting for the head of the department of black studies to meet with the head of the library to discuss what courses are to be included and what materials must be ordered to support those courses. There must be some people within a college or university library willing to do the groundwork, and groundwork it will be, of locating and making available material relevant to the black experience. This implies such projects as: 1) regional union catalogs of primary source material; 2) some kind of national clearinghouse of bibliographic effort to prevent the wasteful duplication of bibliography after bibliography on black materials; and 3) a channeling of this effort toward a definitive retrospective bibliography of black material with an ongoing effort to maintain a current bibliography. This was brought out clearly by McGeorge Bundy when he said:

We have already decided that the subject (black studies) exists. On the other hand, the question does arise . . . whether the subject is fit yet for effective teaching in our colleges and universities—not because it lacks size or meaning, but because the instruments of teaching, the *bibliographic*

and library tools [my italics] and above all the properly trained and qualified instructors, do not yet exist.<sup>3</sup>

This also implies some real questioning of the library's services to the user. This last question is the one for which an understanding of what black studies is, and what it wants, is imperative. With this in mind, an understanding of where black studies might go in the future is also important, for whatever happens here is going to affect deeply the nature of the university and its functions. We must be able to choose from future alternatives, or as De Jouvenal calls them, achievable ends. The only rational way to behave in this day and age is to choose from possible futures and make the kinds of moves now that will more nearly bring about that which would be an optimal pattern for humanity in the future.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to give some general background information to librarians about black studies, and to clarify some attitudes, both black and white, toward black studies in order to interject some reality into what can be a murky, emotionally and intellectually confusing area for whites. Finally, I want to consider some possible alternative futures for academic libraries when their institutions acquire a black studies department.

#### BACKGROUND

A university, if it is to fulfill its functions as a place where young people can explore intellectually the nature and function of the universe, must reflect the society in which it exists. That black studies is here with us now is a meaningful comment about our society as a whole. It is a sign of hope; through the recognition of black studies as a discipline, we begin to perceive and recognize black people as full, complete, and complex human beings with a distinct and viable culture whose destiny within

our country is of tremendous importance for all. Some day black and white America will come together held by the bonds of mutual respect and the ability to share a culture. But that time is not yet arrived. Now it is the black need to legitimize, and even more, to glorify, the black experience.

One of the clearest statements I've read or heard anywhere on this issue is the following one made by Glenn E. deChabert, a black student at Yale University:

I assume that a lot of readers who talk about the separation and the non-separation thing, the integration thing, wonder whether the separation that is wanted by "intelligent" or "responsible" black people is a permanent thing or a transitory thing. To me it seems essential that people understand that black people want to determine their own destinies, not for what's going to happen in the future, but for *right now*. Whatever comes out of black self-determination—whether it be an acceptance of integration or a recognition of the fact that the two races in this country can never be integrated—must be put on the shelf until it becomes necessary to make such a finalized decision. . . . You're going to have to accept the fact that before integration becomes possible in this society black people are going to have to be allowed to get themselves together.<sup>4</sup>

Black studies began as a discipline at San Francisco State College after a long and tragic battle which shook the school to its roots.<sup>5</sup> On April 29, 1968, Nathan Hare wrote a proposal entitled, "A Conceptual Proposal for a Department of Black Studies."<sup>6</sup> It was based on ideas which had originated with the Black Students' Union of San Francisco State College. This document seems to be the first published account setting forth definite plans for a black studies department. The department was awarded official status at San Francisco State College in September, 1969, and presently offers twenty-six courses. But even though San Francisco State College ap-

pears to have been first to draw up a plan for a department of black studies, Yale University claims to have been the first to implement a black studies degree-granting program.<sup>7</sup>

The interdisciplinary nature of black studies raises some interesting questions about evolving a major program of study. Both San Francisco State and Yale seem to be organizing it around an existing discipline, so that the student, after taking a number of core courses, would concentrate in either the humanities or the social sciences. The one element that is greatly stressed and that seems to set black studies programs apart from other similar programs of study is an intense involvement with the black community. This appears to be the key element in all discussions of black studies. It would *not* be using the community as a laboratory, but would rather involve the community in black studies and involve the program in the community.

On March 5, 1969, the Office for Civil Rights of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare issued a warning that some colleges and universities setting up black studies departments were violating the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Institutions such as Antioch, Harvard, Berkeley, and Federal City College in Washington, D.C. which had adapted or were considering adapting certain practices that concerned the establishment of programs or facilities on the basis of race, may have jeopardized their eligibility to qualify for federal funds.<sup>8</sup>

The three basic issues concerned separate housing for students based on race, separate social activity space for students based on race, and separate colleges, schools, or institutes based on race. These issues are by no means clear. For instance, W. Todd Furniss states:

One of the issues raised by HEW, the question of separate social and living arrangements, could be settled solely on the basis

of provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, at least some of the proposals for such facilities rest on the considered judgment of college faculties that there is a sound educational and social justification for them.<sup>9</sup>

The issues have not yet been resolved. Most of the institutions working with black studies programs and departments have been going ahead with their plans without loss of federal monies.

The acceptance of black studies as a legitimate field of endeavor, and the implementation of courses, programs, and departments have mushroomed during the last two years. Colleges and universities offering black studies courses are too numerous to mention. Those institutions which have continually led the way have been San Francisco State, Yale, Harvard, Antioch, and Cornell.

#### ATTITUDES

The germination of black studies courses, programs, and departments across the country has provided an arena for the kind of debate that touches off the fuse of attitudes stemming from all points of the emotional compass. Thus we have blacks and whites of many different persuasions meeting around an issue and exposing a myriad number of divergent viewpoints. It is important for librarians to try to understand these differences, for ultimately they will form part of the material which should be collected as a part of the library resources for black studies.

Since more and more black students are and will be entering our colleges and universities, an understanding of attitudes, both black and white, is imperative if we are to give the kind of library service these students need.

Within the academic community, there seem to be three main attitudes toward black studies. According to John A. Crowl, they fall into the following categories:

Some, including many of the older generation of Negro educators, hold such courses in contempt. . . .

At the other extreme are a number of academicians who feel that colleges and universities must bend over backwards in an attempt to make up for past denial of rights to black people.

Between the extremes are a large number of people who feel that some forms of black studies are legitimate intellectual pursuits, but that generally any such program must fit the university's traditional patterns.<sup>10</sup>

To begin with, the attitudes of a person such as Kenneth B. Clark, black psychologist and author, who resigned from the Antioch board of trustees in protest of Antioch's sanctioning of "an all-Negro black studies institute on campus which virtually excludes whites with funds provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and which qualifies for federal funding by a patently racist arrangement by subterfuge whereby white students can be excluded if their backgrounds are not judged relevant." He goes on to say, "it is whites who need a black studies program most of all."<sup>11</sup>

At the other end of the scale are the militant attitudes of the Black Panther Party whose members are urging blacks to arm themselves. Their aggressive style has become their most potent weapon, dealing as it does in fear. This weapon has been turned back against them however, for many of their number are dead, in jail, or in exile.

It is understandable that black students have trouble when faced with a predominantly white middle class college environment. In the words of Jack J. Cordoso:

. . . when Black ghetto youths . . . hit the campus, they suffer what may be termed cultural shock for they are now in a milieu totally alien to their background. The middle class America about which they feel rather than know, represents an impregnable and forbidding frontier to ghetto Blacks, and the campus, that bedrock foun-

dation of the middle class, is believed to be the instrument of white racism.<sup>12</sup>

This is further borne out by a short paragraph in the Coleman report which is not primarily concerned with what happens to those students who come to a white college, but with why so many do not come at all.

We suspect, without proof, that those forces that decrease the proportion of minority group members, especially Negroes, in the collegiate population result from practices and conditions, including history and attitude, that have not the intent but only the effect of discrimination.<sup>13</sup>

Understanding that these attitudes exist and are real, that black culture exists, is real, and is not white culture nor should be, is a necessary starting point for developing a dialogue between black and white America. This is beginning, just beginning, to happen. Look at the attitudes expressed covertly by white America in setting up tests to evaluate students. All students are judged by white, middle class standards. Nathan Hare, in speaking of these "standards" relates:

... we have got to have a new look at some of these so called "standards" they set up for us. Once a friend and I made a little test, using our (black) culture. He was teaching at a white junior college. We exchanged these little "culture" tests containing such things as "hog maws," "black-eyed peas," and so forth, and I don't think a single one of those white students knew what hog maws were. . . . So, if we gave a test, too, we'd see that you are "culturally deprived."<sup>14</sup>

The editors of the *Yale Alumni Magazine*, in presenting to its alumni the Yale faculty's approval of an Afro-American studies major, said:

In the last two decades, scholars have come increasingly to recognize the existence of an American subculture that is both Negro and poverty-oriented, but there is no clear agreement regarding what comprises the value scheme of that subculture. As a re-

sult, interpretations of the subculture have suffered from an inability to grasp what motivates its members.<sup>15</sup>

This realization marks the beginning of an era in which there is a great amount of research to be done, research which could be done best through black studies, by black social scientists.

There has also been a change in black attitudes toward education. According to Yale psychiatrist William H. Jones (quoting James E. Comer), in an article entitled "How Black Studies Happened":

The tense and explosive conditions we are observing today are the inevitable result of movement by black Americans toward an equal peer relationship. No longer do Negroes see higher education as a passport to white society. . . . Today, new leaders preach black "nationhood" not integration per se . . . not to escape the ghetto, but to return to it and improve the lot of the black community at large.<sup>16</sup>

How does it feel for a black student to attend a white university? The following quotes by a black student who attended Yale University are revealing.

To be black here—to be aware of all the things whiteness has meant for black people and to be asked to submit passively to being coddled by the white power structure, being paid to come, is a fundamental contradiction for anyone with a positive black identification.

The whole question of Afro-American studies was simply a rebellion against implicit racist assumptions that Yale courses had had. The courses were designed for the white people, and we couldn't find courses that had anything to do with us. We said this nonsense can't be, and demanded that either Yale reform itself and become a place blacks can find hospitable or else not have any blacks at Yale at all.<sup>17</sup>

The meaning is clear, and although such words may make white America uncomfortable, it is imperative that we really listen to and understand what is being said. Only then can we go on to

create an environment that can be mutually hospitable for both blacks and whites.

#### PROBLEMS IN LIBRARIES

In serving black studies departments, libraries face problems of bibliographic control, of material arrangement for user access, of user rights, of privileges and responsibilities, and of orientation to library use.

How do we handle catalog relevance for blacks? How do we assign subject headings to black material? Do we follow the Library of Congress and put it all under Negro? This violates the thinking of blacks in this area and might be construed as just another example of white racism at work.

How we attack each problem will depend a great deal upon the size and type of library with which we are dealing, but it seems fundamental that the approach be user oriented, and active, rather than passive.

This indicates that librarians should begin to attack the problem of bibliographic control now, while black studies are still in a formative stage, so that by the time academic institutions have a black studies department set up and ready to begin functioning, they will have the resources available. This will involve investigating possibilities of a national clearinghouse for black material, a computer-based bibliographic information system. There would have to be a regional organizational arrangement so that information could be fed into it from all areas of the country.

The national clearinghouse for black bibliographic material could also serve as a referral point through which scholars working on similar areas of concern could be brought into contact, thus reducing duplication of effort. For this purpose, a research index could be implemented and maintained.

There are of course a great many

problems inherent in an undertaking of this kind. Not the least of these is the problem of subject headings and of making entries compatible with Library of Congress entries. The importance of this has until now been deferred to a future when all bibliographic control will be computer-based, thus making entry compatibility a must. As a librarian, I feel strongly that this is of great importance. From a user's point of view, however, it would be of secondary importance to the ability to find what I wanted through the most appropriate subject heading. Perhaps there could be a compatibility index giving standard Library of Congress headings as derived from the user headings chosen specifically for a black bibliography until such a time as the Library of Congress changes its approach to black materials.

In order for this to take place, there must be a network of human resources, of people interested, willing, and capable of bringing such a project into fruition. It would also require adequate funding and the technical expertise to enable a project of this size to be completed.

Such a clearinghouse would require an immense amount of careful planning and continuity of effort, sparked by a real desire to make available to the user material relevant to study and research in the field of the black experience in the United States. It presents a tremendous challenge to concerned librarians.

#### FUTURE ALTERNATIVES

What then are the possible futures for black studies and for library services to black studies? I shall take as my base Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener's "Standard World," what they call their "least improbable 'alternative future.'" They speak of three possible variations of the standard world as "more integrated," "more inward look-

ing," and "in greater disarray."<sup>18</sup>

*Standard World:* In this future, black studies will become a recognized discipline in white colleges and universities throughout the country. The black community will be drawn into the university and the department will be drawn out into the black community, creating a previously unknown level of trust and understanding between the university and the community.

Library services for this future would depend upon a merger between the university library and the public library so that the resulting library could serve community as well as university interests.

*More Integrated World:* "A relatively peaceful, relatively prosperous world with a relatively high degree of consultation among nations, with arms control and political co-ordination or even integration among all, or almost all, the 'major' or minor powers."<sup>19</sup> In this world, the differences between black and white have been worked out and American universities will have no need for black studies as a separate discipline. Instead, the study of the black experience will be an essential part of all disciplines, and as such will be studied by both black and white students alike. Library services will be integrated within the general collection.

*More Inward Looking World:* "Almost as peaceful and prosperous a world but with little arms control or general co-ordination."<sup>20</sup> This future would contain the concept of black universities within white universities. The black universities would have no separate physical base, but would consist of a group of students who would spend each year of their college program attending a different university. This would ease the problem of enough adequate faculty. They would attend both black and white institutions, thus being provided with a variety of experiences while maintaining their integrity

and identity as individual blacks within a group of black students. There could also be centers for black social scientists and historians serving primarily as research bases for scholars but also serving graduate students interested in black studies. In this world, black studies would become world-centered as Lawrence W. Chisolm suggests.

Whether black studies with its momentum would want to be a part of such a meeting of world cultures, such a re-definition of a world in which children would grow up to feel that the reality of the experiences of children from any number of other cultures and subcultures was available to them on the mean level of bodily motion and dancing, on the acting level of interpreting daily events—this is the kind of thing to which black studies might lead.<sup>21</sup>

Library services would be dependent upon excellence of bibliographic control as it would be necessary to know what exists and where it could be located. For this future, some kind of national clearinghouse for black bibliographic material would be a necessity.

*A World in Greater Disarray:* "A relatively troubled and violent world, but one in which no large central wars have occurred."<sup>22</sup> Here separatism reaches its peak with a black world and a white world coexisting, side by side, but unable to meet, to mingle, to integrate. There would be no black students attending white universities. Black studies would cluster around existing black institutions with new black colleges and universities added throughout the country as money and faculty became available.

Library services would depend on strong collections being generated in each of the universities coupled with unity between collections of different geographically close institutions and a large amount of collection sharing through interlibrary loan, traveling collections, and interlibrary use.

These four possible futures for black

studies and library services for black studies are based on the supposition that there will indeed be a world in the future, and leaves out the element of surprise, which can't really be left out (yet it can't really be included either). By "surprise" I mean technological inventions which do not already exist, or sociological events about which we can have no inkling.

Looking into the future has always been a perilous operation, but it is one that has been with us since the beginning of recorded history. The underlying reason for scientifically studying the future is to give mankind meaningful choices and to educate him to be able to make the best choices for his own continuation.

Librarians too should avail themselves of any opportunity to shape the future

of libraries using all the knowledge with which the world can provide them.

Library services for a black studies program should be developed aggressively by librarians working in direct contact with both faculty and students to provide the kinds of services that will be most fruitful. This contact will open up a double educational opportunity as librarians inform faculty and students about the special needs and requirements of a black studies program. It is also an opportunity for the opening of communication channels across academic frontiers, an event which must take place before meaningful decisions can be made. The prime requirement, however, is human awareness and understanding, as people strive to reach across the barriers of race in order to create a better environment for learning.

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