
**THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN
CONTEMPORARY AMERICA**

Third Edition

by

Daniel Boamah-Wiafe

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Preface to the First Edition

The objective of this book was to write about the contemporary experience of blacks in America for undergraduate and graduate students who have read only a few good publications about the subject. It is hoped that this book will introduce them to the black experience in America. To achieve that goal, we had to select materials that are not too difficult for first time readers, and those that will help more advanced readers to better understand the more detailed and complex analyses of the black experience in the existing books and publications. For this reason, the format is like a general survey or an overview of the subject. Because a lot of details and more difficult issues have been excluded from this book, it is recommended that graduate students and more advanced scholars read more detailed works and publications about the black experience in single subject books on the various aspects of the black experience.

When I joined the Black Studies Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, I knew very little about the black experience in America. However, I was determined to study it as well as I could. I have read books and publications authored by liberals and conservatives that have some relevance to the subject. Because I started to study the black experience in America as an outsider who knew very little about the subject, I was willing to read as many books as I could. I am still learning. As a student I have a stupendous appetite for more knowledge about the subject.

Although I was an American citizen at the time when I started this project, I was aware that I was not born in the New World and that I was first exposed to the black experience in America

as an adult graduate student at the University of Wisconsin at Madison in the early 1970s when the civil rights laws had reduced overt racism in America. Indeed, I did not enter the country until after I had finished my first-degree program at the University of Ghana and taught three years in Ghana. While not having been born in America posed some problems and weaknesses in my ability to understand blacks in America, I sincerely believe that it has also given me some advantages that many American-born Africans or native black Americans may lack. I can safely say that experiences during my formative years in Ghana, and other parts of Africa, and my travels in Europe and North America have given me the bases for comparison between the black experiences in and outside America. The fact that I did not face direct racism in Africa when I was growing up has increased my ability to be more objective than I otherwise would. Also, my life and exposure to colonialism and independence in Africa enhanced my knowledge about the black experience at the "mother continent."

As an African-born American, a black man in America, a student and a teacher, I have been very curious about race relations, and the differences in attitudes and perceptions of blacks and whites in the nation. As an outsider who has spent much of his adult life in America, I thought that the best way to study the subject was to try to look at the issues from both the black and white perspectives separately.

My life in the U.S. has sometimes been disappointing and yet at other times it has been pleasant, very rewarding and exciting. I have had the unique experience of relating, at different levels of intimacy to both blacks and whites. I have had a number of trusted friends as well as not so trusted ones. All of them have been very helpful in my understanding of race relations in the country. I have freely solicited views on several issues from blacks as well as whites with whom I have had the pleasure of being intimate and friendly with for more than a decade before I

started to write the manuscript.

Many of the people I have dealt with, students, faculty and persons outside academia have been extremely helpful in my efforts to understand black America. I am certain that my being African-born has made it easier for members of both races to talk candidly with me without being threatened as much as if I had been born in America. I must admit that I have sometimes deliberately played "dump" about some issues. I have always been very willing to listen and learn from both sides with an open mind.

When I embarked upon this project, I was aware that I would be dealing with controversial and sometimes very sensitive racial issues in America. I never thought that I could satisfy everybody, nor was I naive enough to think that everybody would agree with my viewpoints. However, I hope that this work would be judged sincerely for what it stands for, rather than by the fact that it was written by an African-born black. While its shortcomings may be brought out by the critics, it is always honorable if criticisms are followed by alternatives like Du Bois' criticism of Booker T. Washington's principles.

I have been living in this country continuously since 1970. I went to the graduate school of University of Wisconsin, Madison campus. As a non-resident foreign student, I worked at odd jobs to pay for the high out-of-state tuition at that institution. Working at odd jobs helped me to come in contact with people outside academia. Since then, I have taught both black and white students for more than a decade in predominantly white institutions. Occasionally I have visited predominantly black institutions as well. I have interacted regularly with students and faculty during that time. My education, travels and work experiences in the U.S. as well as my interactions with both black and white Americans and my exposure to race relations in North America have helped this project. That perspective has enabled me to

fully appreciate the diversity as well as the unity of the black experience in America. In the 1940's Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish social scientist wrote a book that has come to be accepted and regarded as an excellent analysis of race relations in the U.S. Although Mr. Myrdal was an outsider, he was able to make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge on the subject.

In his answer to the question how he, a non-scientist was able to write his book, The Making of the Atomic Bomb for which he won the Pulitzer, Richard Rhodes explained that although he was terrified at first, he read as much on the subject until it made sense to him to write the book. Before the manuscript was published trained physicists read and made some suggestions (Warren¹ 1989, 27). If Gunnar Myrdal could study race in America as an outsider, and if Richard Rhodes, a non-scientist could read classic papers in nuclear physics and write a Pulitzer prize winning book on the Atomic Bomb, I see no reason why I, a black man who has carefully studied the situation, actually lived and personally experienced racism, bigotry and race relations in the U.S. for about two decades could not.

I began my studies with the premise that I was an outsider who should study the subject carefully. While I do not by any means imply that this work is flawless, I feel comfortable that I have tried to do justice to it. I would like to repeat that, some of the issues treated in this work are so complex and controversial that I expect some disagreements on the way I have handled some or most of them. As a student, I am used to dealing with debate and criticisms. I believe they are necessary. I hope that those who have comments and/or criticisms would try to communicate them to me, in care of the publishers. I can assure such people that I will sincerely consider all viewpoints before future

1. See: Andrea Warren, "Richard Rhodes and the Making of the Atomic Bomb," in Writer's Digest, July 1989.

revisions or updates are made.

In accord with the title, we have tried to include as much of current information about the black experience in contemporary America as was available to the author when the manuscript was being prepared. This book is expected to be updated as regularly as possible to keep the materials current and relevant to the subject matter.

This book was primarily devoted to the black experience in Contemporary America. Since blacks do not live in this country alone, we have had to deal with the dominant population and other minorities as well. As a result, much could be learned from this book about the country and its non-black population as well.

Realistically, information in this book are expected to be more interesting to blacks than to people of other racial and ethnic persuasions. However, I sincerely believe that political leaders and policy-makers should familiarize themselves with the knowledge of the black experience to help them make reasonably good public policy decisions in contemporary America. Too often some political leaders who depend on majority votes to win elections or retain their political positions have neglected minority views and interests. Usually, the rationale is that being sensitive to black or minority interests could cost them considerable white votes. I strongly believe that policies must be made for the good of the entire nation rather than for the exclusive benefit of the most powerful segment of the population.

The primary audience of this book is first and second year college students. As such, I have done the best to simplify the discussion in the book. As much as possible, I have avoided difficult and complex analyses. An attempt has, therefore, been made to simplify the examination of the subject matter so college freshmen would understand. For many of the students, Introduction to Black Studies is the only Black Studies course they would take before they leave

college. Like other college introductory courses, it is necessary to cover as many of the issues that are of interest to Black Studies as possible. My ultimate goal was, therefore, to fully discuss relevant issues in the black experience today. Unfortunately, time and space have prevented me from doing that. The fact that almost every chapter can be a subject for a book-length manuscript has forced me to abbreviate the discussions. I recommend that students and other readers will use the contents in the book as guidelines for more detailed discussions. It is my sincere hope that the issues examined in this book will set in motion a series of debates relevant to the black experience in contemporary America.

The book is divided into four parts. Part one introduces the subject matter. The black population, its Demographic Pattern and Implications are also examined in the first part. Part two looks at the Social and Cultural Institutions of blacks in America. The Civil Rights Movement and the battle for equality in education are explored in the third part. Part four discusses the Political, Economic and Social Perspectives of the black experience.

Because the black experience has never been static but dynamic, I expect changes to continue to take place. As such, every attempt will be made to revise and update the information in this book as regularly as possible. If the past is a fair reflection of the future, then in order to keep this promise, I expect to make as many sacrifices as I did when the first edition was being prepared. When this book was planned, I thought that the need for such a work would make it possible to obtain financial support. Unfortunately, I was naïve, unrealistic and wrong. As such, I had to do without any support. Of course, the lack of external support forced me to scale down the original plan. In spite of that, I sincerely hope that I have been able to prove that I have been able to do a decent job in tackling a project of this kind. Although an

external support would be of great help and very much appreciated, I plan to do the best I can with available resources to revise, update and improve the quality of future editions.

So many people have contributed directly and indirectly to the project in one way or another. First to be acknowledged is my immediate family and persons closest to me. My sons, Arthur Yaw, Daniel Kwabena Jr., Ernest Kwaku and Michael "Nana" Yaw; my mother, Madam Elizabeth Akosua Adutwumwah, Dr. George S. Asante, formerly of the University of Ghana, my uncle, Mr. K.O. Aboagye and Ms. Carol A. Rashleigh have all been very patient. They bore the brunt of my long hours of work on the manuscript. Because of the long hours I spent writing, re-writing and revising the manuscript, I spent less time with them (especially those who were living with me in the United States when this manuscript was been prepared) than they deserved. Without their understanding and cooperation, it would have been impossible to finish the manuscript in less than two years teaching full time. My oldest son, Michael Boamah-Wiafe deserves a special mention. For several years, because of unnecessary bureaucratic "red-tapeism" by the U.S. civil service, Michael "Nana" Yaw has been unable to get a visa to join the rest of the family in the U.S. Twice, the I.N.S. approved his visa, but the U.S. Consul in Ghana refused to grant him a visa. He has been very patient. For me, the struggle to get him here is a crusade.

A number of colleagues and students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and other institutions of higher education in the U.S. have been very supportive in criticizing, advising or editing the materials at the manuscript stage. At the University of Nebraska at Omaha, I am indebted to the Dean of Arts and Sciences, Dr. John M. Newton for his support, Dr. Benjamin Aaron, who spent long periods of time reading several chapters and making invaluable suggestions, Dr. Julien J. Lafontant for allowing me to use chapter 5 which he co-authored with me

in the book, Dr. Pamela Smith for editing portions of the draft. I am also very grateful to Ms. Carol Rashleigh for giving me a great deal of support, editing several chapters as well as providing some secretarial and managerial support at different stages of the project. Dr. Shirley Jackson, who joined the Black Studies department barely two months before the manuscript went to the printers was kind enough to loan me a number of recently published books that benefited the project. Others who need to be recognized are Dr. Osei Mensah Aborampah of the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee and Dr. Kofi Blay of Delaware State University for sharing their ideas on some relevant issues with me. To my students who have shared their ideas on several topics with me in and outside the classroom and particularly those who have drawn my attention to important television programs, I am very grateful. Last, but not the least, my sincere thanks and appreciation go to Mr. Richard M. Snowden, the director of the University of Nebraska at Omaha Campus Computing and his able staff, particularly Mrs. Pat Dargantes and Mr. Robert E. Sullivan. Without their help, cooperation, and assistance in data analysis and data processing, the final draft of the manuscript would not have been ready on time to meet the publisher's deadline. Of course, the shortcomings and errors are all mine.

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November 1989

Preface to the Second Edition

Many changes have taken place since the first edition was released three years ago. Like the larger population, the black community has changed during the last three years. For example, rap and hip-hop culture are better-defined, and -known now than three years ago.

During the last twelve years, the Reagan-Bush administrations have helped to steer the country and other parts of the Western world into conservatism. Conservative leadership has helped to reverse some of the gains achieved by women and minorities. They have forced the so-called "liberal programs" such as affirmative action, equal opportunities, black-, women- and ethnic-studies programs to defend their existence at college campuses. The growth of conservatism brought closet racists into the open. The result has been that people like David Duke and Rush Limbaugh have not only gained popular support, they are respected as well.

The sound defeat of George Bush by Bill Clinton may have brought a ray of hope. Women and minorities would be a lot happier in the nation if Clinton will honor his campaign promise to replace the Reagan-Bush political approach with politics of inclusion and the empowerment of the citizens of this great nation.

Fiscal problems currently facing the nation are likely to limit what "kind and gentle" politicians and policy-makers can realistically do. In the present atmosphere, college programs of dubious academic quality are likely to become vulnerable to cuts and elimination. This means that each program will be scrutinized before it continues to receive public support. As such, the existence of black studies and ethnic programs on campus will be questionable unless their research, teaching and services contribute significantly to make our communities and the nation better places to live.

To survive, leaders and personnel affiliated with the discipline should make quality control the first priority in the coming years. Of course, quality control begins with quality leadership, qualified and hard-working personnel. It also requires recruiting the best, the most qualified and not the most submissive, compromising, or agreeable. It would be hypocritical for us to recruit only the people who are like us and at the same time ask campus authorities to accept and work toward diversity in the institutions of higher education in the country.

I want to stress that a strong black studies programs depends on quality and hard-working faculty and personnel. The survival of black studies in predominantly white institutions will require strong, effective leadership. Leadership that will unite or include rather than condone, connive or encourage bickering, dictatorship and factionalism will be crucial for the survival of the discipline in predominantly white institutions. Puppets and leaders with self-serving agenda are likely to do more harm to black studies and its clientele than good.

To be effective, the need to de-politicize black studies programs may be very crucial. This means that chairs, directors, or coordinators should accept diversity and use those qualities to strengthen rather than weaken black studies. In addition, black studies need to rid itself of the "Black History" mentality in favor of the multi-disciplinary approach. That approach did not do much harm in the past, but it is likely to prove fatal in the future.

In spite of the problems it has faced during the last several years, I strongly believe that black studies can develop courses that are interesting, enlightening, yet educationally challenging and rewarding.

Normally, textbooks tend to synthesize works done by other scholars and writers into readable forms. But because this discipline does not have

a long history of scholarship and publications as the older and some of the more traditional disciplines, authors in the discipline have fewer publications to depend upon. Also, in my attempts to emphasize the contemporary experience, and thus keep the contents as current as possible, I have had to use the most recent primary data such as census information and raw data from other primary sources to describe The Black Experience in Contemporary America.

Many people have contributed directly or indirectly to the project. Once again, I will like to thank my immediate family for their patience and support. On October 9th, 1990 Carol and I were blessed with the birth of Linda Afua Adutwumwah. Linda has become the most pretty, happy and adorable two-year old in the family. My sincere appreciation goes to my mother and Michael for their continued endurance of life under very difficult conditions in Ghana. My sincere thanks go to Carol A. Rashleigh and her friend, Catherine M. Walker (UNO Inter-library Loan Department) for proofreading the manuscript. Finally, Ms. Johnson of the U.S. Bureau of the Census was extremely helpful in helping to identify and acquire relevant data.

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December 1992.

Preface to the Third Edition

About a decade ago, the frustration of finding an appropriate textbook for my students was the main motivating factor for the project that was finally titled, The Black Experience in Contemporary America. Originally, it was intended for my students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha so the first edition was produced from a computer generated manuscript. However, mainly by word of mouth, a dozen or more black and ethnic studies instructors adopted it as a main text or as the only textbook for their classes. Encouraged by the success of the first edition, attempts were made to revise and update the original manuscript. But efforts to get the second edition accepted by one of the major publishers/distributors failed. As such, it was published and released by a local publisher that believed in the project. The second edition was typeset and released in both paper and hardbound copies in 1993. Although it was not marketed nationally, a few thousand copies were sold, thus proving the publishers who did not believe that this book could sell enough copies to justify publication and distribution nationally wrong.

The success of the first two editions of The Black Experience in Contemporary America was a major incentive to begin work on this edition. Response to the second edition has generally been very positive. Sincere thanks to the instructors and the readers who made useful comments and suggestions on the earlier editions. I have incorporated some of them into this edition.

Because of the enormous amount of information available at the time of preparation, it has taken me more than seven years to finish this edition. Like the first two editions, every effort has been made to use the most up-to-date information and data available. Also, I did not shy away from dealing with controversial issues relevant to the black experience in America.

Since the release of the second edition, black studies in higher institutions has enjoyed a steady growth, in terms of demand, and the discipline is less vulnerable now than it was when I was finishing the second edition. Whether the present academic and political environments will prevail is anybody's guess. However, whatever the future presents, the need for objective and comprehensive analyses of the black experience in America will be important to students, scholars and decision makers.

Although it has had its share of serious problems and scandals, the Clinton presidency is perhaps the first administration in the U.S. that has shown genuine sympathy

with the conditions of blacks and minorities. The President consistently addressed the racial schism and racial injustice in the country during his tenure. In a risky, but a courageous move, Bill Clinton made bridging America's racial divide an important part of his presidency. He made blacks, other minorities and women feel included in his administration and its policies. To what extent his stance on race relations and racial justice in America exacerbated his personal and political problems is unknown.

The election of George W. Bush as the next President of the United States, and the fact that the overwhelming majority of blacks voted for the president-elect's challenger, Al Gore may present a special challenge to blacks. Mr. Bush's promise to be the president of all Americans is reassuring.

Special thanks go to a colleague at the University of Nebraska at Omaha who found time, in spite of her very busy work schedule to read and edit all but two chapters of the manuscript. The remarkable thing about this person is that, in spite of the amount of time spent on the manuscript, she wishes to remain anonymous. Special gratitude goes to Mr. James T. Shaw, assistant professor of library science and the librarian in charge of government documents at the University of Nebraska at Omaha who regularly alerted me of the availability of new documents that he felt were appropriate for this project. On many occasions, Jim would leave messages on my voice mail informing me that he had reserved data that he knew I could use. His was a dedication beyond the call of duty, and I am very grateful to him for his thoughtfulness.

Once again, I used the map of Africa, Figure 2.1 that was prepared for me by Mr. Marvin Barton of the Department of Geography and Geology, University of Nebraska at Omaha. My sincere regards to Mr. Barton. However, Marvin's busy schedule prevented him from updating the information on the map for this edition. At Joe Christensen, Inc. many thanks to Ms. Carla A. Cloutier and her associates for their assistance.

To my son, Mr. Daniel Kwabena Boamah-Wiafe, Jr. I say thank you very much for giving me a twenty-something view and tips on a number of issues treated in the book, particularly on rap music and the hip hop culture. My two older sons, Michael and Ernest have been inspiration as well as pride to me. Mrs. Anne Ludwig deserves mention for her wisdom and efforts in editing chapters 3 and 4 of the manuscript.

In the summer of 1998, I read from a childhood friend,

the Reverend Joseph Adu Mensah, whom I had not heard or read from for more than 20 years. I was very impressed to learn that he was now an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church, Agona Nsaba in Ghana. We began a series of communication and regular contacts right away. His candid advice, suggestions and prayers have been enormously helpful. Also, thanks to Ms. Lydia Ampomah, nurse-midwife at the Mpraeso Government Hospital for her hospitality during my visit to Ghana in 1999. In the summer of 1998, and again in 1999, my cousin, Dr. George S. Asante and his lovely wife, Mrs. Mary Asante provided me with comfortable housing, a peaceful retreat and company at Adenta, a suburb of Accra, Ghana that proved to be very helpful during the final stages of the manuscript. To them and Mr. Alex A. Appleton of New Tafo I say (in Twi) "*Me da mo ase pa-paapa*" (sincere thanks to both of you). As always, the errors and shortcomings are mine.

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April 2001



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Chapter One

THE ORIGIN, NATURE AND SCOPE OF BLACK STUDIES

Black Studies is a relatively new and developing discipline, it does not have all the qualities, traditions, the achievements, and consequently the respect of the older disciplines in academia. But the questions are:

What is black studies?

What is the scope of this discipline? and

How did it originate?

We will attempt to answer the last part of the question first.

Origin Of Black Studies

Black condemnation of American education was greatest in predominantly white institutions in the United States. As Ballard (1974, 60) has pointed out, white college administrators and faculties had little or no idea of the impact of black demand for the same economic, social and political benefits enjoyed by the majority of white Americans would affect their institutions.

Demand for black studies grew out of the civil rights and the black consciousness movements of the 1960s. The civil rights movement created conditions for the demand for courses that deal with the black experience in colleges and universities. The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 and the events that followed the tragedy compelled institutions of higher education into giving in to some of the demands of the black students, faculty and their supporters. Also, for the first time in the nation's history, significant numbers of black students were attending predominantly white institutions. However, blacks in those institutions felt isolated from the rest of the student body. In addition, blacks resented that their experiences were rarely discussed in or out of the classrooms. When they did, the discussions seemed to focus on social problems, creating the

impression that the black experience in America was almost exclusively negative. Positive contributions of blacks were practically ignored² (Bass 1978, 2).

It would, however, be wrong to imply that the birth of black studies originated in the 1960s. Research and serious studies on the black experience in America as well as the black heritage had been pursued by black and white scholars such as Carter G. Woodson, Melville Herskovits, E. Franklin Frazier, John Hope Franklin, W. E. B. DuBois, Gunnar Myrdal, and Charles Johnson in the first half of the 20th century. However, with a few exceptions, research on the black experience were neither welcomed nor included in the curricula and textbooks of the public schools, colleges and universities (Bass 1978, 1).

The result of the widely publicized demands and demonstrations for courses on the black experience was that, by 1970, 640 institutions had added black studies to their curricula. Two years earlier, virtually no institution of higher education in America offered courses on the black experience. Approximately 65 of the institutions that offered courses on the black experience or roughly 10 percent of them had undergraduate majors in black studies. Sixty-nine institutions of higher education offered undergraduate minors and four had graduate majors in black studies. While the black studies revolution in American colleges and universities was remarkable, the range of

2. In accord with past and contemporary stereotypes and perceptions, blacks are often portrayed negatively in print and the broadcast media. Positive facts such as:

- The role of slave labor in the building of colonial American agriculture and the other sectors of the economy has often been ignored. The fact that slave labor was enormously efficient and economically profitable was tremendously helpful for the building of this nation (See: Fogel & Engerman 1974; Itzkoff 1976, 146).
- Important contributions of black educators such as Washington Carver, Ralph Bunche and Booker T. Washington and the accomplishments of blacks in the development of music, dance and religion are rarely mentioned. Even if mentioned, they are not given the attention they deserve.
- The contribution of black people in fighting to preserve democracy in and outside America as well as helping to shape the military traditions of this country are rarely discussed.
- The role of blacks in demanding civil rights, fairness, the development and preservation of civil rights laws and their enforcement that has benefited white women, homosexuals and other minorities has often been pushed under the rug, and
- Important inventions of black people in the U.S. are rarely given the space and attention they deserve in the major publications and text books. Occasionally, brief discussions of the role of the Black American in building this society are followed by a catalog of their negative contributions. The result is that a number of text books in the nation's educational system have neither been completely true, honest, nor have they been representative from the black perspective (See: Nick Aaron Ford, 1970).

commitment to the discipline and the planning preceding its establishment varied considerably. Some institutions made genuine commitments to correct curriculum deficiencies that led to the demonstrations. Others established black studies primarily to silence their critics, or prevent further demonstrations and confrontations (Bass 1978; Ballard 1974).

What Is Black Studies?

Black studies is the systematic study of black people and their experiences. They included the experience of black-Africans, African Americans, Afro-Americans, Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Europeans. It is important to note that black studies is different from African American studies. In the latter, the studies are concentrated on the experiences of African Americans. The former examines the experiences of blacks around the globe. In other words, it explores the experiences of black Africans as well as blacks in the Diaspora. By blacks in the Diaspora, we mean blacks living outside the African continent³. Irrespective of the name used, however, one cannot realistically study blacks or African Americans without dealing with Africa and/or its people.

Black studies treats the black experiences as they have unfolded and as they are currently evolving. It examines valid contributions that black people have made and continue to make in society. The discipline concentrates on the distinctiveness of black people from, and their similarities and inter-dependence with other people. It involves the studies of people who have done a lot more than survive under the most grueling and trying circumstances, either as slaves in the New World or as free but oppressed, marginalized, or as colonial subjects in Africa and elsewhere (Jackson 1970, 35-36).

Ideally, black studies should deal with all aspects of the black experience - both the positive and negative. However, because so many of the negative aspects have been emphasized, it is important to explain or follow the negative aspects with some explanations. This means, as much as possible, negative aspects must be appropriately balanced with positive aspects. Balancing the negative with positive does not mean that the truth must be distorted. The search for the truth must be a priority of education. Any attempt to distort the truth would be a

3. Africa is considered the mother continent of black people. As such people of African descent residing outside Africa are blacks in the Diaspora.

disservice to the students, the black race and scholarship in general.

The Relevance of Black Studies

The need to make education completely true, honest and representative of the major aspects of the American life and culture demands that the black experience, or black studies become part of the curricula at all levels of education. It is even not enough to teach the subject at the college level, but it must start earlier.

Several years of neglect of the black experience in the New World as a legitimate part of the American experience has resulted in serious errors made by some experts of human life, history and society - anthropologists, historians, political scientists, sociologists and psychologists. These scholars failed to give adequate effort, time and space to the black experience in their studies.

The black studies debate has generated interesting comments from both the proponents and opponents of the discipline. For example, Obichere (1970, 179) has suggested that the neglect of the black experience in the traditional literature and the college curricula of predominantly white institutions is not an accident, but the result of calculated anti-black policies adopted by predominantly white controlled colleges and institutions of higher education. However, the fact that the predominantly black institutions of higher learning have not done any better makes Obichere's point shaky at best. Nevertheless, the continued opposition to, and the lack of genuine acceptance of the discipline by college administrators and faculties in the nation may have convinced a number of observers that there may be some validity in the accusation made by the Nigerian.

According to Hayakawa (1970) "the state of scholarship about Negro history and culture reflects the public's long-standing lack of interest in the subject . . ." He emphasized that the enormous amount of research that is needed in this study area has been neglected.

Some scholars will agree with the late Shirley Chisholm, an experienced schoolteacher and the first black woman to serve in the U.S. Congress that "education consists of a full and free inquiry into all phases and segments of human society". If that is true then any educational system will have failed unless it recognizes and effectively deals with all phases and segments of the society it serves, including the black experience.

Research and publications of scholars in the

traditional disciplines have generally ignored the contributions of blacks to the building of the American society. Their lack of understanding of the black experience may have led them to believe that blacks pose a problem instead of being part of the system. Like any other group in America, blacks may be seen as a problem as well as a solution to a number of problems. Sometimes one gets the impression that blacks could not be considered as part of the system and therefore, do not deserve to work towards the "Great American Dream" .

It is wrong to pretend that there are no race problems in America. It is also wrong to think that America's race problems will be resolved if we ignore them. In the view of this author, such a behavior can be likened to the giant African ostrich that puts its relatively small head in the bush whenever it is frightened. Failing to discuss the problems and adopt the "ostrich mentality" will not help. We must readily admit that there are race problems in the country for which solutions must be found. The American society cannot afford to make another serious mistake as it did when the constitution of the nation was written and ratified. It is this reason why we applaud President Bill Clinton for his initiative on race relations in America.

The result of the neglect of the black experience by scholars and educators is that many students enter colleges and universities with little or practically no knowledge of the black experience in America. In rural America, there are some adults who have never had face-to-face or one-to-one direct interaction with a black person before. It is difficult to understand why anybody would grow up in such a sophisticated society without reading or learning something about the largest minority population in this nation besides the myths and stereotypes (Ford, 1973, 8).

The neglect of the black experience in the curricula and research agenda of institutions of higher education have made it questionable whether American colleges and universities are capable of meeting the needs of black communities in America. The fact that blacks are also taxpayers whose tax monies are spent on these institutions at the federal, state and local levels present political and ethical problems. Cut off from the history and culture of his ancestors in Africa, lacking a sense of his own worth and the heritage of his ancestors, and having been brainwashed by the educational system and the media into believing in his own inferiority, it must not be surprising if the potentials of the black man in the New

World have not been fully developed. Indeed, the fact that many black Americans have attained positions of respect comparable with, or higher than the average American shows the caliber of blacks in the Diaspora.

Some black students and their supporters believe that curricula and programs of institutions of higher learning in the nation before black studies were established were not relevant to people of African descent. Indeed, some of them thought that the curricula that excluded the black experiences were destructive to black students in terms of the recognition of black communities, their people and needs. The lack of such recognition also forced some blacks to abandon their culture, heritage and identity.

The U. S. Bureau of the Census estimates show that there were approximately 33.5 million blacks in the U.S. in 1996 (Table 3.1). According to the estimates, blacks made up nearly 12.63 percent of the nation's population in 1996. It has been projected that 15.38 percent of the country's population would be black by the year 2050 if current trends continue (Ibid.). The fact that major cities and large metropolitan areas in America (including the nation's capital) are already predominantly black or non-white makes it important for educators to prepare their students to face the reality of living in a multi-racial society⁴.

Any educational system that does not cater fully and honestly to more than 12 percent of its population can never be representative of the major aspects of its culture. Consequently, it must be reiterated that the need to make the educational system completely true, honest and fully representative of the major aspects of the American society has made the inclusion of black studies in the curricula of institutions a necessity.

The history of the U.S. is full of evidence of "mis-education" of the population about matters relating to blacks and non-white groups. The fact that not as much is known about blacks in the U.S. may in part be responsible for the myths, stereotypes and the contempt of blacks, their history and culture. Since the 1960s, black studies programs have been part of some colleges and universities in the United States. The inclusion of the black experience in the curricula of elementary and secondary schools, and the remaining colleges and universities will significantly improve education in the country.

4. It is important to emphasize that by American definition, the vast majority of the people of the world are non-white or people of color - people with brown, red, and yellow skin color.

In a modern plural society such as the United States, it is important for the people to understand and be aware of relevant issues that are of concern to other racial and ethnic groups. Unless some understanding exists, any attempt to build and develop a peaceful, productive and happy society may not be as successful as one would expect. Failure to understand, or at least, be sympathetic and considerate to the values, expectations, aspirations, fears and concerns of other races and ethnic groups have often led to serious cleavages among different segments of this society. To borrow from the late Aggrey of Africa and the popular song recorded by Stevie Wonder and Paul McCartney, called *Ebony and Ivory*, the black and white keys of the keyboard if properly combined make pleasant music.

As long as the different racial and ethnic groups live together, it is important that they learn about one another. The exclusion of the black experience in the old textbooks did not only deny students from learning about blacks, it led to bitterness on the part of some blacks who interpreted the omission to mean contempt and the disregard for their contribution to this society. It has also denied whites the opportunity to learn about blacks.

The inadequate treatment of the black experience has created some unnecessary problems for some prominent white Americans whose comments have generated controversies. Perhaps one of the best example of the problem was the dilemma that involved the late Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder. Jimmy "The Greek," a CBS-TV sports commentator, analyst and odds-maker was fired by the network after reportedly making comments about black athletes that had racist overtones. After his remarks touched off a storm of protests, the Washington Post (January 1988) reported that the network released the following statement:

CBS Sports today ended its relationship with Jimmy (the Greek) Snyder. . . . In no way do these comments reflect the views of CBS Sports. Mr. Snyder has been a member of the CBS Sports team since 1976 and has made important contributions to its success (Washington Post January 1988).

In my opinion, the network used "the Greek" as a scapegoat. That action was taken because of the protests. Firing one man did not solve the general problem. Indeed, CBS-TV itself could not honestly claim that it had treated blacks and other minorities fairly. The network could not honestly vouch that its programming, recruiting and promotion of blacks at the time did justice to blacks,

their experiences and interests. Mr. Snyder's perception and supposed ignorance of the black situation may be typical of some whites; a situation that can only be corrected by education.

The existence of residential segregation and racial or ethnic concentrations in major cities has led to separate social and cultural institutions in the country. As a result, little interracial interaction takes place on a regular basis. Many students, regardless of race who enter the schools, colleges and universities have been raised in de facto racially, and often ethnically segregated residential, educational and social systems where interactions among the races and ethnic groups are either low or non-existent. The lack of interaction and exposure to the diversity of the American culture and even the greater diversity of world cultures have reduced the opportunity to prepare American students for racial or cultural tolerance.

Because they are the minority and do not have political control, blacks have had, not only to learn about whites, but also to accept or tolerate their culture. It may, therefore, be fair to suggest that blacks are, on the average, better equipped to deal with whites than the other way around.

The average American student knows something about Europe and Europeans. The average students knows that Columbus, the Portuguese discovered America. Modern World History begins with the civilizations that emerged in the valleys of Tigris and Euphrates, Lower Nile valleys, Greece and the Roman Empire. World civilization textbooks treat Ancient Egypt as part of the Middle East civilizations. Little is said about the fact that Ancient Egypt was and is still part of the African continent. The contributions of black Africans are often omitted from Ancient History textbooks.

The omission of the black experience, including the achievements of ancient and medieval Africans in Egypt, Kush-Nubia, Ghana, Mali, Songhay and Zimbabwe has done a great disservice to education. Not only is education that excludes the black experience incomplete, it is dishonest and seriously flawed.

As Nick Aaron Ford (1973, 4) pointed out, non-black schools and institutions of higher learning have deliberately ignored the validity or the educational value of the black experience as a subject worthy of study, except in a context of debasement. This is why we feel that any educational system or institution that excludes the black experience in its coverage is flawed and perhaps

dishonest.

Recent events show that the legacy of racism, racial prejudice and exploitation, and the oppression of blacks have not ended. The existence of racism in this society in spite of some three decades of legislative actions and government policies designed to end it has led some observers (Katz 1978, Fernandez 1981; Farley 1995; Thernstrom & Thernstrom 1997, 444-47) to conclude that education may be a major factor to reduce or eliminate racism in this society. This is why we think that the inclusion of the black experience in the curricula of various institutions of learning is essential. And this is the essence of black studies in institutions of higher education in America. Racial harmony requires that knowledge about blacks be carefully researched and effectively disseminated.

Unfortunately the educational establishment has failed to effectively include the black experience in the curricula. With a few exceptions, curricula remained what they were before the emancipation of the black slave. For blacks, complete emancipation cannot take place until the curricula of major institutions of education are decolonized. The decolonization of the curricula means recognizing blacks as part of the New World and, hence effectively incorporating their experiences and contributions to the building of the Americas.

The fact that racism is still a problem has been acknowledged by a number of authors (black and white) who have strongly argued that racism is alive in America. As Katz (Ibid.) rightly stated, we cannot help white people "come out from behind the myths that have sheltered them for so long and begin focusing on the difficult realities and discrepancies that are present in American society", if the issues of racism that exist in the white community are not openly and seriously examined. In her book, White Awareness, Judy Katz (1978, 4-5) pointed out, that racism:

has been a part of the American way of life since the first Whites landed on the continent. Although the United States prides itself on its ideologies about human rights and particularly on its philosophies of freedom and equality, the bleak reality is that, both historically and presently, this country is based on and operates under a doctrine of White racism. It can be seen historically in White people's interactions with Native Americans, in the development of the doctrine of manifest destiny, in the establishment of Indian reservations, in the capture and enslavement of Africans, in the wartime internment of Japanese-Americans, and presently in the pervasive attitude of most White

Americans that Third World Americans must *fight* for their rights - the same rights that white Americans enjoy from birth (Ibid.).

Racism is manifested not only in the minority ghettos of the cities but equally in the white neighborhoods of the suburbs, in the South and in the North. Racism escapes no one. It is a part of us all and has deeply infiltrated the lives and psyches of both the oppressed and the oppressors (Ibid.).

In the second edition of his book, Majority - Minority Relations, John Farley (1988, 1-2) argued that racism has not only persisted in America, its incidence was increasing in the 1980s. According to him:

The end of the urban rebellions of the late 1960s led many Americans to forget temporarily the race relations problem; tax revolt (California's Proposition 13), the energy crisis, and inflation had become the issues in the forefront of that era's public mind. Today, those issues are largely forgotten, but race relations as an issue continues to reappear in American society.

In 1980, racial problems surfaced in the form of perhaps the most serious bloody riot in Miami, FL. The unprecedented black voter turn out and the black support of the first serious black presidential candidate, Jesse Jackson in 1984 and 1988 show that race is still a major issue for black Americans. In both years, the nation witnessed the most racially polarized voting behavior in the history of United States presidential elections. In 1984, almost two-thirds of the white votes were cast for Ronald Reagan, while more than 90 percent of the black votes benefited Walter Mondale, the liberal candidate.

By the mid-1980s racism had taken the form of a frightening resurgence of activities by a range of extremist hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Order, the Aryan Nation, Posse Comitatus and the skinheads. Race motivated violence escalated. It included the murders of a Jewish talk-show personality in Denver and a state trooper in Missouri. In 1986, a rally was held in Idaho by a coalition of hate groups during which a proposal to make several northwestern states a "white" nation was made.

In 1987, Klan violence sparked a massive civil rights protest in Forsythe County, Georgia, and a black man died as a result of a racially motivated attack by whites in New York City. All these incidents, and many others including the 1998 dragging murder of James Byrd, Jr. in Jasper, Texas point to the fact that the nation's racial problem has been perennial occurrence that will not go away by itself (Farley 1988, 2; The Philadelphia Inquirer July 4, 1999).

In New York City, tempers flared in 1990 after a

racially charged Bensonhurst trial ended in the acquittal of Keith Mondello on all murder and manslaughter charges in the shooting death of 16-year-old black, Yusuf Hawkins. A group of about 500 black demonstrators led by the Reverend Al Sharpton marched into the predominantly white Brooklyn neighborhood of Bensonhurst (The New York Times, in Omaha World-Herald, March 20, 1990).

In Los Angeles, the acquittal of the four policemen tried for the brutal beating of a 25-year-old unarmed black motorist, Rodney King, by an almost all-white Simi Valley jury on March 29, 1992 sparked the most deadly urban riot and mayhem in the nation. As Charles Whitaker (1992, 119) pointed out,

But along with the chilling images flickered on television screens and were emblazoned on front pages around the globe, a sobering message should have been transmitted to an America that for most of the past two decades has failed to heed warnings about the impending danger of prolonged urban neglect and race-based politics.

Now, with the charred rubble of the nation's second largest city still standing as a monument to political indifference and the folly of maintaining what the Kerner Commission in 1968 called "two societies, one Black, one White - separate and unequal," many hope that America will at last answer the desperate wake-up call emanating from its urban core (Ibid.).

Indeed, it is believed that the racial rift between blacks and whites widened in the 1990s. Such conflicts have been deadly in parts of the nation. Racial conflicts and race related deaths have occurred in Howard Beach, Crown Height and Bensonhurst, all in New York (Thernstrom & Thernstrom 1997, 509-523).

Racism and race relations had their ups and downs during the latter part of the 1990s. Racism and prejudice were most often chosen as the number one problem in the 21st century by both whites and blacks in the most recent survey (AP, October 10, 1999). This means that as we begin a new millennium, racial divisions and conflicts continue to be a significant problem in America. The fact that nonwhites continue to face racism, racial prejudice and racial profiling may be the challenge that educators and political leaders must be prepared to face. Of course, the problem cannot be solved unless it is understood. Issues involving racism and racial bigotry cannot be understood unless we know more about the largest and the most discriminated against minority group in the country (See: Myrdal 1944; Kerner Commission 1968; Welsing 1972; 1974; Thernstrom & Thernstrom 1997).

More than three decades after the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders characterized America as two separate societies, little has changed. The nation continues to be two separate societies in the late 1990s as it was in 1968. With a few exceptions, residential areas of major cities and towns continue to be either predominantly white or predominantly black. Lines of color continue to exist in the cities and major settlements where whites, blacks and other minorities live in closely guarded separate neighborhoods. Results of national opinion polls about the black situation generally yield two conflicting responses from white and black respondents. Blacks indicate that they are poorer and worse-off than they were. On the other hand, responses from whites show that they feel that blacks have no reasons to complain. As will be seen later in this book, the irony is that almost all social and economic indicators show that blacks have not only failed to achieve parity, but the gap between them and whites are beginning to increase again.

An article written by a black journalist student from the University of Georgia at Athens about the plight of black students in predominantly white institutions characterized the nature of race relations in colleges and universities in America. Like most of her classmates in high school, Carole R. Simmons (1987, 43), felt that the four years of college was supposed to be the best of her life and was, therefore, very anxious to get to college. However, when she got there, not many people wanted to know about how she felt. On the campus bus, the seats around her were filled up while the ones next to her remained empty until other minority students took them. White students would sit on the seat next to her only when they had no choice.

Few non-blacks were willing to talk about how she lost her first roommate. Indeed, she never met her. Her belongings were already in the room when she checked in.

She'd written a chatty note introducing herself and informing me that she was eating dinner with her family and would meet me later. I unpacked my bags, set a few family photos on my desk, and went to dinner. When I returned a few hours later, a picture of my mother was facedown on my bed. My roommate's things were gone (Ibid.).

Five years later, she returned to the institution to work for her master's degree. The first day of orientation, she overheard one white professor tell another that he was anxious to see how the two blacks in his class would do.

Ms. Simmons was one of the black students. Continuing her saga at the University of Georgia at Athens, Simmons indicated that the institution appeared to sanction acts of racial bias on campus. Black students were never featured in the student newspaper unless it was football or basketball season. Few campus lectures, entertainment and special events programs reflected the ethnic diversity of the student population.

But by far the most troublesome act of omission was repeated in the classroom every day. During her enrollment the only time that a professor mentioned the name of any ethnic person, group or publication was in her American history class. They spent a week on the Civil War, but barely covered the slave trade or slavery (Ibid.).

When she complained to her black friends at other institutions about her feeling of isolation, the reply was that at least she had not experienced the overt racial acts some of them had endured. A friend at the Carleton College in Minnesota said she was often told that the course-work was too difficult for her and was repeatedly encouraged to leave. Another friend at Yale had her tires slashed and a dead bird was hanging from the car's antenna when she returned from an anti-apartheid rally she helped organize. Around the neck of that bird was a note that read, "South Africa has the Right Idea⁵."

Ms. Simmons' experience was not an isolated one. Campuses across America experienced a resurgence of racial harassment in the 1980s and 1990s. Deteriorating problems involving race relations have come about because of a general lack of knowledge about the reality of the black experience in America. In spite of what has been going on in the black community, some believe that the race issue is no longer a problem. Ironically, college administrators complain that they are unable to recruit and keep black students and faculty on their campuses. The blame is usually put on the lack of motivation of potential black college students and faculty.

The Status of Black Studies at Major Colleges

Government mandated desegregation, affirmative action and other federal programs have failed to stop the decline of the number of black students and faculty on the campuses. The existence of effective black studies programs with a clear mission to conduct systematic

5. See: Carole R. Simmons, "A Silent Scream: A Student Journalist Confronts Prejudice and the Abnormal Quiet on the Racial Front," Campus Voice: The National College Magazine, winter 1987).

research and teach the black experience may even not be enough to fully address the problem of decreasing number of blacks in the nation's institutions of higher learning. However, there is no doubt that the presence of strong and effective black studies will help to improve the recruitment and retention of black students, faculty and staff at college campuses. Unfortunately, many institutions of higher education look at black studies with mixed feelings. At best, black studies is tolerated. In many cases, these programs have been deliberately weakened.

Like other ethnic studies programs, black studies has been denied the "academic currency that it needs most: recognition and respect as a legitimate scholarly discipline that constructs, disseminates and impacts knowledge in a distinctive way" (Hu-Dehart 1995). Ethnic and black studies programs have been vulnerable to budget cuts and reductions. The result is that they have been rendered less effective to undertake the mission for which they were established. As Hu-Dehart (Op cit.) has argued, while ethnic studies programs demonstrate campus administrators' commitment to diversity, they are also afraid of free-thinking and independent-minded nonwhite faculty whose scholarship they are either not familiar with or distrust. The result has often been attempts (either directly or indirectly) to weaken or undermine the effectiveness of ethnic studies.

Among the common practices used to undermine such programs include:

- installing weak, (sometimes incompetent, unreasonable and/or dictatorial) and pliable program directors and department heads, sometimes after rejecting strong candidates,
- refusing to hire more than a handful of full-time faculty and swelling their ranks with part-timers who may be given voting rights to dilute the strength of the full-time faculty.
- Research is sometimes separated from teaching by setting up a separate unit for research and denying the ethnic studies faculty control over ethnic-studies research.
- The divide-and-rule strategy is sometimes used to destroy solidarity and marginalize some faculty members, who may be forced to leave ethnic studies and join another program.
- Allow other departments to set up courses that

duplicate or compete with those in ethnic studies.

- Delaying the approval of important courses and degree programs even when demand for such courses and degrees exists, and
- Refusing or delaying granting departmental status to a program that has a comprehensive curriculum and faculty in place (Hu-DeHart 1995).

A major reason why black studies programs have been of low priority in colleges and universities in the 1980s and 1990s is the wrong perception of the reality of the black situation in contemporary America. The prevailing perception among some whites is that civil rights legislation and affirmative action programs have been so effective that unless something is done whites could end up losing grounds to blacks. That perception is based on the illusion that blacks have achieved parity with whites. There are others who believe that too much attention and resources have already been "wasted" on them. Some whites are concerned that if nothing is done to stop, or at least reduce government efforts to help blacks and other minorities reach parity with whites, their children stand to lose. Concern about the imminent or possible deterioration of the condition of whites in America is so high among a few whites that they have formed "white supremacy" groups to fight for what they claim to be "white rights." The presumption is that they are fighting for the rights that whites have lost, or are losing to blacks.

There is no doubt that civil rights and affirmative action programs have significantly helped blacks, women and other minorities. However, a significant number of blacks have not benefited directly from, or taken advantage of the civil rights legislation and affirmative action programs. Also, the progress of blacks should not and must not necessarily be made at the expense of white Americans. As we will find later, civil rights and affirmative action laws and programs have not led to large-scale or widespread progress of blacks. The reality is that poor whites including white females have equally benefited from civil rights as much as, if not more than blacks. In areas of fair employment and equal opportunities, the white woman has, on the average, benefited more from civil rights legislation and equal opportunities than black people as a group.

The Role Of Black Studies In Predominantly White Institutions

Studies have suggested that there is a correlation between the existence of black studies programs on one hand, and black student admission and retention. Also, the presence of black students in predominantly white institutions has often led to the recruitment and retention of more black faculty. The inclusion of black faculty improves the cultural mix of curricula in institutions of higher education. The introduction of the black experience and the Afrocentric ways of research and instruction into the college curricula has made education more representative and culturally balanced. In many cases, black studies faculty make up the bulk, sometimes almost all the black faculty in some predominantly white institutions. It is not unusual for the number of faculty and staff in black studies departments and programs to be used by predominantly white institutions to satisfy the Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunities requirements.

It is important to stress that it is wrong to assume that black studies courses are needed exclusively by black students. While black students need to know something about their history, culture and heritage, effective black studies courses broaden the outlook of white and other students as well. They enable white students to better understand their black colleagues. As we pointed out earlier, black studies courses help prepare the students for a multi-racial and multi-cultural society where most of them will live and work after graduation. It is also important to point out that some educated blacks know little about their culture and heritage. Many of such blacks end up not being able to deal with their own people. It is difficult to help people that one cannot relate to or deal with.

The reality of contemporary America is that the so-called melting pot was a myth. America remains a population composed of people of different cultural backgrounds. It is also, important to note that, to a great extent, cultural diversity has made this nation great. It is, therefore, necessary for Americans to appreciate the cultural diversity of the people, and respect other peoples' cultures. One can hardly respect that which one does not know. Mutual respect is a condition for effective interaction and peaceful coexistence in a multi-cultural society such as the United States.

The populations of many cities in large metropolitan areas in America including the nation's capital have

significantly high proportion of blacks. It is, therefore, necessary for white people living in cities with predominantly black populations to know something about blacks and their experiences in the New World. It is in the interest of whites, particularly those who may work for the federal government to learn about blacks for their own peace and survival. Learning about elements of black culture does not mean that one has to adopt or even like them.

Like the general society, American colleges and universities must not only promote academic excellence, they must also set examples in racial tolerance and awareness. Higher institutions of learning, particularly those fully or partially funded or supported with public funds must serve the majority as well as the minority population. This means that blacks expect and should demand their share of services in the mission of every public higher Institution.

Opponents of black studies have sometimes argued that the establishment of separate and independent black studies departments or programs is a waste of resources. Sometimes, such people have succeeded in getting institutions of higher learning to amalgamate all ethnic-oriented programs into a single unit. It is believed that the amalgamation of such programs into a single minority program or department would save money and resources. In many cases, such a strategy has not only reduced the quality of the individual programs, but it has often failed to save money or resources.

The Scope of Black Studies

The establishment of a separate and autonomous discipline would have been unnecessary if the traditional disciplines in the liberal arts had included the black experience in their subjects of inquiry. The need for black studies in academia would not have been necessary if scholars had dealt fairly and effectively with the black experience component in their subject areas. The neglect of the black experience in their studies has also led to such a serious information gap that one can fairly conclude that scholars in some of the traditional disciplines are poorly equipped to treat it in a fair and adequate manner.

However, if black studies is a valid discipline, then we must define its scope of endeavor. This is particularly important since the subject matter often extends into the domains of other disciplines.

By now, it must be clear that black studies is

interdisciplinary in scope. It deals with the black experience components within different disciplines. For example, since the traditional historians have generally been unable or unwilling to write objectively about the black experience, black history fills the gap in our knowledge base within the discipline (Drimmer 1987, 34-35).

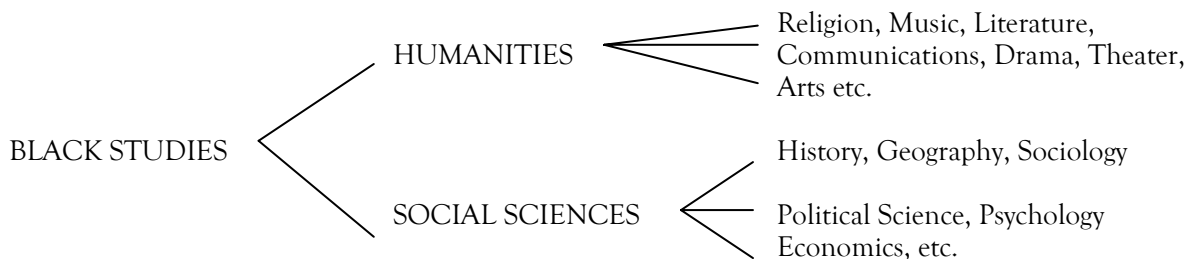
As Ms Simmons (1987, 43) explained, in her American history class, the professor spent a week on the civil war, however, slavery was barely covered. In some cases, when the black experience is covered in the traditional disciplines, it is treated from the Eurocentric perspective (Asante 1998).

In the opinion of this writer, a good black studies scholar will examine the civil war from both the Eurocentric and Afrocentric perspectives. In other words, the civil war would be examined from both the white and black points of view. If education is to become fair and representative, then it is important to look at issues from as many perspectives as possible. The inclusion of black studies in college curricula in this way broadens and enriches our knowledge base.

The discipline deals with information in both the social sciences as well as the humanities on the black experience. The black experience in social science subjects such as political behavior, sociology, economics, and geography may be appropriately dealt with in black studies. The black musical, religious and literary experiences may also be dealt with in the humanities. In this case, the discipline shares similar concerns as history, sociology and political sciences in the social sciences as well as the study of religions, music, the arts and literature in the humanities (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

The Scope of Black Studies



The discipline may also be viewed as inter-continental in scope. As we pointed out earlier, it is customary for African American studies, which concentrates on the African American experience to include the African experience in its subject matter. It is difficult to do justice to the African American experience without treating its African heritage. For that reason, black studies examine the experiences of blacks in Africa, the Americas, Europe and other places.

Like any other discipline, black studies uses theories and theoretical concepts in its analyses and explanations. For example, racial theories such as the Nazi theories of racial superiority and the Hamitic myth with its assumptions of black inferiority are critically examined. The presumed inferiority of the black race in the studies of slavery in America is also explored.

As a discipline, black studies has been part of a recent trend in academia toward reducing class, race and group inequalities, exploitation, animosities and efforts at improving communication among human beings. The demand for black studies in institutions of higher education is not part of the communist effort to divide and rule America. Indeed, many blacks, including this writer think that it is a slap in the face for any body to suggest that they are demanding the inclusion and/or strengthening black studies in the curricula because the communists asked them to. Far from being part of the so-called "communist plot," the goal of those who favor the inclusion of black studies in the curricula is to improve education and make it more representative. It is also hoped that the inclusion of black studies will help improve race relations in the nation. Peace and racial harmony are likely to improve when people of different racial and cultural backgrounds can appreciate and accept their differences. Because the diversity of the American society is partially responsible for the strength of this nation, it is important to maintain it in an atmosphere of cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

Black Studies in the 21st Century

The fate of black studies in the 21st century will depend on how black people, their leaders, black studies faculty, staff and the ultimate consumer, the students perceive the discipline. The ability to develop its programs to suit the contemporary student will largely determine whether or not black studies will remain a viable discipline on campuses of U.S. colleges and universities. To be successful, black studies programs in

the 21st century must take into consideration changes that have taken place in American higher institutions. Attention must be paid to the characteristics and needs of the contemporary student. The needs of the student must form the centerpiece of changes that are necessary to make black studies attractive and worthwhile to students⁶. Courses and programs must be adapted to the needs and lifestyles of the traditional as well as the non-traditional students such as older and part-time students who are becoming more important on college campuses in recent years (Neumann 1986, 155).

In the 1960s and the early part of the 1970s, black students and their supporters were willing to take black studies courses whether or not they fulfilled their needs. After all, they fought for it. Civil rights and the black consciousness movement had raised the consciousness of black students. As a result, they wanted to know more about the black heritage. However, the majority of contemporary college students were either too young or had not been born during the civil rights struggles. As such, their commitment to the discipline is not as strong as their counterparts in the 1960s. It is, therefore, important to develop courses that appeal to the new generation of students.

Like any other college program, black studies must compete with other liberal arts courses for students. To improve its competitiveness, the content of black studies must be good, interesting and relevant to the needs of contemporary students. Black studies courses should help students, particularly blacks with limited resources and mentors to understand the realities of college life in contemporary America. Essential information, which will enable them to learn and understand the college system, should be made available to them during their freshman year. They should be made aware of the perception of the contemporary college student, as well as different strategies and the changes on college campuses. A 1976 Carnegie study (Levine 1981; Neumann 1986, 168) reported that 43 percent of "all undergraduate students believe that many of the successful students make it by 'beating the system,' rather than by studying." While it will be morally and ethically wrong to encourage students to 'beat the system,' black studies faculty will fail if they are naïve and refuse to face the realities of the new campus environment. Black studies students must be made to

6. The composition of the college student population has been discussed by William F. Neumann (1986, 154-155).

understand how the system operates. Often, the ability of the students to successfully work within the system may be the difference between dropping out or graduation.

Curricula of today's colleges and universities have grown so large that it is increasingly becoming impossible for students to choose courses that are right for them. It is not unusual for a college to list more than five thousand courses representing as many as fifty disciplines. The fact that more than 50 percent of all undergraduate students change their major at least once during their college career and a large number change their courses every semester shows that the need for direction is very great (Neumann 1986, 168-169; Chase 1980, 147). For blacks and other minorities, the problem may be more serious than the average student.

Future black studies faculty must adapt to the needs and expectations of the contemporary college students. Students must be instructed and guided through college to achieve their goals in life. To do that, black studies faculty must know the objectives and goals of their students. The reality is that the majority of today's students are in college for a job or career. They need courses that will lead directly into jobs after college. A recent survey noted that 85 percent of undergraduates were in college with a specific career in mind. As a result, approximately 50 percent of undergraduates admitted that they would drop out of college if they thought that higher education would not help them land a job. This explains why as much as 58 percent of all undergraduates were majoring in professional programs in the early 1980s (Levine 1981, 61; Neumann 1986, 160-161).

Black studies students must also be prepared for a society that is experiencing "information explosion," and a time when there is so much information that it is practically impossible to keep track of what is going on without the aid of automation. In today's "high-tech" society, the computer and the Internet are no longer luxuries but necessities. It is, therefore, important that students be exposed to, and be prepared to use computers, the Internet and other high-tech equipment efficiently and confidently. The rate at which the computer and the Internet are finding their way into our lives today require black studies faculty to know and be able to use them effectively for their research, instruction and administration. We must, therefore, be prepared to teach and train students to use computers and the Internet effectively in our classes. The reality is that the computer and the Internet have already become

essential technological tools in our society. As a result, students who have been trained to use computers and the Internet effectively will have the competitive advantage in securing and keeping jobs after graduation.

During the last few years, issues involving diversity and multiculturalism have been subjects of intense national debate and controversy. Increased racial troubles and hate crimes across the nation, and on campuses have led to the belief that gains made in race and gender relations were disappearing fast. In spite of affirmative action programs, enrollment and the retention of minority students in higher education have either stagnated or declined. Race continues to be an important and often divisive issue on American College campuses. Efforts to attract minority students to predominantly white campuses in order to bring greater racial mix of students have been severely hampered by the view among some whites that they were being passed over for less qualified minority applicants (Collison 1992, A37-38).

Once havens of tolerance, free inquiry, reasoned discourse, mutual respect, civility, and social responsibility, American colleges and universities have recently become centers of violent intolerance, racial strife and bigotry. Rising campus racial and ethnic tensions have forced a number of college administrators to seek solutions to reduce tensions⁷ (Morganthau, et al. 1991, 26-27).

Proponents of diversity on college campuses argue that a university is a microcosm of the nation, so every effort must be made to replicate diversity in academe. Effective integration is likely to enrich higher education in America (Reisler 1988, A52; Boyer 1990, 66-67; 76). If this is true, then an effective black studies program on a predominantly white institution is likely to improve higher education.

7. Several solutions have either been suggested or tried to reduce racial and ethnic tensions on campus. In one of them, an unprecedented town meeting of 20,000 students were linked nationwide by satellite on November 18, 1992 for a lively exchange with college officials about the problem.

The forum featured a panel of leading educators answering questions from students and faculty members on 215 campuses.

"I think across the country racial tension is on the rise, both in our society and on college campuses," said University of Maryland President William E. Kirwan.

Kirwan said rising tensions are "a troubling trend," based on poor economic conditions and policies under Presidents Reagan and Bush to distance the federal government from affirmative action and desegregation (The Washington Post, in Omaha World-Herald, November 19, 1992).

Possible solutions which emerged from the forum included mandating racially diverse faculties and establishing minority campus publications to counter a well-financed campus network of conservative ones (Ibid.).

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Recommended Reading

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Contemporary legal institutions, their intrinsic race and class biases, the peculiar development and entanglement of the institution of slavery and American jurisprudence, and the effect of the racist application of the American legal system on every facet of the Black experience. (w) 3 HR./wk.; 3 cr. A survey of the Black experience in America, this course will focus upon the major issues, trends, personalities, and literature of the period, the contradictions of Emancipation, and will examine Reconstruction, migration, and exodus, Black Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, Black power and nationalism. To celebrate Black History Month in February and the rich tradition of American poetry all year long browse essays on literary milestones and movements, find important books on black history and poetics, look for lesson plans for Black History Month, read archival letters from classic Black poets, and search poems about the Black experience by both classic and contemporary poets. Ai's 1978 Letter. In this letter from our archive, Ai sends her materials to the Academy of American Poets after hearing that she has been selected as the winner of the Lamont Prize. Here Ai makes a special point to say that she wishes to be referred to solely as "Ai." She writes: "Please, please in all publicity call me Ai and nothing else."