

PLANNING FOR THE 1980's:

A Status Report Submitted by The Department of Afro-American Studies University of Massachusetts/Amherst

History and Present Status

As a department of Afro-American studies our mission, goals, and objectives derive from our history in a way that is yet painfully different from the more "traditional" departments in Humanities and Fine Arts. To ask of them their history is to ask for a record of how they have facilitated an area of study that has long been ordained as necessary and meaningful to collegiate education. To ask us for our history is to ask that, once again, we justify our existence in an arena which has yet to fully endorse us. Moreover, we recognize that our relative youth as a bona fide area of studies makes us vulnerable in times when talk of "retrenchment" and "cutbacks" is common. That vulnerability exists because our history has not been adequately addressed. We hope this planning exercise can provide another University forum for its discussion.

Our department is named for William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. This is no hapstance, but a fact which symbolizes our commitment and aspirations. Having gone to Fisk University (a black college) after attending public school in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, where he had hardly seen another Afro-American, Du Bois was struck in a dramatic manner by what he describes as "the beauty and potential" of black people and determined that black contributions to America and to the world should constitute a part of the education of every American. He personally embarked on scholarly studies of our people, believing that when the truth of our lives was known that America and its educational institutions would accept and propagate the truth. Many of us who came to the University of Massachusetts in the 1960's knew and respected the work of W.E.B. Du Bois. After all, he spoke to us eloquently of our potential as black Americans when other voices were quiet. It was natural, then, that in the midst of doubters--which is what the University of Massachusetts represented to the small group of us in the 1960's--we recalled Du Bois' words, his ideals, and began to dream of what this University should be and could be if it had the moral strength.

All too frequently it is said that Afro-American Studies is the child of the violence that rocked such campuses as those at San Francisco State College and Cornell University, and the less violent, but threatening, building occupations such as those at the University of Massachusetts and other local colleges. As with so many attempts to pin down the beginnings of movements and institutions, this statement can and does result in a misleading history because it is a pernicious oversimplification which as it is repeated becomes evermore simplified to the point of prevarication. It becomes another of those areas where the black We and the white They use the

same language but express different meanings. When We (soldiers in the cause) mark the birth of black studies in this way, we mean simply that 1968 was the year which signaled the acceptance of Afro-American Studies as an area of study in white colleges... All too often when the statement is used by critics of Afro-American Studies it has been in a context suggesting that one day in 1968 someone said LET THERE BE BLACK STUDIES. AND THERE WAS.

When Julius Lester in his article "Growing Down" [1] says "Black Studies was born because a man named King was assassinated," there are no overtones implying that Afro-American Studies was hastily produced to quiet rebellious students. It is clear that he means the unwilling acceptance of it into the curricula of American colleges and universities:

Black Studies carries the burden of its beginnings. It was not invited into the curricula...because it was thought to have something new and vital to offer the humanistic body of knowledge. Indeed, it was not invited at all. It fought its way in through demonstrations in the sixties and seventies. Black studies was born because a man named King was assassinated.

It is equally clear that Lester is aware of how the bald fact has affected the perception of Afro-American Studies among white faculties:

It is not surprising, therefore, that few white academicians perceive black studies as legitimate. It is a political pacifier, a badge of liberalism universities wear to prove they are not racist. Beyond that, it is not regarded with respect because, as one of my white colleagues expressed it: "Well, black studies is not one of the traditional disciplines." This is like saying apples aren't oranges. In the mind of too many white academicians, however, the fact that black studies is not a traditional discipline is enough to invalidate it.

The evidence of this perception is overwhelming. From its earliest days, Afro-American Studies was seen by large numbers of white people, who should have known better, as something thrown together to pacify black student demonstrators. For instance, at a conference on black studies held at Canisius College in the spring of 1970, one of the white participants, on what turned out to be an all-white panel, reflected both these attitudes when on the one hand she denied there could be such an area of study because "there is no literature, there are no reference books," and on the other hand pleaded with the racially mixed audience, "please don't take *The Invisible Man* from us in English because we are white."

The fears in white academia were many, often expressed in the questions they raised, some of which have since become negative assumptions subconsciously held about Afro-American Studies. As always there was the perpetual fear (grossly expressed by the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party but also expressed by major American authors with the high status of a Faulkner and the academicians) that black folk when they seek dignity will cause irreparable harm to white folks, that we will become racists. DeVere E. Pentony, Dean of the School of Behavioral and Social Sciences at San Francisco State College stated this concern in his "The Case for Black Studies":

There is obvious concern that efforts to focus on blackness as one of the answers to white racism will result in an equally virulent black racism.

He concludes that white people should expect "that a significant ingredient in constructing black unity and group dignity would be an anti-whiteness." This fear still plagues white academia and seriously affects its perception of Afro-American Studies. Pentony provides a list of "critical questions" which reflect white fears and assumptions:

Will black studies be merely an exchange of old lies for new myths? Is it the work of the college to provide an ideological underpinning for social movement? Will the traditional search for the truth be subordinated to the goal of building a particular group identity? Is the ideal of the brotherhood of all men to be sacrificed to the brotherhood of some men and the hatred of others? Can the college teach group solidarity for some groups and not for others? Will the result of separatist studies be a heightening of group tensions and a reactive enlarging of the forces of racism? Will standards of excellence for students and faculty alike be cast aside in the interest of meeting student and community needs? Will anti-intellectualism run rampant? Will constitutional and other legal provisions be violated by this new version of separate if not equal?

The assumptions, of course, are that a correction of white history and white evaluations of our people must entail mythmaking on our part; that we are uncritical, wishing not to search for truth but only to build egos; again, that we are separatists bent on illegally creating a separate and, to the detriment of white students, unequal set of standards; and that we are anti-intellectuals without standards--certainly not equal to the "standards of excellence" held by white academia.

Perhaps a retelling of how Afro-American Studies came to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst will help a little to dispel some of these false assumptions which have constituted a disproportionate part of what Lester calls the "burden" of black studies.

Beginning after the 1954 Supreme Court decision declaring segregated schools illegal, and when white Southern state colleges and universities were attempting to find ways of circumventing the implications of that ruling for them, there began a flurry of interest in the upgrading of the black colleges and universities. On one such black state university campus, a law building was constructed, ostensibly equal to that on the white state university campus, to house a law faculty of one man to teach one student one course unavailable (except at the white campus) anywhere outside the state. This was that state's keeping the equals separate.

Where grants and scholarships had been all but non-existent to the faculties of black institutions for doctoral studies, there now was a rush to set up programs, funded largely by major private foundations, to identify promising graduate material from among these faculties. Scholarships and assistantships became available to newly graduated students to enter universities in the North, much of this funding coming from Southern state coffers. Tuition and fees, living expenses and books--all paid to keep black residents out of Southern "white" state schools. The University of Massachusetts was one of the institutions attracting these students. By 1965, however, out of some 18,000 students, a liberal estimate of the number of black students on this campus would be only fifty, most of whom were graduate students. It was from among these students, joined eventually by a few faculty members, that the impetus for Afro-American Studies at the University came.

Most of us had come from black colleges and universities either as students or instructors--most had participated in some capacity in the Civil Rights Movement, a movement perceived by white professors and students as a strange new, sometimes exciting, sometimes abhorrent phenomenon, but one which we thought a continuation of our history--another rung on "Jacob's ladder," which generations of our people had climbed before us.^[2]

We Blacks thought of one another as having shared common experiences alien to the masses about us but whose eyes were witnessing by way of television the badgering of a Stokely Carmichael on "Meet the Press," or high-powered water cannons breaking the ribs of black marchers chased by Bull Connor's dogs; together, we (and they) read and heard of the martyrs, the children bombed in our churches, assassinations and brutal murders of men and women, black and white--some prominent, others made so by their deaths. As we moved about campus, we were met by embarrassed professors who sometimes wondered aloud how, given what was happening to our people, we could concern ourselves with the intricacies of the poetry of a period long past; or by another who, whenever he could bend the ear of one of us would breast-beat about the difficulties of giving one of our number a grade allowing graduate credit since he left classes and went to spend time as an activist in Mississippi--"I can't give him a grade for that, even though I understand his going."

In the face of it all, we gathered together, the brothers and sisters, and sang our songs--the sorrow songs, the jubilees, gospels, hymns, songs of the Movement, and also those of the union movements and the IRA. We told our stories and related them to our history which we had been fortunate enough to receive, and in turn related it to the history of the western world on which we had been tested for the sake of credentials. We discussed the news, the papers we were writing, the latest gossip. But most importantly, we discussed the educational future of black people in this country when we held "church" and testified to the truth as we saw it.

Uppermost in our minds, as in the minds of our forbears, was the education of the youth. Our history had taught us about our people's struggles to gain access to learning. We recognized, as had Du Bois, that

The eagerness to learn among American Negroes was exceptional in the case of a poor and recently, emancipated folk. Usually, with a protective psychology, such degraded masses regard ignorance as natural and necessary, or even exalt their own traditional wisdom and discipline over "book learning"; or they assume that knowledge is for higher beings, and not the "likes of us."

American Negroes never acted thus. The very feeling of inferiority which slavery forced upon them fathered an intense desire to rise out of their condition by means of education.

Where, we asked, were the black students who should be attending this land-grant university in Massachusetts? There was little we saw to attract them here. We saw that the conditions of integrated and de facto segregated public education in the North were those described by Du Bois--discouragement of black youth, resulting in dropouts and, from among those who did go through the process, sometimes with attending physical horrors, few became useful members of the black community. What type of institution best suited the needs of black youth?, we asked.

We examined the black colleges, noting reforms that would be required to make them truly responsive to the needs of a new day, the new conditions to be met as we reached the next rung on Jacob's ladder. We examined the white Northern colleges, noting those things needed to make them not only attractive to black youth, but productive as useful members of the black community and the world. We began building curricula that would improve both the black and white institutions. We turned to Du Bois, among others. Before long, we were staffing our ideal of a college. By 1966-67, the general outline of a curriculum, a cultural program, and supporting services had evolved from these discussions.

Around the country in both black and white colleges and universities the cry was going up for curricula that were more relevant to black students. Black colleges, which during the 1950's had begun dropping from their catalogs courses in black literature and history, a unique part of their offerings, were hastily reinstituting these courses to meet student demands. In some of these schools there were major boycotts, strikes, and demonstrations protesting not only the curricula but the general "whitening" of them. Clothes and hair fashions changed. Our African heritage was exalted. But it was in the white institutions that the greatest changes were taking place. More black students were attending them. Black students were no longer the lonely exiles--mere shadows--who were seen in their classes, waiting tables, or playing football. White students were in rebellion again at the hypocrisy to which they were heir. White administrators were finding themselves caught between demands of both black and white students. As Michael Thelwell told the Black Studies Directors Seminar at the Institute of the Black World, held in Atlanta in November of 1969:

The administration's only vested interest...is to keep the peace. I would disagree that the institutions are moribund; they may be decadent, but they're not moribund. They continue to serve a very real function--but they are very uptight. They are not uptight because of us, the blacks, but because of the white kids who are pressuring them. If black demands appear at all reasonable, and if they do not appear to violate federal regulations or get the school into a law suit, it has been my experience that the administration will bend over backwards to keep us happy.

Concerning the adoption of Afro-American Studies departments, Thelwell recognized that "the real problem is the faculty.... If peace was the principal vested interest of administration, faculties had much more at stake--their defense of lifetimes of study now questioned as racial self delusion and, of greater importance, their control over the minds.of students. Thelwell correctly identified these young minds--especially those of black youth--as the "panache" over which the struggle for Afro-American Studies was being waged:

We challenge the right of existing departments to educate black people. My real fight is to get black studies courses substituted for some of the brain washing courses black students are currently being forced to take.

Faculties, indeed, presented "the real problem" in that they, the white intellectuals, were the bearers and supporters of the American tradition which has always been against Afro-Americans, relegating us in history to a few easily disposed-of stereotypes or conveniently ignoring our

existence. Thus "the weight of most white intellectuals is against us--the proponents of Afro-American studies."

In this rather heated debate which was beginning to sweep the country, slogans (at best oversimplifications) began distracting attention from the more important thinking and planning that continued, burdensomely, to progress. The catchword of the day was irrelevant--"Western civilization is irrelevant to black people." Some prominent black people--always well versed in western culture--and others made prominent by press and other media ever on the outlook for "militants," and any seeming discord among black people, all went about the country telling black students, without qualification, that everything they were learning was irrelevant to their lives. Some black faculty seized the opportunity to qualify the slogans. Others, long cut off from their roots, honestly believed, because they accepted the same assumptions and felt the same threat as their white colleagues, that black studies was somehow dangerous, somehow less than traditional disciplines, somehow a fraud to be perpetrated against black students. Too frequently, the slogans were reinforced by white faculty--by altering their course requirements for black students, lifting class attendance requirements for them and justifying their doing so by appealing to the arguments of relevancy.

Before entertaining any idea of an Afro-American course of study, the University of Massachusetts had to awaken to its responsibility to serve black as well as white students. Until 1968 there were more students from Asia and Africa on campus than black students from Massachusetts; and there were more black students at the formerly legally segregated Universities of Mississippi and Alabama.

Almost any discussion of recruitment of Afro-American students, whether at meetings or parties, eventually led to the question of their qualifications for college work. Those of us, both black and white, who thought the University was shirking its responsibilities in its admissions policies viewed this qualification argument for continuation of those policies as begging the question; for we ourselves were fully cognizant of some of the problems that would arise when black students were admitted in any significant number. We noted, also, that "lack of qualifications" all too often implied the inability to learn rather than poor high school preparation for college. We recognize the latter as justification for concern but in no way as a reason for the University to avoid what was clearly its moral, if not necessarily legal, duty.

It was clear that, without support services, problems would ensue, for we knew that many of the prospective black students would come from poverty-stricken neighborhoods serviced by inferior schools, and that the majority would come from educational systems dedicated to keeping--even if unconsciously so--the racial status quo. Those of us who had received our secondary schooling in the North knew how black students were kept out of academic tracks, the courses they were discouraged from taking the career counselors who attempted to lower black pupils' ambitions even the teacher who literally wept before her class, apologizing for the black youngster's sitting before her and explaining that "Negroes simply can't grasp the material, but state law requires me to teach them."

Understanding the problems meant for us having insights into the special needs the newly admitted black students would bring with them. Addressing some of these needs, black members

of the University faculty took the initiative in an attempt to make the University more responsive to black residents of the Commonwealth and wrote a grant proposal for the creation of the Committee for the Collegiate Education of Black Students program, which has come to be known as CCEBS [3] and has widened its scope to service other minorities and white students. The proposal was accepted and funded by the Ford Foundation on a matching basis. The campus community, in some quarters, appeared anxious to move in this cautious manner toward correcting its error of almost a hundred years' standing. Even the Student Senate contributed to the matching funds. Thus, in 1968, CCEBS was launched, recruiting fifty one black men and seventy black women.

In his 1973 study of black studies programs, Nick Aaron Ford, long-time chairman of the English Department at Morgan State College and first occupant of their Alain Locke Professorship of Black Studies, noted that the best black studies programs provide students with what he terms "formal or informal remedial aid." The type of program he describes, however, differs greatly from what is ordinarily thought of as a remedial one, that is, a group of pre-college courses. Rather it is generally what was envisioned for CCEBS, a university unit involved with recruitment, financial support, orientation, counseling and tutoring among other services. Although CCEBS was a reality prior to the founding of the Afro-American Studies Department and operates independently of the Department, it has performed the functions Ford determined as essential to successful black studies programs.

In one respect, it was the plight of these one hundred and twenty-one CCEBS students which demonstrated the pressing need for a department of Afro-American studies on campus. They were greeted with some hostility, [4] some awkward friendliness (frequently paternalistic), and overwhelming curiosity by the town and campus communities. All too often, they were made to feel they were experimental animals in a laboratory. The press was constantly prying directly and indirectly into their lives in attempts to get information about the conditions under which they had grown, their adjustment, and their degree of success or failure. Church groups wanted them to teach what the "ghetto" was like. They were frequently met with paternalistic overseeing on the part of faculty and even the staff and tutors of CCEBS. They sensed that the campus--both faculty and white students--expected from them a "hat in hand" gratitude and viewed them as less than bona fide students.

In this Kafkaesque situation the black students were bewildered. Their attempts to organize were frequently discouraged by some black faculty members and staff members of CCEBS who feared such union among the students would result in white hostility to the program. Bewilderment gave way to rage--rage to the point that some of the students knew not friend from enemy. In long night meetings, black faculty members found themselves subjected to vituperative tongue lashings. Others of us blacks saw these attempts at organization as positive and encouraged it. The students, however, viewed us with the same suspicion they did white people. Hurt but understanding and not discouraged, we black faculty and graduate students continued to deal with the task of helping those students through what could only seem to them a tortuous maze of contradictions. We recognized their sense of powerlessness as the same powerlessness felt by those who lectured them not to rock the boat.

We recognized, further, the need for an institutionalized reflection of a black reality, a counterforce to those factors, whether black or white, that consciously or unconsciously said to black students, "you must forget where you have come from, become what you can never be--white." Simultaneously struggling with the power structure, with those faculty members who, because of their history had trouble seeing the mote in their eye, and with teaching the black students where they should yield and where they must continue to deal with legitimate structure was arduous, often painful. We were between the proverbial stone and hard place--on the one hand our white colleagues threatened a program close to our hearts by telling us and others they were too militant, demanding too much, too political; on the other hand, black students called us "bourgeois Toms shucking and jiving for Mr. Charlie."

We continued, however, to fight for the students' right to participate, with dignity, fully in the life of the campus without giving up their individual and racial identities, without being either smothered by paternalism or crushed by hostility and without having a separate set of "understandings" about their role on campus.

In truth, these first one hundred and twenty-one black undergraduates were the pioneers of what is now popularly called among academicians, faced as they are by recruitment needs, the "non-traditional students." As such, they brought with them a plethora of problems with which white faculties appear only now to recognize a need to deal--student families, sick babies, housing difficulties, work schedules--in short, the problems of living in the real world, one devoid of the traditional leisure associated with "a college boy's school days." It was in this atmosphere that negotiations began for an Afro-American studies department. The time had come to bring to partial fruition Du Bois' dream to institutionalize in American education the study of African peoples, their history, their culture, their lives.

Birthing is hard; sometimes uncertain....

While the rhetorical blitz went on and universities made efforts to admit more black students, the shapers of viable programs were working--drafting proposals, outlining curricula, developing black studies structures and models, and seeking funding for various aspects of their programs. At the University of Massachusetts, Michael Thelwell was our link to outside sources. He met with people who were developing programs, took ideas from here to share and brought others back to this campus. Some of the people with whom he met became members of the original faculty; still others were to join the department later. Although refined, the general outline for the department--its curriculum its cultural aspects, and its support services--did not change greatly from those envisioned in those early discussions.

During the Spring of 1968 Thelwell worked in the Afro-American Studies Program at Cornell. This field exposure, as it were, allowed him to bring to us the benefit of his experience. Consequently, some of the many pitfalls that plagued other programs--including those at Cornell--were avoided here. Further, Thelwell engaged into this planning stage the expertise Of three men who were dedicated to assisting in getting the department off to a good start--Playthell Benjamin, Cherif Guellal, and Ivanhoe Donaldson.

While the proposal was being polished and going through the University process of adoption, a temporary arrangement was made whereby Afro-American Studies courses were offered under the aegis of the English Department. The black studies courses were taught by the nucleus of the original faculty: Michael Thelwell, Guellal, first ambassador to the United States from Algeria, Ivanhoe Donaldson, an active member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, Sidney Kaplan, long-time member of the English Department and member of the proposal drafting committee, Playthell Benjamin, Esther Terry, and Bernard Bell.

The debate at this time among the University's faculty did not seriously center on whether there should be an Afro-American studies program. Rather it revolved around how much autonomy it should have and the type of organizational framework in which this interdisciplinary area of study would operate. There were among the predominately white faculty three basic positions. There were those who thought the concept of black studies was without merit and would have none of it. Others held the position that though Afro-American studies should be taught, it should be a program in an existing department. The reasoning of this group varied. Some assumed that any such program was a flash in the pan, therefore as an expedient were willing to set up a program, cool out any threat of disruption, and phase out the program "when things get back to normal." Others in this group feared the political aspects of black studies, thinking that Afro-American studies was too non-traditional to trust with departmental status and all that it implies—a budget, tenured and tenure-tracked faculty, and a lack of that paternalistic guidance which has plagued black education since the 1860's. The third position was held by a number of faculty members who saw the value of Afro-American Studies and who were not so bound by the chains of race and culture as not to see the further need for those working in the area to have the freedom that departmental status could give the area to develop; this group of white faculty members joined with the black faculty and graduate and undergraduate students in arguing for a department of Afro-American Studies.

In this, the University was but a microcosm of the larger national picture. The question about the country now was how much autonomy to give black studies programs. Some Afro-Americans argued for complete autonomy, desiring institutes or departments separate from white university or college structures, headed by black personnel for a black clientele. This type of structure was viewed, by the founders of the W.E.B. Du Bois Department as being, in the long run, unworkable, as not in the best interests of black students, and as possibly illegal; certainly, they did not see it as one of those "reasonable demands" Thelwell found administrators willing to accept.

William Strickland, who later joined the Department, in his position as panel moderator at the Institute of the Black World's "Black Studies Directors Seminar" addressed this issue, in the reasonably defining intent of the term, autonomy:

...there is no such thing as absolute autonomy. What we are talking about is the empowerment of black studies. We are talking about maximizing the situation in which we currently find ourselves; we are talking about understanding that we live in an imperfect world and that we are trying to be as relevantly correct as we can, given the contradictions of our situation.

In his presentation at this same conference, Thelwell realistically hit the mark:

When we talk about autonomy and funding, we've got to realize that that in itself is a contradiction. We are not going to get funds separate from efforts to control us; we're not going to get within the structure of any white university the kind of autonomy which means that we don't have to deal with the white power structure of that university.

He defines autonomy, then, as "the freedom and resources to establish a program and run it without any effective interference." He recognized that there would be interference, for "there is an obsession in white folk to control--or appear to control--black people." Reasoning thus, for the founders of the department, autonomy did not mean separation from the University, rather to enter the game not having given away points.

The committee charged with drawing up the proposal for Senate ratification determined that a department tied into the University structure was the alternative that would best serve the University, Afro-American Studies, and most importantly, black students.

This committee recognized that both black and white students were being hurt by the existing pattern of education, describing the schools as "traditionally the purveyors of white middle-class values and assumptions--which are by definition of the Kerner Commission Report racist..." They pointed out that "for the white student, this racial and cultural chauvinism has functioned to defraud him of any sophisticated and accurate vision of his nation's reality. For the black student it has been a damaging and embittering fact of life." Echoing Du Bois, they were concerned that the black student who received his training in the white universities and colleges were "frequently lost to the black community" and that this student's "education makes it impossible for him to find a useful and creative role in that community." They noted that the proposal:

presumes the willingness of this University to undertake significant and extensive changes in, and additions to, its intellectual and cultural environment. It presumes also that the education offered here be effectively responsive to the practical needs of the black community and psychological needs of the young black students who have been deprived by the society and its educational system of any positive sense of the history and culture of their people. In addition, the presence and availability of the department and curriculum...will inevitably serve to expand the white student's consciousness of the history and current reality of his country and society.

Thus the committee addressed and disposed of the question of an anti-white department expressed by De Vere E. Pentony. (See above.) Although the greatest concern expressed in the document is with the value of Afro-American studies to black students, in the spirit of "whosoever will, let him come," and in recognition that America is a multi-racial, multi-cultural country, the committee invited white students to partake of this other point of view.

The committee's proposal called for the establishment of "a formal academic department to be known as the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies," which besides offering an undergraduate major for those students "interested in careers in education and scholarship" would offer "courses of study essential to non-majors intending to play some role in the black community."

It defines the scope of the department's interests and area of study as "not only of the black community in the United States but...of Africa and other parts of this hemisphere." The approach to Afro-American studies, it describes as inter-disciplinary and to "concern itself with the wide range of questions pertaining to the political and cultural history, the present situation as well as the future aspirations and possibilities of Black America." The disciplines thought most important to the department were history, literature, the performing and fine arts, languages, and those disciplines associated with the social sciences. The proposal stressed that the program of the department must involve both traditional and non-traditional approaches to study and scholarship. Further, the committee considered a black cultural center and "the preserving, developing, presenting to the general community of the various expressions of the cultural life of the black community" as an essential element of the department's program.

When the proposal was informally circulated among some of the University faculty, a major response to it was that its tone was too militant and that it would hardly pass in the Faculty Senate unless it were toned down. Re-reading the document, it is difficult to understand this criticism, for one finds in it a measured analysis of the educational situation in the United States, generally, and at the University of Massachusetts specifically, coupled with a proposal for one line of attack toward rectifying the mess the educational institutions had helped to create. The committee refused to accept the criticism as legitimate and sent the unchanged proposal forth for formal consideration.

In the interim, an incident occurred on campus which has been greatly misunderstood--but which had ultimate ramifications for the Department--the taking of Mills House and the creation of New Africa House. Among numerous members of the University community it is still believed that the Afro-American Studies Department came into being because of this building take-over, since one of the demands coming from the house was for a black studies department. It is, perhaps, one of those ticklish points of history as to how much the take-over may have influenced the faculty senators who already had the proposal under consideration.

The facts, however, are simple. It has been noted that the black students brought to the University by CCEBS were met with some hostility; much of it came from "fraternity row." One day in Spring of 1969, a gang of "frat boys" chased several black students to their dormitory. When the students secured themselves behind a locked door, the fraternity gang left, vowing to gather an even larger number and return to "do battle." Barricading themselves in the house, the black students went through the halls knocking on doors, announcing that when the fraternity gang returned, the students housed in Mills were "either with them or against them" and if they were not "with them" they should leave the dorm. It was easier to fight, they felt, if all their foes were in one place. Uninvolved white students left the building. Meanwhile, more black students joined those in the house and what began as a defense tactic on the part of harassed black students was blown into a full-fledged building take-over reminiscent of those taking place over the nation--demands and all. For days after, UMass joined the nation in having "black militants" take over a building. The unenlightened campus so responded. The proposal for our Department was being considered by the Faculty Senate. The incident may have influenced some senator's votes, but what impact it had on the Senate's final recommendation is hard to say. At any rate, the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies was inaugurated at the University.

NOTES

[1] Julius Lester, "Growing Down," *Change* 11.7 (October, 1979): 34-37.

[2] "We are climbing Jacob's ladder, Every rung goes higher, higher, Soldiers of the Cross."

[3] Today (2001) known as CCEBMS: The Committee for the Collegiate Education of Black and Other Minority Students.

[4] A particularly ugly incident occurred in November of 1968; five white students beat another white student and his non-student black guest. One of the five was reported as saying that since Nixon had won the election, "niggers don't belong at UMass anymore." *Daily Collegian* (November 12, 1968), p.1.