

WILLIAM E. SIMS. *BLACK STUDIES: PITFALLS AND POTENTIAL*. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978, 140 pp., \$8.50.

According to the author of this important study, the students who instigated the demand for Black Studies were a "new breed" of Black students. They were different from the White Majority in their manners, speech, style of dressing, and walking. They were also different from their Black predecessors in these same areas. In addition, they were veterans of the Civil Rights Movement; their heroes were Black activists--Ralph Brown, Malcolm X, and Eldridge Cleaver; they had no intention of "escaping the ghetto."

This new breed wanted to rid higher education of its racist policies and make it responsive to the Black communities, or make it give them programs and courses that were relevant to their experience and methods to improve the quality of life in Black communities.

Dr. Sims describes how many of these students were recruited by faculty or administrators because of increasing Black pressure from the outside. As a result of this pressure, the recruiters began to examine their consciences. Having done so, they recruited Black students whose high school average was low but whose transcripts indicated areas of academic strength. The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1969 brought into existence a demand for increased Black admission quotas. GED tests and junior colleges were also utilized as means to get more Blacks into higher education.

These activist students were aware of the tremendous power for change that they could exert, but they made mistakes such as: 1) the lack of any kind of plan that looked beyond the concession by the college of the need for Black Studies; 2) poor selection of faculty to coordinate the programs; 3) selecting coordinators who did not have nor develop the art of making friends and influencing people; 4) lack of understanding of the budgeting procedure (Sims illustrates the point that when Black students started the push for Black Studies, they gave absolutely no thought to the seven stages of the budget, therefore these unsophisticated coordinators placed serious limitations on the future of Black Studies programs initially); and 5) individuals pushing for the programs did not have any plan to fall back on.

It is true that the students did make mistakes, but, the author asks, what about the political games played by the institutions, then and now? The students were, and are, human beings unable to break through that impenetrable wall of institutional racism. The author asserts that the curriculum committees delayed implementation of the new Black courses. When these tactics failed, the curriculum committees questioned whether the experiences of Black people were worth studying. (Sims points out that

it is easier to move a cemetery than to move a university curriculum committee.) Furthermore, white administrators of these institutions had no intention of committing the necessary funds to guarantee a program equal in quality to all other programs on the campus.

Universities did not commit space, time, equipment, or people to the Black Studies programs, nor did they provide effective remedial programs for those whose high school training was inadequate in such skills subjects as reading, writing, and mathematics. There were also administrators who responded to the whims of professors who fought Black Studies for reasons partially racist and partially economic.

The point is made by Sims that the majority of the programs had no orderly structure, and this fact was obvious to the university presidents; but they did nothing about these problems. Therefore, the demise of many Black Studies programs was inevitable.

However, the students not only had to face hostility from the white administrators, faculties, and students, they had to face vocal objections from Black scholars and civil rights leaders not connected with educational institutions who feared that these studies would not offer any stability to the new Black nationhood. The critics of Black Studies never admitted that there were very good, well-organized programs.

Sims gives us some practical pointers toward better programs, such as a course outline for Black Women in History. This course syllabus delineates the purpose, objectives, reading list, evaluation, and suggested research topics for a fourteen-week course, plus a five-page annotated bibliography. He also includes an outline for a course of introduction to Black Studies, as well as sound advice for the Black Studies coordinator. Included with this advice is a description of an apologetic racist, of the tactics he is likely to use, and how to detect them. He exposes many tricks that the apologetic racist has available to hold the line on Black faculty appointments. Also, he gives good advice on the planning of a Black faculty organization on a white campus (it should not be patterned after the major faculty organization).

He suggests that Blacks should stop the foolish habit of labeling leaders as "militant" or "conservative" because our enemies never make such distinctions. We are separately, but equally, hated by them.

Sims compiled useful data on western Land Grant colleges. As a graduate of two Land Grant colleges and the president of a Land Grant college, he speaks with authority in this area. Dr. Sims has also published widely in the area of Black education. In this particular study, he points out that Black Studies coordinators at

western Land Grant colleges do not have authority commensurate with their various and diverse responsibilities.

Sims summarized his book by making the following recommendations for effective implementation of Black Studies courses: 1) Higher education should institute a series of short in-service programs designed to change attitudes that are based on ignorance; 2) presidents should place greater emphasis on and commit more funds to an interdisciplinary approach to Black Studies programs; 3) the Land Grant colleges should move immediately to increase the number of Black students in each of the schools involved in the study; 4) colleges should stop restrictive policies, such as the setting of financial aid deadlines, which are in direct opposition to long-standing minority cultural patterns; and 5) students should accept some of the responsibility for the improvement of developing procedures to insure a racial balance in colleges in the western part of the United States.

Finally, Sims pinpoints the crucial issues relating to Black Studies in higher education today. He strongly believes:

The main problem facing higher education today is not financial exigency, it is not unionization, it is not equality for women faculty. It isn't any of these issues that are debated on every campus across the country. The important, almost critical problem facing higher education is whether it will enlarge its vision and its academic milieu to include black students and black programs.

Dr. Sims concludes with an optimistic projection that student activities will reemerge with far deeper and more urgent implications than those of the turbulent sixties. In this regard, it is expected that Blacks will better cope with the political decisions which will be made about Black education in that period of history. Black Studies programs must ascertain a more stable position in this era of educational reform.

His presentation is quite well-organized. This work is written with great clarity and with such style as to make it fascinating reading. It is a balanced book in that it appropriately looks at all facets of Black Studies in an orderly and dispassionate manner. He definitely accomplishes his goal, presenting a "systematic discussion of Black Studies programs in American higher education since 1968."

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