TEACHING AFRO-AMERICAN HISTORY, IN MISSISSIPPI, K-12

"HERITAGE FOR NEW AMERICA"

A Mississippi Committee
for the Humanities
Public Forum

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Introduction

HERITAGE FOR NEW AMERICA

This collection of speeches is the result of a two-day public forum which explored alternative answers to the question, "Should the state of Mississippi require that all students, K-12 be taught Afro-American History?" It was held at Jackson State University, February 27 and 28, 1980.

The forum focused on one of the most basic concerns of the humanities, the study of human existance. It has generally been accepted that when human existance has been studied and taught from the perspective of all races and ethnic groups who have built America, it enhances the self-worth of all Americans. On the other hand, when one of these groups is left out of the teaching of America'a past, then that group's self-worth is deminished. Studies in the Michigan State University's Family Ecology Department are showing that over the past three years, the self-concept of black students is declining where they are in an integrated school system. Is this the case of Mississippi?

The forum raised the following questions: Can the humanities offer any help to enhance the self-concept of Mississippi's children K-12? Does the content of what is taught in the humanities such as in literature and social studies courses alter or affect the self-concept of our students? Would the teaching of ethnic history enhance the self-concept of all our children? If so, would the teaching of Afro-American history enhance the self-concept of the Black child?

Further, should the state of Mississippi require the teaching of Afro-American History, K-12 to all students? In the late 1950's Missouri and many other states responded, "yes" to this question and not only required that the history of their state's largest minority be taught, but prepared a manual for its teaching.

During and since that time Mississippians had been involved with the process of integration. We had not raised the questions asked above in public discussions. Not only was the time here when Mississipp should raise these questions, but the time was upon us to ask the scholars-in-the-humanities to explore these questions with the voting public. Thus the Mississippi Committee for the Humanities', Public Forum, "Heritage For New America," was timely.

The scholars-in-the-humanities delivered the papers that follow to shed light on these questions:

1. What is the status of the teaching of Afro-American History K-12 in America?
2. Is the teaching of Afro-American History, K-12 important in America?
3. Is the teaching of Afro-American History important in Mississippi?

Further, four other scholars-in-the-humanities reacted to the presentations and set the tone for small group discussions. Hopefully this reproduction of these speeches will reach a larger audience and continue to generate more discussions on the questions raised by the forum.

Alferdteen Harrison, Director
Institute for the Study of History,
Life and Culture of Black People

"BLACK AMERICANS: A SEARCH FOR HERITAGE", a speech by Dr. J. Rupert Picott, Historian, Director of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History in Washington, D. C.

Dr. Picott examines the issue of the teaching of Afro-American History in grades K-12 through the use of three of the goals of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. According to Picott these three goals, which he refers to as guidelines in his very eloquent speech, were put forward by "The Father of Afro-American History", Dr. Carter G. Woodson, when the organization was founded in Chicago, Illinois in September, 1915. Picott uses a fourth guideline to conclude his well weaved examination of the issue.

The first guideline requires a knowledge of Afro-American History through recognition of the validity of the Afro-American oral tradition as an historical accounting of the "record" of Black people in the United States and Africa. The emphasis is placed on the importance of memory as part of the African collective experience.

The second guideline calls for the inclusion of Afro-American Studies in textbooks on American History. Picott very pointedly takes issue with the ways in which Blacks and others are left out of textbooks through "omission" and exclusion. He reminds his audience of the importance of understanding the founding and development of the social, political and economic process and institutions of the nation by a recognition of those Black contributors who had a profound impact on trends and development.

Picott's third guideline challenges Afro-American and Hispanics to take responsibility for leadership in the nation. He feels this is urgent and can be achieved "in our times".

BLACK AMERICANS: SEARCH FOR HERITAGE

By J. Rupert Picott

Americans, for the past twenty years, have been part of revolutions, sometimes overt and noisy; at other times demanding, and with reasonable quiescence. One of the major thrusts of this era which has had tremendous impact on the life of minority peoples everywhere has been the new, determined and never placid movement for recognition of the person, and thus, of heritage and of potential.

The late 1960's which gave birth to the Afro-American Studies or Black Studies and/or Black History courses offered in selected American colleges, universities, institutions, public secondary and sometimes elementary schools, is part of, and is deeply embedded in this new yearning. Indeed, led by the organization, founded in 1915 by Carter G. Woodson, and carried forward by many individuals and associations this action for recognition of the Black American, propelled by himself, is one of the new phenomena of the past 200 years.[1]

Incidentally, the "Father of Black History," Carter G. Woodson, who lived during the time of "Negro", undoubtedly, would have been comfortable with the term "Black American," when he organized the national association in Chicago on September 9, 1915, Dr. Woodson set up three goals which he felt must be achieved by Black Americans for themselves. These aspirations were: (1) to become knowledgeable of Africa and the African heritage of Negro Americans; (2) to achieve an appreciation of the inventions, discoveries, participation and contributions of the Afro-Americans to the founding and development of the United States and (3) to be completely informed about one's heritage, as a basis for improved understanding, by people for the better life.[2]

This paper will attempt to discuss four guidelines considered pertinent by Black and other Americans in the development on nationwide sharing. The first guideline, which is the basic ingredient of living, is: Black Americans Should Become Knowledgeable of Their Heritage.

For almost 5,000 years the African has transmitted the best of generations of existence through "word of mouth". This has been true of other nationalities and people, but it has been especially true of so many of the Black Americans' ancestors from West Africa. These stories about everyday doings of ordinary people, told by Gurus, whom Alex Haley so well described, have become the "record".[3]

These teachers, venerable ones, brought the record forward from hundreds of generations. The history of Africa has become now, in so many places, viable and memorable. We, who are the decendents of these piquant, voluminous, pungent and encompassing historical traditions, are among the favorite of man. We are a tradition of the mind, with memory at its best; of heart, with soul for the brother and of physical presence, with manliness that forged the independent spirit. In this great dichotomy of the race, achievements of the centuries loom large and are the fertile soil out of which America, in part, has been developed and built.[4]

Most people now recognize that the countries of the African continent, the Third-World countries in Africa, South America and Europe offer for the future, perhaps, the best haven for the expansion of democracy and the democratic spirit.

The legendary leadership of Greece and Rome[5], the refinement of China[6], the inventiveness of Japan[7], combined with Africa to make the old world and old ways the soil out of which the new America was born and grew to size, power and empathy. But we, in America, who are so atuned to

speak one language only, are so often victims of neo-national thinking, and only now, are beginning to appreciate the fecundity of other peoples and other countries. If we move into the new world of the eighties, we will have been forced, frequently with avarice and aided by misnamed missionary spirit, to expand our visions beyond American shores. We will be forced to have our cities become sister cities to other populous geographical locations around the world. The story of the Middle East oil and the changes which this has produced to dominate world politics, is but another visible example of the future of 1984, brought home in 1980.

Es-Sadi (1596-1660) in his History of Timbuktu, the Tarikh declares that "man is his brother's keeper."[8] Our leaders have formed western alliances, and European working agreements. But our history tells us, that in this new day of living if we are not to suffer the diminution of Rome and Greece, there must be created an African-United States Pact that will be grounded in heritage and implemented by a new consortium of peoples as equals.

The second guideline is that: Black Americans Have Shared and Must Continue To Share In The Making Of America.

The human treatment of Black Americans, part of the United States nation from its very beginning, has been the subject of much discussion. An official history of Virginia declares that "Belief in the evil of slavery didn't necessarily imply a belief in the equality of Blacks."[9]

Most Americans know, or ought to be aware, from our experience with the Civil Rights Movement, that Black Americans were and are an essential part of this nation.[10] We were here long before the government was established. Black Americans were among the original settlers in the nation. We accompanied the Norseman in the 1300's and 1400's; shared with Columbus

in the 1400's, and walked this land before the landing of the Mayflower.[11]

The textbooks of the Americans schools, in too many instances, seem handed down from schools of early years, for they repeat the old allegations of "Black Americans being out of it." Carter G. Woodson long ago, spoke eloquently about the omission in the "Mis-Education of the Negro"[12] and in the first textbook on the Negro American entitled" The Negro in our History."[13] Too many of the textbooks are still being used in American public schools and institutions which say almost nothing about the Black American's inventions, discoveries, contributions and participation in the progress of this nation. Moreover, little, if anything, is said about the Black American's participatory stance of seeking, striving and succeeding.

You know, of course, that Benjamin Banneker, of Maryland, was a mathematician, astronomer, and surveyor of great ability who put his talent to use for all of us.[14] "Red-Stop, Green-Go." These are the words of an American on the move.[15] It was Garrett A. Morgan, who invented the prototype of the traffic light.[16] Percy Julian was one of the great names in chemistry. Medicine and ship-building meant much to him. From soybeans, he derived a synthetic form of cortisone, used in the treatment of arthritis. He also invented a weatherproof coating to prevent and retard rusting on battleships.[17] The often used words "the real McCoy" applies to a Black American, Elijah McCoy, who in 1872, invented an oil container equipped with a tap from which the oil flow was regulated by a spigot. Attached to a machine, it would allow the oil to drip, drop by drop, onto the moving part so that the machine or engine lubricated itself while in motion. Because of this discovery, manufactured goods became more widely dispersed and travel became possible at a lower cost.[18]

Granville T. Woods was called the "Universal Inventor" because of his

many mechanical and electrical devices. He also invented an "amusement apparatus" - the forerunner of the roller coaster.[19]

Have you ever been tempted by Valentine Chocolates? Well, the Black American who made the present-day sugar industry possible through his invention of the multiple evaporation process, was Norbert Rillieux.[20] The "Ice Cream Man" was a Black American. In 1832, Augustus Jackson originated a basic formula of cream-based ice cream.[21] Dr. George Washington Carver revolutionized the economy of the South and the nation. This Black American created more than 300 products from the peanut and the sweet potato.[22] The shoes you wear were made possible by automated production, an invention of Jan E. Matzeliger. He designed the process of shaping the upper part of the shoe and sewing it onto the sole.[23]

The list is long; the inventions tremendously important to everyday life, and the discoveries meaningful. This information is vital to all Americans, who are becoming more and more conscious of their past as a prelude to their future.

I would like also to talk about the American public school system of which I was priviledged to have been a part. Credit for the public school systems of the present day should be given to the Black Americans who saw the need and acted, in Post Civil War state assemblies, to provide education for all at public expense.[24] Prior to this time, we were a nation that gave too much credit to English private school system.

According to the ASALH archives records, there are 176 Black Americans who are mayors in the United States. In the State of Mississippi alone, there are nineteen Black mayors. Throughout America, there are eleven mayors who are Black and female.[25]

Despite the progress that has been made, although negligible when

compared to the totality of the participation of all Americans, Blacks are at the theshold of involvement in American political, social, economic and emotional leadership. This means that there is a great need for (1) a reassessment of our teaching for leadership; (2) a redevelopment of our participation of the governmental operation of the nation, and (3) a rededication to self-evaluation affirmation, popularized by Mary McLeod Bethune that "I am Black, I am somebody, I can do for the good of the country, and because of all this, I shall share and share fully in the American way."[26]

Teaching is perhaps the cardinal basis for this involvement, but it is all pervasive; it requires a renewal of the human spirit that asks that people work for people, and in the process, as with Martin Luther King, "We dream dreams,"[27] and with W. E. B. Dubois,[28] apply intellectual aggressiveness and full devotion to making better for citizens, and thus, for ourselves.

The third guideline is that: Black Americans Must Assume Responsibility For Leadership"

More and more, we must know that in America from its very inception, there have been those among us who have achieved equality because of their leadership, expansion of their leadership, expansion of their participation. This is the America we must seek. This is the role which the forty million Black Americans, including Hispanics, must constantly demand, forever safe-guard, and continually share. This responsibility for leadership is the new burden of the Black American, and a task which is achieveable, - and in our time.

The fourth guideline is that the :Black American's Heritage Is The Focal Point of New Living.

The course of American history has changed.

Our nation is now at the threshold of a new, dramatic, impacted and

fulsome shift of foreign policy that portends significant movement, in our long-held traditions and established rules of living. One can recall the numerous arrays of policies that affected every American and provided for him a heritage unmatched in the annals of time. This is why the heritage of a people is so drastically important. This is the reason the legends and legacy of past years have provided substances to which we can cling and guideposts upon which we can erect our tents.

If we have ever been, we are now no longer the only leader of the free or the nonfree world. If we have ever been, we are now no longer the only savior of mankind. One hundred days ago when Iran "slapped us in the face," that action began, for America, a new kind of self-assessment.

Perhaps, it will be marked by Historians as a new day in the massive outlook for America. We are so close to it. We want the hostages freed. We are so anxious to get back to the old ways, so much so that we are hindered in our realization of the significance of our dealing with other peoples.

We are forced now to begin to understand the thousands of years of Persia and the new/old Islam,[29] to understand the new frontier nations in Africa, and what is more, to understand the heritage of our next door neighbors.

In Great Britian an historian 55 years ago declared "Man's very command over nature, so admirably and marvelously won has become his greatest peril."[30] We, too in America are in the midst of a new awakening that demands that "Those who would fly the flag of freedom" and "talk boldly about human rights" must look homeward for the happenings in America as well as to foreign countries. These happenings are broadcast instantaneously by satellite to all parts of the universe.

The Mississippian who would sell goods and services to Third-World nations needs, first an education of the heritage of these nations. Following this, he would need to develop international marketing skills and strategies in selling those goods and services to those people.

This brings us sharply face to face with the need to provide an understanding of the heritage of Americans, and ultimately to the heritage of peoples around the world. The educator looks longingly at the elementary school curriculum for the propagation and inculcation of heritage and other valuable ideas needed, in these precarious times of confrontation, in America. Many believe that a new kind of education is called for; a teaching process that is people-based as well as career-oriented. Many believe that if America is to provide some participation and direction for these days, it must understand the background of potential friends and be aware of, and sensitive to, the ethnic history of its enemies.

Since the elementary grades are "where it is at," there is ample reason to believe that a new America, grounded in the future, must begin in the classroom's awareness of the heritage of its people.

This is the reason students and adults, sensing fundamental change in America living in the 1960's, demanded the establishment and implementation of Black Studies, Afro-American Studies, or Africana Studies into the curriculum.[31] These young American protestors, mostly in the American fashion of seeking change, were wise beyond their years. They realized with political acumen that conceptual change about race starts in the mind. These leaders were obviously aware of the heritage exhibited by the charter of the United Nations in the 1940's (1942) which declared that the change in the nations and peoples, begins in the thinking process.

ASALH, which rightly was a national catalyst in the movement to study

the heritage of the Black American, through the formation of educational courses and university disciplines, is now conducting a survey to ascertain the status of Afro-American Studies, Black Studies or Africana Studies, during the past twelve years.[32] It will survey approximately 2,000 selected public schools, colleges, universities, and city and state departments of human resources, for data. Since definitive responses to our questionnaires have yet to be returned, it would seem, that (1) there has been a settling down in the course requirements, and, " as would be expected, " and increase in the demands of quality in these courses; (2) a few of the areas in the 1960's which hastily established courses have dropped these studies, while others have been replaced; (3) Black Studies, Afro-American studies or Africana Studies, now in many colleges and universities, are now a part of the regular course curriculum offerings; (4) the fight, as would be expected also, particularly where dollars are becoming scarce to support all colleges and universities, continues; (5) Black Studies, the newest of the intellectual crop, continues to have to defend its validity, and (6) increasingly, Black Studies are being added, spurred by the new demands upon all Americans to better understanding of Third-World nations.

Conclusion

The Black American's search for his heritage is immediate, direct and continues. There is need to maximize every facet of communication, and technology we can muster, to serve as a delivery system to apprise everyone, of the Black American's heritage. Probably, the most effective vehicle is the one-on-one people-to-people approach, people caring and sharing.

The potential for Black achievement in America and the world is monumental, and perhaps, cannot be measured. Suffice it is to say, in the final analysis, we are limited only by ourselves.

END

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[31] Ibid.

[32] J. Rupert Picott, A Proposal to Survey Afro-American Studies or Black Studies and/or Black History Courses Offered in Selected American Colleges, Universities, and Institutions, The Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, Inc., January, 1979, P.15.

"A Case for Teaching Afro-American History and Culture in grades K-12", by Dr. Cleveland Donald, Historian, Director of Afro-American Studies at the University of Mississippi at Oxford, Mississippi.

Dr. Donald builds his case for the teaching of Afro-American History in grades K-12 with four arguments. In his first argument he directs his attention to a history of the founding fathers and their treatment of the issue of education. Donald documents the facts that the founders of the nation acted to create public education in order to protect "cultural values".

The second argument is grounded in the law; "the courts have declared that where prior experiences of discrimination can be proved, an extra-ordinary remedy like affirmative action may be used".

A psychological argument is ventured in order to make the third point of Donald's case. He pinpoints a poor self-concept among Black children and reminds his audience that the purpose of "public education is the promotion of racial understanding". He cites the study of Afro-American History and culture as one way of gendering this racial understanding between the races.

The final argument is an attack on the miseducation of all children by excluding or omitting the contributions of the Afro-American. A pluralistic approach is presented as one way of correcting "misinformation, or grevious oversights".

The final section of Donald's paper is concerned with the teaching of Black English as a second language. This should prove to be interesting reading as he develops arguments for and against Black English as a language to be taught in grades K-12.

A CASE FOR TEACHING AFRO-AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE IN GRADES K-12

by Cleveland Donald, Jr.

In the 1940s E. Franklin Frazier, a black sociologist, and Melville J. Herskovitz, a white anthropologist, disputed the impact of African culture on the New World. Thus transpired their disagreement:

> MR. FRAZIER: I have not found anyone who could show any evidence of survival of African social organization in this country. I may cite a concrete case. You will recall that in reviewing my book, The Negro Family in the United States, in the Nation, you said that the description I gave of the reunion of a Negro family group could, with the change of a few words, be regarded as a description of a West African institution. But it also happens to be equally adequate as a description of a Pennsylvania Dutch family reunion. What are we to do in a case like that? Are we to say that it is African?
> MR. HERSKOVITS: Methodologically, it seems to me that if in studying a family whose ancestry in part, at least, came from Africa, I found that sometimes they do resemble a very deep-seated African custom, I should not look to Pennsylvania Dutch fold, with whom this family has not been in contact, for an explanation of such a custom. I may be wrong but that seem elementry.
> MR. FRAZIER: But where did the Pennsylvania Dutch get their custom that resembles the one I described? Did they get it from Africa too?
> MR. HERSKOVITS: May I ask if the methodological point at issue is this: is it maintained that if we find anything done by Negroes in this country that resembles anything done in Europe, we must therefore conclude that the Negroes' behavior is derived from the European customs, the inference then being that the traditions of their African ancestors were not strong enough to stand against the impact of European ways?
> MR. FRAZIER: No I wouldn't say that, but I believe it should be the aim of the scholar to establish an unmistakable historical connection between the African background and present behavior of Negroes, rather than to rely on a priori arguments.
> MR. HERSKOVITS: We will be in agreement, if you will add to your statement that neither should the scholar deny any such connection on a priori grounds.[1]

Not only have succeeding decades failed to resolve the central conflicts on the Frazier-Herskovits exchange, but time has increased and made them more sophisticated. Some recent scholars, for example, neglect research on African culture for a derivative, the impact of Afro-American culture on the new world. Furthermore, major palavers center not on resolving issues as much as on grasping their implication for matters of public policy. This shift currently appears in raging debates among educators and layman over teaching Afro-American history in the kindergarden through twelveth grades.[2]

While scholars have held similar discussions before, this latest imbroglio occurs during an uncertain time in American education generally. The coming decade recalls the 1960s in ways mildly less exciting and the 1770s in ways slightly less fundamental. In the 1770s revolutionaries constructed a rudimentary educational mechanism to inculcate values in an unschooled population of youths. In the 1960s reformers expanded educational structures to cope with tremendous growth in the number of students who met educational, financial, and cultural criteria for participation in the learning process. Ironically, both generations showed concern for values: but, the founders simply established traditional rules without questioning their validity whereas educators of the 1960s maintained bedrock principles exactly by doubting and challenging them.[3]

Three conditions assured American education in the 1770s and the 1960s. First, the recipients and donors of education came, for the most part, from the same relatively homogeneous cultural group. Educators and students alike sprang from European soil. Second, the suppliers of education did not exceed the demand--neither that anticipated in the 1770s nor that actually available in the 1960s. Teachers, who were in short supply, enjoyed

unusual power and prestige. Finally, bright economic promise filled the nation. On the other hand, the 1980s find these conditions entirely reversed. Educational planners must now undertake stringent cutbacks or include blacks and other traditionally alienated groups. In several instances, these groups have already required systematic and substantive changes that could radically alter education in the United States.[4]

II

Four arguments favor teaching Afro-American history and culture in grades K-12. First, the founders of America recognized that public education had responsibilities beyond inculcating basic skills and in fact understood that basic skills were best learned within a cultural matrix. The Puritans--the originators of the educational system--wished that "every person. . . have personal access to the Holy Scriptures, which meant the capacity to read."[5] Moreover, fearful of disintegrating pressures upon family life, they saw in education an opportunity to bolster the home and to support its cultural values. Their concern for protecting cultural values through public schools led the Founders to supplement voluntary support with taxation without serious opposition. Later, early nineteenth century middle-class religious reformers and workingmen's associations reasserted these Puritanical views of education in successful demands for fully free tax-supported schools. After the Civil War the North imposed the outlook upon the South. Indeed, serious efforts to divorce the three Rs from cultural values commence only after Progressivism emerges.

Yet another ground embeds beliefs that public schools should teach Afro-American history and culture. This second reason involves legality. The Courts have declared that an extraordinary remedy like affirmative

action may be used where prior experiences of discrimination can be proved. No one doubts that racial prejudice has existed in this country; for examples, one need only read Winthrop Jordan's White Over Black. Furthermore, no one doubts prior discrimination in education, since Afro-Americans found few or no educational opportunities in the antebellum era and under segregation received separate-but-unequal schools. Thus public schools, like affirmative action programs, legally can and should permit remedies that would facilitate racial understanding and consequently rectify the tragic heritage of discrimination in education.[6]

Emerging patterns of integration provide a third reason. In 1954, Dr. Kenneth B. Clark's research showing that black children in segregated schools preferred white dolls provided the scientific argument for the Brown Decision. Yet, many of today's black children in integrated schools could fail the same cultural test. Like today's white students, blacks do not know reading, writing, and computing; but more tragically black youths also no longer remember Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, and Marcus Garvey. In fact, certain basic problems in today's public schools do not relate to a preoccupation with but rather to a lack of concern for ethnic studies. If public education understood its duty to promote racial understanding through good courses in black history and culture, perhaps teachers would not now have such difficulty teaching students--both black and white--to read, to write, and to compute. Used in this sense, black history and experience constitute another learning aid.

A fourth and final support is the general confusion over what it means to encourage the teaching of black history. Some believe that all positive steps to promote racial understanding are anti-educational. But this is not the case. Blacks and others of color comprise the world's majority.

If students do not know Ghana, Mali and Songhai or Mary McLeod Bethune, Maggie Lena Walker, and Gwendolyn Brooks, they are uneducated--seriously so--and need exposure to the black experience and its members. Thus a proper function of public education includes the study of blacks and the black experience, in this sense, because it corrects misinformation, false information, or grevious oversights.

III

When we accept the four premises above, it does not automatically follow that we must support the proposition. Critics often raise two important objections to the teaching of Afro-American culture in schools. First, these faultfinders claim that sole responsibility for cultural and religious education rests with other, more appropriate institutions like churches and the numerous social and civic organizations. Moreover, whenever they do become involved, schools ought to play a limited role; they should thoroughly integrate, so this criticism goes, black history and culture into the traditional curriculum and the American experience. Educational institutions, some add, should neither offer seperate courses nor suggest unique methodologies and assumptions. Second, those who object to instruction in the Afro-American experience have enormous difficulty moving from generalizations about black history and culture to considerations of course content. As a matter of fact, since no single approach is exclusive and since the gravity of the sin of historically omitting the black experience justifies all remedies, the location of black-related materials within educational structures need not be discussed here. But the concern for content most assuredly deserves a response, particularly because it asks for specificity behind the four abstract premises of puritanical precedent, juridical sanction, pedigogical

value, and informational need.[7]

Perhaps Black English offers the most fruitful and exciting opportunity for learning. Unfortunately, however, the current rampage over classification--whether to make it a dialect, language, or a form of substandard English--reveals that black English does not enjoy recognition. For one reason linguists have conceded only recently that this form possesses three essential attributes for effective communication: namely, that it is different but not deficient, that it is adequate, for it expresses the same concepts as other languages but in unique ways; and that it is systematic, with a fully formed set of grammatical and pronunciational rules. Consequently, scholars and laymen see in black English an untamed linguistic jungle of ferocious misconjugations, poisonous syntax, torrid punctuation, and dense thought. Still another reason evokes the image of perilous thickets and overgrown vegetation. Simply stated, many people fail to recognize that all blacks do not speak and write Black English, nor do practitioners use it consistently well. Furthermore, many whites have unconsciously adopted Afro-American speech patterns. But we should not dismiss black English for the linguistic imperfections of its constituents no more than we should judge standard English be the stylized utterance of a Boston Brahmin or the hokey twang of an Ozark mountaineer.[8]

In some instances, people reason that acceptance of black English requires us to reject standard English. To be sure, our culture invariably pictures anything black as a negative of something white. This reflection, moreover, encourages a warfare between black and standard English so intense and so destructive that any solution short of total, absolute, and unconditional victory for one amounts to complete surrender to and treasonable fraternization with the other. Certainly, American assimilationists have exhibited these xenophobic tendencies in other cases; nonetheless, the urge never has been as strong toward any other group. Polish, German, and

even Spanish communities, for example, have usually given up their linguistic identity to meet the first precondition for assimilation; but they have been expected neither to deny that they ever had a language nor to believe that it left any cultural influence.[9]

Even in the distant past, when European-African intercultural contact began and when one would expect a pattern similar to a more contemporary German or Mexican-American mode, we perceive the uniqueness of black-white interaction. Thus the accumulated experience of centuries does not account for the response to black English. Hundreds of years ago arguments very similar to those of the nineteenth century geneticists and racialists conquered environmentalist claims and enthroned a view not of cultural differentness but of inherent inferiority. Consequently, black language became nonexistent--nothing more than the frustrated babblings of a retarded child. And apparent similarities between standard English and black language simply confirmed and reinforced this stereotype.

Belief in the nonexistence of black English sharply contrasts with the usual response to other languages. Moreover, a description of the learning of languages reveals that the belief bears bitter fruit. Most pedagogues teach English to non-English speaking students by a process that resembles techniques Americans themselves use to learn other languages. To apprehend the Portuguese word carro, for example, students visualize the object, imagine the English equivalent "car," and translate from one language to the other. This three step method of seeing the English form along with the object and then finding the Portuguese is slow initially but rapidly increases with proficiency. Eventually students learn to summon carro without associating it with "car," but simply picturing the object. At this point, acculturation has begun to take place.[10]

This process works because it confirms a key learning principle--that comprehension requires memory or prior experiences whose meaning transfers to new information. A powerful mechanism, the metaphor, allows most Americans to use known phenomena to understand the unknown. However, this process has not held for Blacks. Sometimes twisting the experiences of blacks, at other times relegating them to the imagination, and at still others questioning their existence, educators have undermined black history and culture. Instead of expecting Afro-Americans to learn by remembering, most scholars believe that Blacks can learn only by forgetting. Black minds become blank tapes upon which the experiences of another culture are recorded. Certainly, this view underlay the development of headstart programs in the 1960s. Catching them before they had acquired too many undesirable experiences, eradicating those already picked up, and implanting desirable ones at an early age would give black and underpriviledged preschoolers a headstart in life. Not unexpectedly, however, the strategy has worked unevenly. The mixed results of these programs grow not so much from efforts of the well-to-do to assure their children a competitive edge as from the refusal of educational planners to acknowledge an invioliable learning principle: whether good or bad, prior experience and knowledge are necessary for the comprehension of new information.[11]

In spite of the objections, however, black English can play an important role in learning standard English. Take, for instance, the expression "I ain't got nothing." Readers accustomed to seeing an aberrant version of standard English in this sentence will immediately recognize the glaring violation of a rule against the double negative. Speaking to a pupil, the teacher might point out that the negatives, not and nothing, neutralize each other; hence, one has conveyed the sense of having something. However, the sentence could have had the same meaning for the teacher as for the

student if the instructor had known that two negatives do not negate each other in black English. Like the construction, "Nobody knows nothing," the sentence "I ain't got nothing" is logical because all negative concords have been distributed to all of the indefinites. Moreover, this function of the double negative exists in other languages like the French. "Je n'ai rien," which literally means "I ain't got nothing," employs the two negatives ne and rien. Yet the two words do not make the expression positive. More so, the double negative appears in both Iberian languages, which have influenced many New World varieties of African communication like Papiamento and black English.[12]

Occasionally unequal comparisons are made between black and standard English. An instructor will often correct a student who says "They mine" with the expression "They are mine." However, here equivalency does not obtain. In its economy "They mine" corresponds to "They're mine"--with the only difference that the speaker drops an entire word rather than one letter.[13]

Other evidences of a separate black language abound. Resembling Iberian language speakers, black English users sometimes make a statement to ask a question. "What time it is?" provides a good illustration. In this and similar cases inflexion and context alone give clues to the meaning of the sentence. Moreover, speakers frequently invert. For example, rather than employ the complementer "if" to say "I ask Alvin if he knows," a student might substitute "I ask Alvin do he know" to convey the same sense. In addition to syntax, black speech forms effect other nomenclature of the English language. Among verbal conjugations the third person singular leads in popularity. The idioms "We is" and "I is," for instance, have shown an inerradicable tenacity for survival.[14]

Thus much linguistic research announces a distinctive pattern of semaphore called black English. Its importance rises above whether its idioms appear on standardized examinations or whether its grammatical and syntactical rules should apply for written and spoken work in the college and office. First, giving order to a peculiar communicative form, black English permits teachers to use the metaphorical experiences of Afro-Americans and some whites to teach standard English as a lingua franca. When they appreciate the principles of their communal tongue, students will more readily apprehend those of the English. Second, encouraging a positive mental attitude toward Afro-American phraseology, black English instills pride in minority and underpriviledged students, an essential ingredient for effective learning. Finally, if for no other reason, we could justify using black English because all other methods have proved unsatisfactory.[15]

Fortunately, black English does not represent the only area of the Afro-American cultural and historical experiences available to grades K-12. Black folklore and satire, creative arts and religion as well as history and society come to mind. Moreover, the lexicon of the folklorist yields a cornucopia of African words and idioms. Used as illustrated with black English, these aspects of our ethnic experience would also benefit public schools.[16]

A Case for Teaching Afro-American History
and Culture in Grades K-12

Different aspects of this discussion have been presented at: "Heritage for New America" a symposium partially funded by the Mississippi Committee for the Humanities (MCH) and Jackson State University's Institute for the Study of History, Life and Culture of Black People; "Africanism in Afro-American Culture" a lecture sponsored by the Artist-in-Residence Program of the Yazoo Public Libraries (also funded by MCH); the Coahoma Junior College Black Awareness Month (February 1980) Celebration; and the five headstart centers of the Marshall and Lafayette County Headstart Program. It has also benefited from Professor Peggy Emerson's seminars in the School of Education and my course in the Black Studies Program at the University of Mississippi.

Notes

[1]Quoted in John F. Szwed and Roger D. Abrahams, "After the Myth: studying Afro-American Culture Patterns in the Plantation Literature," in Daniel J. Crowley, ed., African Folklore in the New World (Austin, 1977), pp. 67-68. Two works which contrast the two view points are Melville J. Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past (Boston, 1958) and E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro Family in the United States (Chicago, 1939).

[2]Among numerous recent articles on black studies see: Phillip Carey and Donald Allen, "Black Studies: The Reality," Human Behavior V111 (February 1978), p. 48; J.L. Colquit, "Eliminating Black Cultural Oppression in the School Curriculum," Education Digest 42 (March 1977), pp. 21-3; "Report Card on Black Studies," Newsweek 83 (March 1974), pp. 81-82; W.C. Van Deburg "Afro-American Studies: A Question for Preservation," Negro History Bulletin 37(June 1974), pp. 362-4; A.L. Smith, "What the Score on: Black Studies?" Today's Education, 61 (January 1972), p. 62; and A. Weinstein, "Passion and Pity in Black Studies," Trans-action 8 (June 1971), pp. 61-3.

[3]Views on colonial and nineteenth educational policies and strategies taken from Bernard Bailyn, et al., The Great Republic: A History of the American People (Lexington, Massachusetts, 1977) Vol. 1, pp. 154-61, 238; 304; 415, 427, 497-504, 508; 497-504, 739, 795. Observations of education in the 1960s are mine.

[4]Bailyn, et al., The Great Republic, Ibid.

[5]Bailyn, et al., The Great Republic Vol. 1, p. 155.

[6]On racism see: Winthrop Jordon, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (Chapel Hill, 1968) and his The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States (New York, 1974); Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York, 1944); Joel Kovel, White Racism: A psychohistory (New York, 1970); on black education see Louis Harlan, Separate and Unequal (Chapel Hill, 1958) and Horace M. Bond, Social and Economic Influences on the Public Education of Negroes in Alabama, 1865-1930 (Washington, 1939).

[7]Issues raised above are most crystalized in the debate over black studies; see, for example, Armstead Robinson, ed., Black Studies and the University; A Symposium (New Haven, 1969).

[8]See recent studies of the topic by Robbins Burling, English in Black and White (New York, 1973); Joey Lee Dillard, Black English; Its History and Usage in the United States (New York, 1972) and his Lexicon of Black English (New York, 1977); Deborah S. Harrison, et al., Black English: A Seminar (New York, 1976); and Roger D. Abrahams, Talking Black (Rawley, Mass., 1976).

[9]Maldwyn A. Jones, American Immigration (Chicago, 1960); Leonard Dinnerstein and David Reimers, Ethic Americans: A History of Immigration and Assimilation (New York, 1975); Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (Waltham,

Mass., 2nd. ed., 1973); and Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot: Negroes, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City (Cambridge, 1963).

[10]See, for example, Joseph Michel, ed., Foreign Language Learning: An Anthology (Austin, 1967), especially the essay by Wallace E. Lambert, "Psychological Approaches to the Study of Language," pp. 215-250.

[11]In contrast to our sociolinguistic explanation is the economic argument, most recently restated in Andrew Hacker, "Creating American Inequality," New York Review of Books (March 20, 1980).

[12]William Labov, "The Logic of Non-Standard English," in Roger Abrahams, ed., Language and Culture Diversity in American Education (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972), pp. 225-262.

[13]Labov, "The Logic of Non-Standard English," pp. 229, 245.

[14]Lynn L. Sims,"'Aks the Man if I be Goin'": Roots of Black English," Military Review (February, 1980), pp. 30-32.

[15]Stephen D. Chennault, "Black Dialect: A Cultural Shock," in Dexter Fisher, ed., Minority Language and Literature: Retrospective and Prospective (New York, 1977); and Luberta Mayes, Black Children's Perception of the Use of their Dialect (San Francisco, 1977).

[16]See, for evidence: Judith W. Chase, Afro-American Art and Craft (New York, 1971); J. Eugene Grisby, Jr., Arts and Ethnics: Background for Teaching Youth in a Pluralistic Society (Dubuque, 1977); Alain Locke, The Negro in Art: A Pictorial Record of the Negro Artist and of the Negro Theme in Art (New York, 1968); Roger D. Abrahams, Afro-American Folk Culture: An Annotated Bibliography of Materials from North, Central, and South and West Indies (Philadelphia, 1978); John M. Vlach, The Afro-American Tradition in the Decorative Arts (Cleveland, 1978); and Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (New York, 1977).

Group Summary

This group addressed itself to the question: Should the State of Mississippi require that all students, K-12, be taught Afro-American History?

Dr. Donald prepared a formal presentation for the benefit of the group based on the three questions posed in the other group discussions. His lecture also included an answer to an additional idea projected by the keynote speaker, Dr. J. Rupert Picott.

Since different group participants were present at each of the three sessions, Dr. Donald reviewed his thesis and expanded specific illustrations at each session. Group members responded well to the scholarly approach of Dr. Donald. Dialogue with other professors who were in attendance was lively and provocative. Rapport with students was easily established and their responses caused all participants to reflect in new ways on the subject of Afro-American History as a course in the schools of Mississippi.

Dr. Donald's lecture included "yes" to answer "Could the teaching of the humanities enhance the self-concept of school children? When teachers of each discipline perceive the values of presenting all aspects of each culture group, the acquired knowledge transmitted to students will help them to develop appreciation for the personal contributions of others outside their immediate group.

The teaching of Afro-American History to school children could be a helpful learning tool for enhancing self-cencepts. The holistic effect of the social sciences would show the Black experience as a positive, relevant one. When this experience is perceived undivided and decompartmentalized, children will understand that man is not separated from his works.

Dr. Donald suggested that alternative ways to teach Afro-American History lie with families, churches, fraternities, sororities, other social groups, and public media sources and that these groups should not relinquish any efforts they are now making in this area. Efforts to expand the activity of teaching Afro-American History in the schools could be included in the goals for these groups.

Dr. Donald felt also that any material change in societal structure to be gained by the teaching of this history was very doubtful. He expressed the idea that the inclusion of this course would not appreciatively affect the price of oil and gasoline.

The immediate topic of requiring all K-12 students to be taught Afro-American History in Mississippi also has the "Yes" answer. The problem to be solved is how to accomplish this goal. Dr. Donald reviewed facts which cited that early education in America was based on the theory that man should be taught reading skills in order to interpret the Bible and and get to heaven in the life here after. Likewise, the utilitarian purposes of the African experiences, he suggested, should be explored in a positive manner. Thusly, the discovery and relevation of African influences on America's development could be utilized by honest teachers in an honest manner. Building positively on the knowledge that each student brings with him from his home, church, and community should be the goal of educators. Attempting to have the child deny and negate what he already knows handicaps the learner as well as the teacher. When prior experiences are used as building blocks, progress will be made toward developing positive attitudes for the American political, social, and economic system. Knowledge of Black language patterns, Black architectural design, Black art forms,

and Black folklore will give teachers opportunities to correct mistakes of the past which have ignored influences of Blacks in the building of this nation. Schools should be held accountable for their methods of instruction of the true facts.

Tapes were made of each session and they have the specific illustrations of each point.

Recorder,
Mrs. Posey Smith

A Model For The Teaching Of Afro-American History In Grades K-12

"Is The Teaching Of Afro-American History K-12 Important In Mississippi?", a speech by Dr. Ivory Paul Phillips, Social Scientist, Chairman of the Department of Social Science at Jackson State University.

Dr. Phillips provided the "Heritage For A New America"series with a useful model for the teaching of Afro-American studies in grades K-12.

Phillips traces racism in the development of political, social and economic institution in the State. By tracing the evolutionary development of racism Phillips carefully documents its impact on self-concept of all children. He further points to the way in which racism affects the social, economic and political lives of every Mississippian.

Mississippi's educational institutions are challenged to serve as pioneers in the creation of a pluralistic society. Phillips documents that this can be done by incorporating the study of Afro-Americans and other minorities into the curriculum for grades K-12.

A well documented and thoroughly discussed model is presented to the reader as one way for bringing about the desired change. The model includes Afro-American studies in every subject through the spiralling of twenty-one (21) key concepts throughout the K-12 curriculum.

Phillips warns that the teaching of these subjects with this model requires "non racist teachers", which he feels will improve "the self concept among Blacks and lessen racial prejudice among whites", creating positives changes in race relations" in the State.

The fourth guideline is an invitation to the policy makers to include Afro-Americans in their reassessment of the nation due to shifts in the balance of world power created by the depletion of economic resources. Picott calls this the age of the "new living" in America which will demand

a pluralistic approach to foreign and domestic policy. He sees the Afro-American at the vanguard of this reapprasial because of the Afro-Americans direct relationship to Africa and "our neighbors to the South". This will then entail studying the peoples and cultures of the world in order to establish viable relationships.

This "new living" will require that studies of Afro-Americans, Hispanics, and other people and cultures be instilled at an early age. Picott sees the inclusion of Afro-American Studies in grades K-12 as the first step toward achieving realistic future policies.

IS THE TEACHING OF AFRO-AMERICAN HISTORY K-12 IMPORTANT IN MISSISSIPPI?

Ivory Paul Phillips

This is a topic which is both easy and difficult to discuss. It is difficult because many people who oppose the idea do so on an emotional level which is extremely difficult to counteract using mere facts and logic. Nevertheless, this is a challenge that must be met if America is to become a truly pluralistic society, if Blacks are to become a truly free people, if we are to raise up a heritage for a new America.

At the outset, however, there must be several common agreements and several factors that must be considered. One must consider the fact that Blacks or Afro-Americans constitute 40% of Mississippi's population. That figure is down from 1950 because many Blacks fled the state to escape political oppression and economic exploitation. One must consider the fact that, despite the much publicized return of Blacks to the south, large numbers continue to leave the state. One must consider the fact that the state has acquired a notorious reputation because of the way its Black residents have fared.

Aside from those factors, if there is to be any progress made toward stopping the population drain of the state's Black population, toward changing the states' negative image, and toward actually improving the racial and racially-induced conditions of the entire population, there must be an admission of certain truths. The facts that Whites earn 2.4 times as much as Blacks, and are about 3.4 times more likely to be professionals or administrators than Blacks speak of racism. With 59% of Blacks living in poverty while

only 16% of the Whites are in poverty and with 74% of the Whites owning their own homes while only 49% of Blacks do, also indicate that there is racial discrimination.[1] The fact that Black unemployment is twice as high as white and that predominately White universities are financed twice as well as predominately Black universities, confirm a pattern of racism. The dramatic rise in Council schools and in Ku Klux Klan activities leave little doubt that there is great tension between Blacks and Whites. The large number of racial murders - Emmitt Till, Mack Charles Parker, Vernon Dahmer, Medgar Evers, James Chaney and others - support the states' reputation of racial oppression.[2] In a state 40% Black, if less than 5% of the elected officials are Black, there is little doubt that there is racial oppression. Finally when 13% as many Blacks have left the state as there are now here one can realize that racism is a big factor.

Moving from that point, we must be in agreement that the school has a role to play in preparing citizens to deal with the problems and negative conditions of society. It is recognized that the school is not the panacea for eliminating racism and its results from the state. Yet it must also be recognized that the school has to be a pioneer in that area since the school for years touches the daily lives of most maturing citizens. It is up to us, the more mature citizens, to determine what role schools must play with the problem of racism.

There are several schools of thought on the subject. One school of thought says that the school must help develop social activists, students who will mature into citizens who envision changes for their society and who move to have it changed in those ways. A second school says that the school must help develop flexible students, those who can adjust to the changes brought on by technology, by other cultures, and by other factors. A third

school indicates that they should help develop students who appreciate and seek to preserve the status quo. Finally, there is one school which says the school should help develop students who recognize the essential ideals and values of the present and previous generations. These students, as mature citizens, would then be in a better position to turn back, if necessary, to those ideals and values.[3] Since change is the only constant, it is inevitable, we would be much wiser to plan for and aid the change than to wait and get dragged along by the changes.

Regardless of ones particular learning there are some valuable things that Afro-American history could contribute. Like the field of history in general, Afro-American history can go a long way toward moulding attitudes toward ones own and other groups, toward avoiding similar mistakes of the past, and toward a fuller understanding of the present society.[4] All of these are important goals for the state of Mississippi.

This latest surge or demand for Afro-American history came on the wings of the Black Power Movement of the late 1960 and early 1970s. It was a part of the Black Studies quest.[5] As conceived they both were to promote unity among Blacks, an improved self-concept among Black children, an appreciation of Black culture, and diminishing of racial prejudice among Whites.[6] And, although it may sound like an exaggeration these things can be greatly assisted if Afro-American history is properly taught.

Afro-American history tells the story of what has happened to and what has been done by African people whowere brought to America. The more accurately and comprehensively this is done the more lessons one can extract regarding politics, economics, and cultural and social life. The more comparatively and systematically the Black experience is unfolded, the more sociological, psychological, and economical principles one can discover and

utilize in his/her life. It is these lessons, these principles that make for changed attitudes, self-concepts and behavior.

While there is research to indicate that history as a school subject can help to do these things they occur only under certain conditions Berelson and Steiner indicate that: (1) Human beings learn accepted ways of behaving; human behavior is very dependent upon learning. (2) The closer the correspondence between socializing agencies, the more securely and the more rapidly socialization takes place. (3) People's attitudes and behavior toward ethnic groups typically conform to norms of the groups with which they interact. (4) Opinions, attitudes and beliefs within, a group are particularly subject to influence by the most respected and prestigious member 's of the group, the opinion leader(s).[7]

These things suggest that in order to achieve the desired results, Afro-American history needs to be taught in an honest manner, by an unbiased, effective teacher who has good rapport with the students and the groups of which they are members. Under such conditions then, the writer feels that the teaching of Afro-American history K-12 is important in Mississippi.

As this position is taken, three questions may arise - how to get Afro-American history into an already crowded curriculum, why is it necessary at each level, and what to do about those grades that have no history courses.

Dr. James Banks, in his book Teaching Ethnic-Studies, has suggested that the major thrust of ethnic studies should be curriculum revision.[8] By that he means utilizing information about and concerns of ethnic groups to correct and enrich the content of each course in the curriculum. While this writer agrees that this is one good and necessary approach, it alone is not enough. Using Bank's approach the problem of getting Afro-American history into an already crowded curriculum is greatly diminished. One is

no longer worried about having Afro-American history replace other subjects in the curriculum. It becomes a matter of adding to or replacing course content. In literature, for example, Black writers would need to be added, indicating what may be unique and/or important about their form and messages, pointing to the environment that produces such literary expression. In government, the movements condition, and concerns of Blacks would need to be discussed, showing how they have influenced the course of America's political development. In biology, the physiology and physical environment of Blacks would be analyzed in an effort to account for preferences and behavior that may differ from other groups, and how these cause Blacks to have different health needs and concerns. The list of subjects, with illustration, could go on and on.

Obviously, this approach would call for a broad definition of history. In this sense, history means the study of any group, phenomena, or set of concerns, using a chronological framework and data that has been verified as historically accurate. In short, everything is history which can be dealt with in such a fashion, history then would be seen as a process rather than a particular body of knowledge.

In addition to allowing Afro-American history to spill over into every subject, another advantage of the approach advocated by Banks is that it would be consumed by all of the students rather than just a selected few. This would enable all students to see how Blacks have contributed to the Building of America and advancement of the world. On the other hand, it would enable all students to understand the injustices and oppression experienced by Blacks, culminating in the realization of the need for true brotherhood and democracy being established.

A third advantage of Banks' approach is that it would demand more professional honesty from teachers. The burden of eliminating prejudice

and low self-esteem would not be left to a few teachers. All teachers would have to face up to that responsibility. This total effort would move Afro-American history from the view of being something superfluous to being seen as very important. It would become easier for students to accept, since it would become the norm rather than the exception. Similarly, the racist teacher who is dishonest and out-of-step would increasingly feel that way. The honest and progressive teacher would not feel pressured or as an outlaw because he would be the norm.

The utilization of Afro-American history as a mechanism for Curriculum revision also answer the question of what to do about those grades where there is no history course normally taught. Students would simply get Afro-American history through the regular course content be that geography, English, health, spelling, civics, or whatever. The important point is that contact would not be lost with the achievements, condition, and aspirations of Black people.

As beneficial and attractive as is the strategy of Dr. James Banks, it still falls short on several counts. If only that strategy is used, nowhere would there be a full-fledged, systematic teaching of the Black experience. Such an exposure is important because for many people this would be necessary in order for them to appreciate the full impact of Black oppression and exploitation. Without the full exposure one may get the impression that individual Blacks have no barriers to their success except lack of initiative. Without full exposure one may feel that all that was necessary to improve the lot of Blacks was to grant them physical freedom and later eliminate discriminatory laws. If one is to get a full understanding of Black people in America, a study of Afro-American history is essential.

We teach American history not because world history omits America

but because it helps us to more fully understand America. We teach Mississippi history not because American history omits Mississippi but because it helps us to more fully understand the state. A piecemeal approach even a piece in each grade will not do if one is to be truly knowledgeable.

Futhermore, if there is no separate, independent course in Afro-American history then the students as well as teachers will probably perceive it as being relatively unimportant. It is also for this reason that Black History month does not have the impact which it should have on the schools. It is merely a one-time thing seen as somewhat superfluous and voluntary.

If there is doubt about the effects that Afro-American history can have on the thinking and behavior of Americans there are a few factors that one should consider. In modern societies systems of public education and their requirement to teach the national history were both aimed at increasing national loyalty and patriotism, at helping create desired conceptions about the country and its heroes. Western historians place a great deal of stress on Ancient Greece because in many ways they trace their own origins to the Greco-Roman world. This generates pride and self-esteem. When western European historians boastfully write about the discovery and exploration of the Americans it affects a sense of righteousness and authority regarding the European settlement of the Americans. The teaching about how underdeveloped America was under the Indians has achieved its goal all too well.[9] Most Americans now feel that it was good and the right thing to do in taking America from the Indians so that its full potential could be reached. The larger than life stories that developed around George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and other revolutionaries have helped justify the actions

of America relative to Britain and their policies regarding the young American nation. Every war in which America has engaged, American historians make it appear that this country was either an innocent victim or a crusading saviour. As a result of that, even now Americans are almost up in arms over the crises in Afghanistan and are practically ready to make war on Iran to obtain oil. Adolf Hitler said it quite well in Mein Kempt, if a lie is told long enough people will begin to believe it.[10] That being the case, one can certainly expect that if the truth, about the Afro-American experience is told long enough, it will be believed.

As mentioned earlier, effectively - taught Afro-American history can help to solve the problem of racism, improve the condition of negative Black self-concepts, and deal with poverty, exploitation and oppression which grow out of racism.

Nobody who is truly intelligent, truly ethical, and truly honest can doubt that these are desirable results. The question is "are those in a position to bring about this change - board members, administrators, and teachers-willing to bring about the change?" The related and larger question is, "is White society in general ready to surrender its privileges and advantages in order to let justice be done?" That is exactly what has to happen if the shackles of racial oppression are to be removed from Black people. All of us, but especially teachers, must be willing to do whatever is necessary to make Afro-American history work; to help it become one of the cornerstones in re-educating Black and White children so that one will not think that he and his people did nothing and will never amount to much while the other thinks that his is the greatest people to ever have lived and can do no wrong.

There is no measure of importance that can be assessed for the amount of human and material resources wasted through racism - slums, crime,

diseases, early death, welfare, lessened productivity, et cetera.
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When these and other benefits are considered it is almost an insult to ask, "is the teaching of Afro-American history K-12 important in Mississippi?" It is not enough to decry the reputation which this state has acquired. It is not enough to do as an old TV commericial suggested, talk Mississippi at every opportunity.[11] It is not enough to re-create the old bumper sticker which read, "Mississippi - the most lied about state in the union".[12] No, too much of what is said about Mississippi is true. And, if we do not like it being said then we must make every effort to do whatever we can to bring about positive change and that includes advocating the teaching of Afro-American history K-12. That brings me to one final point. That is that Afro-American history in one form or another needs to be taught at every level. It is necessary at every level because there are new psychological developments in the child at each level that need to be capitalized upon.[13] Just as important is the fact this recycling of Afro-American history would re-enforce it truths and its importance.

Hilda Taba, among others, has advocated a spiralling curriculum such as the one suggested here.[14] It would concentrate on a particular set of concepts and generalizations would be based on data from various historical periods and geographical areas.[15]

Over the years the writer has come to the conclusion that there are 21 concepts which are basic to understanding the Afro-American experience. These are Black culture, Africanisms, oppression, genocide, resistance, contributions, success, achievements, allies and alliances, racism, American dream, unity, dissension, class, race, power, imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, nationalism, and pan Africanism.[16]

These concepts could be spiralled throughout the entire curriculum. For an example, in the lower elementary grades power in the family, among

playmates and among community helpers could talk about Afro-American history; at the upper elementary level power could become central to studying about different communities and peoples as it relates to Afro-American history; at the junior high level power could deal with examining nations and civic responsibilities; finally, in senior high school power would be looked at on the international level and in specialized fields. The same thing could be done with other concepts.

Then moving beyond the question of whether or not Afro-American history is important K-12 in Mississippi, my central effort has been and will continue to be how best to implement Afro-American history throughout the curriculum so that it affects positive changes in matter of race and economics.

On the other hand, it is good to celebrate Black History month. It is good to give some students special assignments in Black history. It is also good to hold classes in Afro-American history after school, on week-ends or through student organizations. They all need to be continued. Nevertheless, they are not enough because neither stamps a seal of legitimacy on the subject which would cause everyone to take it seriously. Neither approach makes Afro-American history truly accessible to all students.

In order to lift Afro-American history to the level where it needs to be, there should be a combination of James Bank's curriculum revision approach, a spiralling set of concepts and generalizations, and comprehensive required courses at the upper elementary and senior high levels. With that kind of combination, being implemented by competent, committed, non-racist teachers there is almost no way that tnings can remain the same. And, with that challenge to all teachers and administrators to try it, I rest my case.

FOOTNOTES

[1] These statistics taken from Handbook of Selected Data for Mississippi Mississippi Research and Development Center, 1976.

[2] James W. Loewen and Charles Sallis, Mississippi Conflict and Change (N.Y.: Patheon Book, 1974);pp.249-285

[3] John U. Michaelis, Social Studies for Children in a Democracy (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1965) chapter 1.

[4] Bernard Norling, Towards A Better Understanding of History (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1960) pp.2-9.

[5] Roger A. Fischer, "Ghetto and Gown: The Birth of Black Studies," Current History (November 1969)

[6] John Guenther and Wayne Dimas, "Black History for What?" (unpublished manuscript).

[7] Bernard and Berelson and Gary Steiner, Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965)

[8] James Banks, Teaching Ethnic Studies (Washington, D.C. : NCSS,1974)

[9] This has long been recognized as a problem in writing history. Thomas Pressley dealt with it extensively in Americans Interpret Their Civil War

[10] Robert Downs, Books That Changed The World (N.Y.: Mentor Book, 1956) pp. 118-129.

[11] These public service messages were aired daily on television during the mid-1960's.

[12] These bumper stickers were very popular among White Mississippians during the 1960's.

[13] J.H. Flavell, The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1963).

[14] Hilda Taba, Teacher's Handbook by Elementary Social Studies (Readings, Mass: Addison - Wesley, 1967.

[15] James Banks and William Joyce, Teaching Social Studies to Culturally Different Children (Reading, Mass: Addison - Wesley, 1967).

[16] Ivory Phillips, The Black Bible (Jackson, MS.: Ivory Phillips, 1979), pp. 11-16.

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Group Summary

Numerous points were emphasized in the group discussion which followered the presentation of Dr. Phillips paper. They were as following:

1. The group supported the necessity of teaching Afro-American heritage in order to develop the full potential of children as human beings.

2. The importance of the knowledge of one's own heritage was stresses.

3. The importance of beginning early with young children in order to destroy stereotypes was emphasized.

4. The group felt that there should be a community-wide effort (involving parents and the church) to emphasize the Afro-American heritage.

5. These aforementioned items would enhance a child's pride and value system, his or her motivation and achievement in school and would go far to correct Mississippi's negative image. The latter would have an indirect economic impact as fewer persons would choose to leave Mississippi when they became adults.

6. The option of studying all ethnic minorities (which would include Afro-American History) was presented.

7. An effort should be made to enhance the media's presentation of Afro-American History topics.

8. Finally, the group recommended in-service training for teachers to show them how to implement Afro-American subject matter into the regular curriculum of their schools.

Recorder,
Ms. Earnestine Madison