

model for the field, one that rejects the counterproductive Afrocentric approach, intellectually challenges all students, and encourages truthful research. Pragmatic and jargon-free, Professor Early's recommendations can serve as a blueprint for constructive ethnic studies programs.

In the public-school arena, Professor Sandra Stotsky, director of the Institute on Writing, Reading and Civic Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, revealed significant bias in curriculum design and textbook purchases. Increasingly, texts with gender and ethnic stereotypes brainwash American children to embrace certain agendas. Taken together, Professors Early's and Stotsky's papers illuminate the hazards of a politicized multiculturalism and the dangers that loom if traditionalists simply dismiss the field.

Ethnic Studies and American Higher Education

Gerald Early

It cannot be said with certainty whether multiculturalism is here to stay, although it must be admitted that in some respects it has a good chance of sticking around for a while. This is so for two reasons. First, it is not a new obsession in American life but rather an old idea redefined in an extraordinarily attractive manner. Second, multiculturalism is attractive to Americans in a stringently moral way because of the intensely high, nearly parochial sense of national pietism it evokes. In short, multiculturalism brings group dynamics in America to the level of a major social crisis, creating a sense of ethical panic that anxiety-prone Americans truly enjoy.

America has always seen itself as a pluralistic society; that was indeed the guiding principle of its myth of making one people out of the many. In the past, of course, this view did not exactly include the Negro, who was largely seen as a distinct "problem," nor did it consider women. Multiculturalism, because its vision includes African-Americans, women, gays, and others, now gives us a newly-drawn pluralism. In the past, pluralism was primarily concerned with how America made Americans; now multiculturalism is concerned with how America makes differentiated segments victims of an assimilative force called Americanism—one that is largely a conformist, nearly totalitarian creation of the white male. Multiculturalism, an outgrowth of the older vision of American pluralism, is, in large measure, a considerable departure from old ideas about diversity in that it is preoccupied with radical

revolt against what it feels has been the systematic suppression and oppression of various groups in America. Pluralism is not asserted as just one peculiarly enriching or bedeviling aspect of what it means to be an American. It is now a claim for self-determination and justice, for rights, civic parity, and freedom. As such, multiculturalism manifests itself at the university as a politicized intellectual agenda through women's studies and ethnic studies programs. I wish to confine this discussion to one branch of ethnic studies, namely, African-American studies.

Whatever the fate of multiculturalism, it can be said with some confidence that ethnic studies, particularly African-American or black studies, will, at least probably, outlive its current advocates and critics. That is to say, that while the current ethnic studies *fad* is an outgrowth of multiculturalism, its continued existence is not contingent upon multiculturalism's success. There are several reasons for this. First, black studies, as the opening intellectual salvo of the ethnic studies movement, is not descended from multiculturalism; its existence, as a phenomenon of late 1960s campus protests and black militancy, predates multiculturalism, which was largely spurred by the affirmative action movement of the 1970s, when various ethnic groups discovered that there was social and economic bounty and booty to be had by claiming victim status. (Whether such claims are justified is not my concern here.)

"Looking for an edge" is a particularly American pursuit. Other groups have replicated the protest/grievance paradigm of blacks, but blacks will remain America's special "problem" group for three reasons: (1) they were originally brought here against their will, (2) they were legally enslaved in this country for several hundred years, and (3) they were the subject of federal legislation that both removed and redefined their citizenship status.

No other "special grievance" group can make those specific claims. It is indeed these claims and the centrality of blacks in the drama of America's growth as a nation that provide the second reason for the continued existence of black studies: most Americans consider the study of black people of far greater importance than that of other groups to an understanding of American history and culture. We have Black History Month, now a major cultural and marketing event in America. The history of no other ethnic or "special grievance" group, including that of women, is accorded such special status. Third, achieving respectable representation of blacks, of all ethnic and "special grievance" groups, remains a particularly difficult task for white colleges, especially on faculties and in many graduate school disciplines. (It must be noted that white colleges had an interest in significant black representation on their campuses before affirmative action. Most of the black students who were protesting on white college campuses in the late 1960s came because of recruitment drives launched by many such schools in the mid- and early 1960s.) Black studies and ethnic studies programs are useful recruiting

and marketing devices in this regard. Interest in maintaining some sort of “official” black presence at white schools is likely to remain strong as long, also, as blacks are disproportionately represented in the bread-and-butter athletics programs, football, basketball, and track and field, of many colleges. (It must be remembered that in the late 1960s several black college and professional athletes were in the vanguard of the Black Power movement.)

Although I believe that black studies specifically has a future at the American university because of politics, sentiment, and the conjoining of certain historical circumstances that have made black people the “exceptionalist” Americans, I do not believe that the health of these programs can in the future hinge on these very elements. Yet with the growth of Afrocentrism (or *Africentrism* as it is now referred to in the *Journal of Black Studies* and *The Journal of Black Psychology*, popular academic journals that believe in an “African-centered” perspective as the only stance that can save black Americans mentally and emotionally) as the defining intellectual—or, it can be convincingly argued, anti-intellectual—feature of these programs, it is precisely these elements, blacks as “exceptionalist” people, sentiment, and politics, on which such programs now trade for their continued existence. So defining it is to assure that black studies will never be taken seriously as an intellectual enterprise, that it exists always as a “favor” granted by whites to blacks, and that many blacks will continue to be wards in the American university and never full-fledged, respected citizens.

To be real and effective, black studies must drop the very elements that it now mercilessly exploits. The only reason it can now give for its existence is as therapy for both black and white students, to cure them of the effects of racism and as a psychological—not, it should be noted, intellectual—corrective to “Eurocentric,” racist scholarship. Surely racism has had a deleterious effect upon both blacks and whites in America (as have a good many other warped ideas), but it is the height of hubris for blacks who teach in such programs and the white administrators who fund them to think that a small black studies program on any given white campus will generate a cure. It is undeniable, moreover, that, over the centuries, a great deal of racist scholarship has been generated by whites. Much of this, however, already had been refuted in respectable circles long before black studies came on the scene. Furthermore, the best way to refute this pernicious scholarship, if that is still the major reason why black studies programs see themselves as existing, is for the scholars in the program to do their work and have it published in first-rate journals and by respected presses, whether black or white, not by simply parroting a notion of the primacy of Africa in all things.

The major problem with many black studies programs is that they have swallowed the Marxist-cum-Foucaultian concept that “knowledge is power.” This is perfectly understandable and natural for a group of people who have been abused and misunderstood by mistaken and viciously-asserted “knowl-

edge” designed to keep them powerless. However, it is precisely because that mistaken and viciously-asserted “knowledge” so degraded them that, one would think, blacks would be among the most fervent in believing that “knowledge is truth.” Having seen how whites have tried to use knowledge-as-power over them, having been lied about and lied to for so long, having seen how whites have tried to place a color imprint on the acquisition and meaning of knowledge, one would think that blacks would recognize truthful knowledge, non-colorized knowledge, non-racially aggrandizing knowledge as their only legitimate and ennobling source of power. For the true mission of American higher education, despite how corny or romantic it may sound to Foucaultian realists these days, is not therapy for the sick, not fair play for the historically abused and misinterpreted, not power for the “subversives” to oust the white men and give blacks an alternative world, but rather the quest for truth and understanding, undertaken not by disembodied, unfeeling minds, but by passionate believers in liberty, in the right of the individual conscience, in the need for the coming together of groups, and in responsibility for the society in which we work.

In order for black studies programs to become fully mature intellectual partners in the university, three changes must occur:

1. *Black studies programs must cease seeing themselves as anti-Western or as left-wing collectives.* There is nothing inherent in the study of black Americans or in African peoples that would necessarily lead one to a left-wing political position, and there is no need, in the name of relevancy or power, for black studies programs to adopt such a stance. To be sure, the West enslaved black people, abused them mightily, and practiced racism. But the West did not invent human slavery and in fact proceeded to end it. While the West abused black people, it has been in the West that attempts at truly multiracial societies have been tried. No other country in human history has tried to bring together as equals such disparate groups of people as has America. The West practiced racism, but the West has worked harder to end racism, chauvinism, and unfair privilege of all sorts than any other set of societies. (And it must be remembered that the West did not invent the abuse of women, ethnocentrism, and elitist or aristocratic prerogative.) To be sure, the West invented colonialism, but the West also ended it. There is much for which the West should be criticized in its treatment of black Americans and African peoples, but there is also much for which it should be praised, particularly because the West has worked harder than virtually any other society in human history to change and correct its evils.

The idea that “individualism” is a European invention and therefore an evil for blacks (a common belief these days among many blacks, especially Afrocentrists), and that “communalism” is an African invention and therefore good for blacks, has probably led many black studies programs to embrace some sort of communist-utopian idea. That this dialectic is a bit too simplistic

goes without saying. That it can lead to a totalitarian, conformist standard of “blackness,” a kind of messianic and often misguided sense of race loyalty, urged on by a “need for community,” and a “need for unity,” also goes without saying. (Of course, when it is coupled with the belief prevalent among many Afrocentrists—as well, incidentally, as among gynocentrics and other “subversives”—that reason is a Eurocentric or white male invention, one can see how dangerous the romance of communalism is in black studies programs today.) Probably the main reason why this idea has appealed to many blacks is the disunity, self-destructive behavior, envy, jealousy, and the like that afflicts the black community in America. Naturally, anything “individualist” seems bad, since it leads to disunity, so it must be put down as something “white.” But it is not “individualism” that is the cause of disunity among black Americans, but rather license or permissiveness, self-indulgence (preached constantly by our consumer-oriented society), inability to sacrifice for a larger or greater good (blacks, like other groups, have been able to do this only periodically and are unable to do it now because of an uncertainty that reflects the uncertainty of the direction of the country itself), and a paucity of resources to counteract the destructive trends taking place in white society.

2. *Black studies programs must not be all-black operations.* It is often argued that black studies programs must be all-black in order to “empower” black students and faculty on a white college campus, giving them a departmental or administrative unit as a kind of power base. In truth, this does nothing more than stigmatize and ghettoize black faculty on the campus and black studies programs themselves. This allows the larger white campus not to take black studies seriously, or to engage it at all as a field or collective of study, because the program itself has defined the primacy of its existence as political.

Black studies programs should be integrated because (1) all forms of legitimate study on a college campus belong to all and are not the province of some special group, nor do they exist specifically to serve as an “identity” or “political” endeavor for such a group; (2) just as non-blacks should be encouraged to study African or African-American history and culture, blacks should be encouraged to study non-black subjects, so that, in the end, a college campus, stimulating free intellectual discovery, can truly be diverse in its disciplines and so that one’s expertise or intellectual interest is not judged by one’s sociological grouping; (3) America is a miscegenated culture, and it is only through the dialogue that results when both blacks and whites consider the subjects of black studies that both black and white students can properly understand and profit from the study of the questions of race and culture in the United States. Indeed, such understanding will in part come about through replication of how these questions have been thrashed about in our society itself.

3. *The black studies program must not see its mission as antithetical to that of the*

mission of the university. The black studies program must not consider or teach that traditional methods of scholarship, objectivity, the search for truth, and a deep appreciation and knowledge of Western culture are “white” perspectives or “white” concerns. Black studies will not achieve what it desires at the university unless it decides to achieve precisely what the university itself wishes to achieve: an educated student body open to a number of points of view, wrestling, through research and hard work, to arrive at some sense of true knowledge. For in the end, knowledge is not power; it is in fact a humbling, virtually ego-erasing experience in partaking of the minds of many others, agreeable and disagreeable, to forge and to fuse as well as to prune and weed out. Any gain in knowledge only reminds us of how little we truly know. As Sherlock Holmes rightly says in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four*: “It is that the chief proof of man’s real greatness lies in his perception of his own smallness . . . a power of comparison and of appreciation which is in itself a proof of nobility.” And it is, paradoxically, within the very confined enterprise of mastering one’s discipline and of scratching for a minute portion of the truth—of seeing oneself as a small conduit of a large and sound intellectual tradition that is essentially non-racial in its design and possibilities, no matter how perversely whites may at times have used it—that blacks will, in the end, find their power and presence in the university.

The Changing Literature Curriculum in K–12

Sandra Stotsky

Ideally, the integration of what is called multicultural literature into the K–12 curriculum represents an effort to broaden it to include works of literary merit about social groups in this country who were presented inadequately, if at all, in earlier literature programs. Few would disagree that all students should be able to see the multiethnic nature of the country they inhabit (as well as a broader range of peoples around the world) in the literature they are asked to read. They should also be able to see different ethnic and racial groups in major roles in this literature, so that they have some opportunities as readers to identify with all types of Americans, male and female. These egalitarian goals appear to be positive ones, for young students especially, whether or not there is any evidence that including multicultural works enhances their self-esteem.

Other considerations have been suggested in articles by individual teach-