

"REALIZING THE DREAM
OF A BLACK UNIVERSITY"
& OTHER WRITINGS

PART I

TONI CADE BAMBARA



Makeba Lavan, Conor Tomás Reed, Editors

SERIES 7, NUMBER 2, PART 1, FALL 2017

INTRODUCTION

[I]t should be clear to all of us here, as it is certainly clear to our brothers and sisters at San Francisco State, at UCLA, and elsewhere, that fissures or breaks are not enough. To obtain a relevant, real education, we shall have to either topple the university or set up our own.

—Toni Cade Bambara,
“Realizing the Dream of a Black University” (1969)

Instant coffee is the hallmark of current rhetoric. But we do have time. We'd better take the time to fashion revolutionary selves, revolutionary lives, revolutionary relationships. Mouths don't win the war. It don't even win the people. Neither does haste, urgency, and stretch-out-now insistence. Not all speed is movement.

—Toni Cade Bambara, “On the Issue of Roles,”
The Black Woman: An Anthology (1970)

THE “TONI CADE BAMBARA SCHOOL OF ORGANIZING” is alive and ubiquitous, even if to many, Bambara’s name may be unfamiliar.¹ Throughout her life, Bambara acted as a writer, teacher, and filmmaker bridging social movements and shaping our present potential for collective justice. In New York City, New Jersey, Atlanta, and Philadelphia, as well as on travels throughout the world—moving within and against universities, coalitions, and conditions—Toni Cade Bambara was a walking counter-institution. We invite readers to learn about her enduring interventions as a community scribe, activist pedagogue, and cultural worker through the materials gathered in this project.

Bambara’s archives at Spelman College brim with the rebellious, loving energy of her teaching, writing, organizing, and friendships. The few letters kept in her archive reflect the enduring value of these

¹ This name is respectfully borrowed from the forthcoming documentary by Toni Cade Bambara’s longtime collaborator, Louis Massiah, about her life.

connections. For example, in a 1973 note from an occasional twenty-year exchange with the elder poet Gwendolyn Brooks, Bambara is told, "dear remarkable rich-minded golden-penned Toni... Thank you for knowing me, thank you for thinking the best of me." Brooks is referring to Bambara's reverent *New York Times* review of her memoir *Report from Part One*, and is grateful to Bambara for supporting her move away from commercial publishers to the Black independent Broadside Press, without commenting on the ironies of seeing the younger writer gain greater access to mainstream venues. In a 1980 letter from novelist Octavia Butler, she solicits Bambara to contribute a story for a Black science fiction anthology called *Black Futures*; though it never came to be, this correspondence opens up speculative possibilities for how their writing lives could have intertwined. In a 1987 postcard to novelist, poet, and essayist Ishmael Reed, Bambara asks for issues of his co-edited *Yardbird Reader*—a key 1970s independent journal presenting a radical multi-ethnic vision of the US that grew out of Reed's early association with UMBRA—a precursor to the Black Arts movement—for a course she was developing on Contemporary American Literatures. Ongoing heartfelt correspondence with Tom Dent, another key UMBRA figure with whom she worked in Atlanta, reveals numerous projects that remain unknown outside the archive or through exchanges with other friends.

When researching her archives and reading her publications, it is clear that Bambara believed her mission in life went beyond writing. Teaching and community work were a cornerstone of her activism and the backbone of her existence. Bambara was always teaching, and learning from her elders, peers, and students—seemingly, everyone she encountered. In a 1981 letter to June Jordan—during a few intense years when at least 28 Black children, teens, and adults were mysteriously killed in Atlanta—Bambara describes how a chance dialogue can lead to action:

Cab driver Blood drove me home from airport and we talked about [the situation] here. Another blood missing. Exchanging theories and what not. After \$4.90 on the meter I said let's set up a self-defense studio and gather up all the vets and martial arts folks and folks with heart to spare. He turned off the meter. We stopped for coffee. One of them real old timey young brothers raised by daddy and uncle and older men who hunt and have gold teeth and know how to swing a hammer and take pride in planing a door so it travels smoothly over carpet. Talks real slow and careful like and making every syllable count. So I've got several of the Farrakhan guards throwing out the net, and he's called back already to say he's invited some vets to his house for dinner tonight to talk things over.²

In another letter to Jordan from that year, Bambara explains the contours of what would become her novel *Those Bones Are Not My Child*, a city-memoir of the Atlanta murders:

What I am doing is putting [the Atlanta situation] in a national and international context of attack and mobilization. What I am doing is 'inventing' some characters (composites fiction?) who play out the drama of a missing youth (composite) against the backdrop of the actual shit (documentary) with wide speculation—drugs, porno, etc.—linking Atlanta with cities where our children are hazarded by all sorts of corruption—linking too with infant formula in Third World etc... Lots of references within the script about cops, Klan, ritual murder, etc.³

Regardless of geographical location, her pedagogy writ large was animated by Black (inter)nationalism in forming intellectual,

² Letter to June Jordan, Schlesinger Archives.

³ Ibid.

spiritual, and physical solidarity with oppressed, or as she called them, “downpressed” people across the globe.

Growing up on 151st St. between Amsterdam and Broadway until the age of ten, Toni Cade Bambara, born Milona Mirkin Cade, acted as a “community scribe” for adults by drafting verbal agreements and meeting minutes for neighborhood organizers, running tips to local journalists, and transcribing letters to loved ones. This responsibility to document, interpret, and serve a collectivity provided an ethical anchor to her writing approach.⁴ In the essay “Working At It in Five Parts,” published here for the first time, she recalls an extensive network of street educators who shaped the teacher-activist she would become. Here we can see the thematic trails she left throughout her life that could demonstrate to her readers and students how to navigate the complexities of geography, family, motherhood, social movements, the creative process, and mortality.

Across all these themes, her focus on the power of language—the folk origins of language amongst the people and its ideological uses by the state and other structures—remains central, and we still have much to learn from her thinking. Her analysis, for example, of the usage of single words by UMBRA poet Lorenzo Thomas and novelist Toni Morrison, then extends into a discussion of her own place in the world, who her audience might potentially be, and how, because of the complexities of imperialism, colonialism and market forces, “I am necessarily preoccupied with language tasks.” This allowed her to gain a unique perspective, to “understand that the world is big, that the actual and potential audience for Black writing is wide. People in Cuba, Iran, Vietnam, Brazil, the Caribbean, New Hebrides, the Continent, all over are interested in knowing how we in the belly of the beast are faring, what we are doing, how we see things.”

⁴ Toni Cade Bambara, *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions*, (Vintage, 1999), 218.

Among significant early junctures on this path, Bambara mentions “Speaker’s Corner” and “Michaux’s Book Store.” The “Corner” on 135th St. and Lenox Avenue served as an “outdoor university,” teaching people how to deliver incisive arguments, compel audiences spanning ideological spectrums, make rhetorical room for call-and-response, and above all, be intellectually relevant to others outside oneself.⁵ And “Professor” Lewis Michaux’s National Memorial African Bookstore—a “House of Common Sense and the Home of Proper Propaganda”—cultivated yet another autonomous lecture space outside it, dubbed Harlem Square or African Square, signaling how Black studies were meant to circulate off the page as much as on it.

In another text, published here for the first time, “Puerto Ricans (Spoken Version),” comprised of notes Bambara assembled for a voice-over in Frances Negrón-Muntaner’s 1994 film, *Brincando el Charco*, we witness first-hand Bambara’s urge to make greater sense of new experiences, as the 1940s-1950s mass migration of Puerto Ricans into New York City alongside Black residents redefined cultural belonging—making a Black-white racism paradigm more prismatic.⁶ The new neighbors—some who looked different and some “who looked just like us”—arrived without “any winter clothes” and narrow job prospects in a city that retained little of the migration uplift promised by Operation Bootstrap. Puerto Rican children who only spoke Spanish were placed in learning disability schools or under-resourced segregated schools with Black children. Soon, Black and Puerto Rican neighbors began to work together in local organizing campaigns. Bambara’s intimate and first-hand knowledge of these studies-on-the-streets, and her mentorship in youth by “insubordinates, dissidents, iconoclasts, oppositionists, change

⁵ Ibid. 251.

⁶ Also see Frances Negrón-Muntaner’s “Things that Toni Taught Me,” *Savoring the Salt: The Legacy of Toni Cade Bambara* (Temple University, 2007).

agents, radicals, and revolutionaries” propelled the formation of her later activist community and City College of New York pedagogical efforts.⁷ Her attention to these multi-ethnic dimensions of Harlem helped shape her aims to create studies that related Black people’s histories to those of their neighbors and co-workers also struggling against institutional and interpersonal racism in the United States in a more global anti-colonial context.

After undergraduate studies at Queens College in the late 1950s (where Lorenzo Thomas was a classmate and early collaborator), then a Master’s Program at City College in the early 1960s, Bambara began to teach in 1965 at the age of 26 in City College’s Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) Program. This educational access pilot project—created at City College in 1965, and then extended through community pressure to all CUNY senior colleges in 1967—aimed to prepare a cohort of Black and Puerto Rican high-school students for college studies by providing non-credit preparatory courses, study stipends, and social-work counseling, as well as financial support throughout their time in college. Within a few years, SEEK would become a nucleus for counteracting the institutional inequalities entrenched in City College’s admissions, curriculum, value systems, and relationship to the surrounding Harlem area.

By the late 1960s, Bambara—deeply familiarized with CUNY and citywide politics—was seen as an approachable militant faculty member by increasingly radicalized students who prepared the grounds for intensifying campus protests. In the archival materials, we also see vivid traces of Bambara’s relationships with other members of the extraordinary teaching cohort, which included Aijaz Ahmad, Barbara Christian, Addison Gayle, David Henderson, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Raymond Patterson, Adrienne Rich, and Mina Shaughnessy. Bambara welcomed Jordan by walking her to her first day of teaching

⁷ Toni Cade Bambara, *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions*, (Vintage, 1999), 174.

with the advice, “Anything you have to give, just give it to them... They’ll be grateful for it.”⁸ Lorde’s 1971 poem “Dear Toni Instead of a Letter of Congratulations Upon Your Book and Your Daughter Whom You Are Raising To Be A Correct Little Sister” also recounts their time at City College together. Bambara’s response to this poem still beams from the archives. She writes, “tryin to think of a really balanced way to say thank you for the stunning poem... I mean stunning. So just wow, Audre, it’s a fantastic poem. Overwhelmed, Toni”

Documents from the City College period show Bambara’s early insistence on a form of mentorship and cooperative spirit that was no-bullshit, strategic, visionary, receptive, and jocular. Through departmental reports, newspaper articles, and public letters to students, Bambara elevated the stakes of learning and expanded the avenues of struggle, planting the seeds for a much longer inter-generational project of political consciousness and social liberation. By evaluating the students’ oral, written, and activist work, Bambara distinguished between literacy and competence, an assessment that SEEK educators would later popularize to demonstrate how writing acuity reflected only one facet of students’ intelligence. Bambara and her colleagues modeled an anti-authoritarian position as teachers with “very little academic distance” from their students, which provided the interpretive space to explore their curiosities and make demands upon higher education together. In a summer 1968 SEEK report published here, Bambara weighs the significance of SEEK students’ interest in autonomous “experimental college” projects such as the Free University and Liberation School that appeared alongside, or at times even within and against, formal universities at the time. She anticipates that these immediate forms of counter-education “now taking place in universities all over the world” could clarify the students’

⁸ June Jordan, “Black Studies: Bringing Back the Person,” *Civil Wars*, (Beacon, 1981), 45.

visions for alternative learning inside intransigent institutions. After all, to “establish a ‘real’ college within the mock college” could upend the legitimacy of the pre-existing college structure itself.

This vision and practice culminate in “Realizing the Dream of a Black University,” first published in the February 1969 issue of the campus newspaper *Observation Post*—two months before the April 1969 student strike—and reprinted here. Bambara passionately argues for students, faculty, staff, and community members to transform the university now, emboldening them to acknowledge and utilize the tools, knowledge, and expertise already at their disposal, instead of deferring to an imagined future standoff with distant administrators. Bambara portends of the campus environment, “an explosion is imminent,” advocating for City College and Harlem to combine forces to change the college. For Bambara, a “Black University” entailed a more expansive intellectual project than simply adding Black students, teachers, and courses. It meant disrupting disciplinary boundaries, identifying knowledge bases outside of the university that flourished inside poor multi-ethnic neighborhoods, and creating a partisan liberatory relationship to collective studies.

In another document published here for the first time, “Dear Bloods,” a memo that Bambara circulated to student organizers immediately after the strike, she minces few words to communicate that making “something out of nothing is so much better than blowing a fuse.” Bambara gives examples and contact information for Black women students initiating “counter-courses” on History, Literature, and Sociology, arguing that the “responsibility of getting that education rests with you in large part. Jumping up and down, foaming at the mouth, rattling coffee-cups and other weaponry don’t get it.” Because of her close proximity and the trust she built with these students, Bambara could critique their shortcomings while pushing for them to actualize demands directly.

Bambara’s landmark 1970 anthology, *The Black Woman*, acted as a new kind of Black, Puerto Rican, and Third World feminist studies open curriculum. In one of her two essays for the anthology, “On the Issue of Roles,” she lambasts heady misogynist elements of campus organizing at the time, and redefines the roles needed to engage in social change *here at home*—anticipating future women of color’s feminist analyses on social reproduction, care, and the need to counter strands of Black nationalism that perpetuate sexism. We can also see how the “Dear Bloods” memo’s terse mentorship expands to reach a national audience of Black and Third World students and community radicals.

Bambara refused to relegate the stories of people of color to “Special Topics” courses or minors because she believed that the stories of people of color were just as important to the social tapestry of America and the world. In her 1972 essay, “Black English,” Bambara writes, “In school we have focused on language as a noun, not on what or who is named, or on who is doing the naming... In school we do not emphasize the real function of language in our lives: how it operates in courts, in hospitals, in schools, in the media, how it operates to perpetuate a society, maintain a social order, to reflect biases, to transmit basic values.”⁹ As an activist pedagogue, Bambara gave students the tools to see language as a verb, and to call out those who wield language as a discriminatory weapon. She challenged students to carefully investigate all the spaces they occupy (from the classroom to their homes), endowing her students with the courage and camaraderie to explore their own upbringings, ideologies and prejudices, instead of ignoring, dismissing, suppressing or transmitting them.

⁹ Toni Cade Bambara, “Black English,” *Curriculum Approaches from a Black Perspective*, (Black Child Development Institute, 1972), 78.

Bambara once said, "My job is to make revolution irresistible."¹⁰ At every turn, she found a way to bring learning to, and honor the intelligence of downpressed communities, whether through the characters in her fiction, or in her refusal to be hindered by institutional constraints. Bambara was a writer of "the movement," serving as chronicler and conduit of multiple voices and actions. These forms of movement composition—willing clarity and direction towards liberation into existence through words and actions—kept Bambara responsive to an "authenticating audience" of her students, peers, and fellow insurgents in an extended inter-generational family.¹¹ Transforming society out there and in here, according to the wisdom acquired through many experiences, requires a patient radical vision beyond one protest, communiqué, revolutionary tradition, school, semester, year, decade, even lifetime. In realizing her dream of a "Black University," the institution of Toni Cade Bambara is ours to construct and proliferate in all the spaces in which we work, love, and enact new freedoms together. We hope this selection can provide an entryway into the richness of her liberating vision.

—Makeba Lavan & Conor Tomás Reed

¹⁰ Bambara, Toni Cade. "An Interview with Toni Cade Bambara." By Kay Bonetti. *Conversations with Toni Cade Bambara*. Ed. Thabiti Lewis. (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2012), 35.

¹¹ See Louis Massiah's "The Authenticating Audience," *Feminist Wire*, November 18, 2014. <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/11/authenticating-audience/>

REALIZING THE DREAM OF A BLACK UNIVERSITY (1969)

If news reports are anything to go by, and if the Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence at Brandeis University is anything to go by, and if the many books that have come in the wake of campus disturbances are anything to go by—then at least 90% of the several hundred rebellions that have taken place on American college campuses and in the American high schools in the past six years were propelled by and revealed a gross dissatisfaction with the curriculum (its premises, its omissions, its presentations, its designers). And one grievance in particular that manages to get focus in these disturbances is the casual absence or deliberate overlooking of the role the African and Afro-American tradition plays in our history, our art, our culture in general. It should be noted, too, that the demand for African and Asian and Hispanic studies in the high school and college curriculum comes from all kinds of students and faculty, not simply from Black, Puerto Rican, Mexican, or Oriental students.

If the rumblings at the College are anything to go by, if the seriously posed questions our students and white students are raising in classes are anything to go by, if the demands for curriculum change stated by the Onyx Society, by the DuBois Club, by SDS, and a number of other organizations are anything to go by, if the responses from the current SEEK poll are anything to go by—then we might be reasonable in saying that there is a great deal of discontent on this campus. And judging by the inability of the administration to set up the machinery to expedite Chancellor Albert Bowker's new admission policy, judging by the somewhat anemic proposals offered by department curriculum committees, judging by the fact that there are less than fifteen Black professors on this campus, we can safely assume that an explosion is imminent.

There are a number of signs that indicate that the college administration just might be awake to the possibility of impending blow-up and may be, at this very moment, attempting to initiate cooling off or even reformist projects. I suggest that the origins of any remedies, head-offs, panaceas are not without significance. If they come from the top, they are suspect. And when the explosion is over, if the enormous task of reconciliation and reconstruction is handled only by the top, the remedies will not be effective. I cannot anticipate, in fact refuse to anticipate, what will happen at CCNY; I only know that the gauges on the boilers indicate heat.

What is at the root of the dissatisfaction? Probably the variety of purposes teachers, students, administrators feel a university has. Rather than run through a host of definitions for the Idea of the American University from the patently utilitarian (get your working papers, train automatons for industry, process robots for professions) to the elitist intellectual (what a cultivated young person must know, knowledge for its own sake, the delight in the life of the mind and to hell with real life), let's just agree from the jump that whatever its motives, ideals, dreams, purposes, what the college does at best is to critically re-appraise and renew the cultural heritage, and what the college does at its worst is to merely study and perpetuate the idea of our cultural heritage—the idea, not what it is necessarily, but what we have traditionally believed it to be.

Two problems right there: number one, the culture examined is always and only the mainstream culture; number two, there is a huge gap between the idea of that culture and the actual culture. The mainstream American culture is riddled with too much duplicity (land of the free and home of the brave on the one hand—discrimination, injustice, lynchings on the other), too much illusion (the multiracial melting pot myth of the one hand—conflicting and often antagonistic racial, national, ethnic clusters on the other),

too much political evasiveness to be merely studied. It is no longer possible for an instructor to merely ask the student to study names, dates, events, theories, laws without addressing himself to the contradictions, distortions, inconsistencies, and lies for any number of reasons which should be evident to anyone who's been awake since World War II, the main one being—people just ain't gonna go for it no more. The students at this college have already indicated that they are weary of being lied to, tired of playing games, damned if they'll be indoctrinated, programmed, ripped off any longer.

Competitive Ideology

It doesn't take a great deal of intelligence or a host of analytical skills or any brand of expertise to see what is wrong with the City College curriculum. What is wrong with it is exactly what is wrong with other college curricula and what many student unions across the nation are attempting to cope with by setting up Experimental Colleges, Black Studies Centers or some other counter school that will offer the students a competitive ideology.

A brief glance at the bulletin will reveal that the English Department is still dipping out of the old Anglo-Saxon bag, the snobbism and racism of which its roots in the Jamestown Settlement and was nourished from generation to generation by Anglophiles like T.S. Eliot, for example, who were committed to the belief that the Anglo-Saxon tradition was superior to all and that its purity and sanctity needed to be protected by the most sturdy of America's cultural-protectoral institutions—its universities. The infusion of one or two Black literature courses in their curricula does nothing at all to the deeply entrenched notion that Anglo-Saxon literature is The Literature—especially if those courses are taught by people like Ted Gross who handles the Negro Poetry courses on occasion and who will always be remembered for this remark he made in answer

to a question on why Richard Wright wasn't included in his great American authors course: "Well it's not as if Wright were a major writer." (You might take a look at the 1934 speeches Eliot gave at the University of Virginia to put this remark in proper perspective.)

Any student who has taken Art I, can tell you what is wrong with that "appreciation" course pretends to offer a survey of traditions that influenced Western culture. What are you being asked to appreciate and, based on emissions, what are you being told obliquely is not worth appreciating? A student in Music 5 (an alternative to Music I) asked his instructor why the African and Afro-American traditions were not taught since they obviously influenced American music and so much of modern music throughout the world? He was told, "We only consider serious music in this course." I sometimes wonder, though we needn't wonder too much, why music instructors never relax their stranglehold on the Baroque and Romantic and Classic periods long enough to take a look at American music. Obviously, it is too tainted.

You will note too if you examine American literature anthologies that there is a drafty gap in the chronicle occurring around the Civil War period, Reconstruction, Abolition. We know why. Any student who has taken the History I course, or at least had a gander at the text knows that the title World History has got to be changed to White Western History and that another course which will offer an ideology other than the White Western one be offered.

Where do we go from here? What happens to the student who is not satisfied with a surface discussion of democracy, socialism, et al, in a Political Science course but wants to examine the theories in vivo as it were—to the student who is all too aware that the "laws" learned in an Economics course do not operate in practice for they do not take into account greed, exploitation, racism, politicking, monolithic corporations, powerful families, or individual industrial

thugs—to the student who wonders if the "free market" and "free enterprise" are not some easy rationale for actual inequalities in the real world—to the student who spends three weeks learning about the electoral college in some "objective" way and finally learns in 1968 that the quickest way to reach it would be to start with the observation that the electoral college is a machine to keep the power out of the hands of the people?

In short, what happens to the student who cannot or will not operate in the schizophrenic way a "good" student has been trained to, with real life on one hand and academic life on the other? Some leave. And in fact, a great many of our students have thrown up their hands. Some become sleepwalkers. Shorting out is one thing we have been traditionally conditioned to do. Some can juggle that schizy business and retain some semblance of honesty and sanity, but at great costs. Some blow up and others hope for and work for a viable alternative to the madness within these walls. It is to these latter groups that I address myself and am optimistic about doing so, for they are in large numbers, and beginning to get organized, and are currently infecting others with their health.

The drift toward mass education was just that—a drifting. It grew out of some sloppily defined egoistic devotion to the myth of democracy. It was not a planned experiment, nothing programmatic about it at all; consequently, the move toward mass education was accompanied by many unexpected and unprecedented problems. No one knew when, how, why, or in what way the universities would have to shift their focus to accommodate a mass studentry, how the traditional approaches and traditional material would prove invalid once the new students came in, or how the traditional premises might be challenged when the doors opened and in flocked people who were not part of the aristocratic classes and could not afford to regard the classics, logarithms, the minuet as a time education.

The immigrants, the workers, the CI's came in with a wide range of skills, needs, ambitions, demands. And, judging by the state of health of the existing curriculum, they played havoc with the traditional education, but not enough for our purposes. Some cloistered academician in the past could very nicely teach Latin; tradition would carry him. But later, with the influx of non-upper-class, non-Anglo stock students, that professor would probably spend the majority of his energies convincing one student that Latin would be useful to his scientific pursuits; another that Latin would aid in the study of Romance languages; another that Latin could be useful in English vocabulary; and still others that the study of Latin, the study of anything, was valued to the enjoyment of the life of the mind. In short, he would have to package and market his project. With the influx of post-World War II people, students who had been in the habit of reading newspapers, of being in touch with the world through TV, who had had fathers in the labor movement, the civil liberties and civil rights struggles, who themselves had participated in historic events, further breaks in the tradition occurred. Enter the hippie, the yippie, the radical, the militant, the underclass, the overlooked, and further fissures in the surface appear. And I should think at this late date that it should be clear to all of us here, as it is certainly clear to our brothers and sisters at San Francisco State, at UCLA, and elsewhere, that fissures or breaks are not enough. To obtain a relevant, real education, we shall have to either topple the university or set up our own.

A Center for Black and Hispanic Studies

Offering each other a good education is a gargantuan task. There are not enough good texts available. Much of our tradition has lain dormant because our books of the past are out of print (keep in mind that unless the colleges use a text, that text rapidly goes out of print). We have never had a network of communication that would enable

us to keep track of or even be enough aware of our own specialists. Funds are not easily gotten for projects such as the one we have been proposing these last few months. We are not even sufficiently in touch with those centers which our brothers and sisters on other campuses have established to be able to avoid their pitfalls. We will be slowed down by charges of "segregationists" and by the usual red tape nightmares that are peculiar to large bureaus. Few of us have been willing to do our homework, really map out the areas that need to be covered and consider priorities, which course to offer first.

What remains is work from you, students. It will do none of us any good if the Center is run by faculty, if curriculum is designed wholly by faculty, if staff is hired merely by faculty. Students need to begin immediately to rethink all that they have been saying these past few years about a Black University.

If we all agree that the Center will be an organic part of the college, and that its courses will be accredited and funded by the College, but that the Center will be controlled by Black and Latin students and faculty who will have the power to hire using their own standards, and to design courses considering their own needs—then we will be ready to ask the Chancellor of the City University to shift monies to our Center and that an all-day conference be set up to which department heads and curriculum people come to hear what we, students and faculty, have decided. In order of importance, the Center would be a course-offering agency, a research agency, a buttress, a skills bank, a conference center.

A Buttress

Many of our students say that they cannot always voice their objections to a given course but simply feel that something is not quite right. Many of our students have postponed History I, for example, until they have filled in the gaps in their knowledge of their own history. The Center could provide the student at various stages

of his college career with courses, workshops, seminars, or one-to-one relationships to help him anticipate the omissions or biases in any given course so that the student can with confidence move into these courses and get something valuable out of them. He would then be able to articulate those suggestions from the gut that something very bad is going down, could offer counter theories, and suggest additions to the book-lists.

I've been told that the reason our students do not do well in many courses is that they have deficient skills or flabby motivation. I find that analysis too simplistic. The designers of the SEEK program were too simplistic too, focusing on the weaknesses as problematic, but never realizing that our students' strengths are problems too—honesty being a strength, the desire for a real education being a strength, the knowledge that there are gauges other than the mainstream ones by which to measure one's sense of worth being a strength, the awareness that you are being taken off in those courses being a strength—they are problems because they interfere with the smooth transition from Pre-Bac status to matriculated status.

It would be necessary then, that older students and teachers know a great deal about texts, the instructors, and the syllabi of the required courses and be ready to teach the younger student. So that a student should be able to, for example, get something worthwhile out of History I, either a third year student would design a course for him, or the Center would simply provide an alternative course.

I think, too, that a knowledge of and an appreciation of one's roots, frees the student to then appreciate whatever else is available. Are there not huge numbers of students who reject Shakespeare, Joyce, James, outright—in fact, get quite nasty in class—simply because they can't afford to like Shakespeare, Joyce, James; cannot afford to respect, appreciate anything white or western; feel threatened, absorbed, gobbled up? We get turned around like that sometimes. "Root Appreciation" courses, it seems to me are the answer. Is it not

true that the state when the African nations began to borrow, adopt, adapt European politics, economics, etc.—that stage was precluded by a period of intense cultural revival, a re-embracing of Africanness?

A Research Agency

It's pretty clear that the elementary, secondary, and senior schools that have begun to include Black culture into the regular curriculum are at a loss for guidelines on the use of whatever material they have on hand. In addition to continuing the much neglected work of compiling comprehensive bibliographies, the Center must also begin to get some of our books back into print by recommending that colleges include them on their booklists, and the Center must take on the responsibility of designing material for the teachers in the grammar schools, high schools and colleges. And too, the Center should provide guidelines as to how the material can be best handled.

The Center, once it has staffed itself with specialists, and has undertaken a thorough going appraisal of courses offered by the college or proposed by curriculum committees, would recommend texts, tapes, movies, students, instructors, other specialists that could guarantee that the course would not perpetuate the madness we are now objecting to and attempting to extricate ourselves from.

Skills Bank

Assuming we all agree that the credentials mania on the part of the universities and the elitist disease in our own society have killed off or at least excluded many of our experts, the Center could perhaps move us away from the sterile tradition of hiring in terms of paper feats. The Center would tap the resources in our community and use as instructors those grandmothers, those on the corner hardheads, those students, those instructors, whoever happens to have the knowledge and expertise we desire, regardless of the number of or absence of degrees, publications, titles, honors.

We have already in our student body and on our staff at the College and in SEEK people, who know how to teach instruments, dance, lay out magazines, operate radio stations or restaurants, dismantle cars, take over TV stations, read newspapers for slant, handle landlords and cops, organize committees, set up conferences. The Center could begin then, to set up a network of communications so that one person desiring to set up a course in Caribbean cookery, let's say, could be put in touch with chefs, caterers, linguists, anthropologists, etc.

Course Offering Agency

It is as a course-offering agency that the Center would lead ultimately to the Black University. Let me say from the get-to that the courses that appear on this page are not courses that necessarily will be or should be offered. They are, simply, what I am thinking of at the moment. The job of setting up a curriculum, of establishing priorities, of putting into operation what is necessary for our students in general or for the student who wishes in particular to major in a black area—that job has got to be done cooperatively, with the major work on your shoulders, the thrust and demand coming from you. All that any of us who are in the process of thinking, writing, designing, can offer is what we see at the moment to be important. I only wish that we all realize that the most important and immediate business at hand on this campus is the establishment of the Center for Black and Hispanic Studies.

Work To Be Done Immediately

In addition to those tasks mentioned above, those of you who are convinced that the Center is important, that we move toward it in an organized, cold-blooded, clear headed, uncompromising fashion, should now begin to plot out the following:

- What is wrong specifically with the required courses? with the texts used? How could that course be corrected? What would a counter course look like?
- How many students on campus with a desire for this Center are still not in touch with the Onyx Society's Education Committee, the DuBois Club's Education Committee, the SEEK faculty and staff and student group that have been meeting occasionally to discuss this center? Organize them and get to work.
- A CCNY Black Student and Latin Student Union must be formed and must merge with the citywide Black Student Union.
- To prevent thorough dissipation of energies from spreading yourself too thin—turn whatever club, organization, committee, workshop, extra-curricular activity you belong to into a Black and Latin Studies Center group. Start where you are, with whomever you're with at present.

Some Possible Courses...

American Justice and the Afro-American

A cold hard look at how the American judicial system has aided in the enslavement of our people. Survey course should definitely move at least to the current relationship between the courts and Black Liberation groups. Instructors should include Earl Anthony, whose text on the Panthers should appear next Fall; Conrad Lynn, a lawyer who has been active in the Movement; Len Holt, also; perhaps lawyers from the Vera Foundation and from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund; some militants who have been at the receiving end of American 'justice.' Texts might include Herbert Aptheker and C. L. R. James and Huey Newton papers.

Negritude

An examination of the philosophy, the architects (Senghor, Diop, Césaire) the disseminators (Satre, Toure), Afro-Americans (Hughes, etc.), critics (Baldwin), other practitioners (Caribbean, South America), the movement and its current impact on the current renaissance all over the world where Black people reside. Instructors should include Addison Gayle and Dr. Wilfred Cartey.

Nutrition

An historical account of how the African staples introduced in slave areas (U.S., South America, Caribbean, etc.), helped stabilize the economy and the diet of those areas. An examination of soul food of Black and Latin people from a nutritional, geographical, historical cultural point of view. A look at the Zen regime. Fieldwork in restaurants around the city and in other areas. Instructors should definitely include Verta Smart Grosvenor (author of "Cooking by Vibrations or the Travels of a Geechee Girl"), some cooks from soul restaurants, some grandmothers, some dieticians from southern and urban hospitals.

Trends in Western Thought

A three-pronged investigation of existentialism which focuses on man's reliance on his self, naturalism, which stress man's dependency on the forces within his environment, and rationalism which decreed that man needs no other equipment than a firm resolution and faith in the rational faculties. The tradition of Western arrogance which needs a thorough examination, I should think, could best be understood I think by handling the three together and tracing the roots of the Great Conceit from Aristotle's "Ethics" up through Descartes, Pascal, Comte, Bacon, etc., for the development of reliance on scientific knowledge, which depends on a vision of the world from which

accident, chance, magic, God, evil, error, love, weakness, dependency, was excluded. Man—equipped with the resolution that human reason guaranteed all-proceeded to operate or at least taught others to operate as though they were scientists who can control their world under good lab conditions—isolating, insulating, manipulation—and demonstrate damn near everything by reason. Of course anything outside this 'lab' was superstition, magic, barbarism, uncivilized. This trend in Western philosophy seems to be symptomatic of the mentality that produced great rationales for racist convictions and imperialist adventures.

Psychology and Blacks

How much paranoia is health and sanity for Black people might be a way to start. Texts might include the recent "Black Rage" and the classic "Mark of Oppression." Course should examine the traditional classifications and check their (ir)relevance to us. Instructors should include Betty Rawls.

Eastern Ethics Through Literature

An examination of early Jewish, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindu, Chinese, and Japanese writing in an attempt to other pre-Western traditions that receive not nearly enough focus. Texts might include "Arabian Nights" and the early Persian collection from which many of the tales came, Book of Kings; Old Testament including the "Apocrypha" which presents the legends, laws, history, customs, prophecies which are explained in the Talmud—one of the Black rabbis from the New York area would be excellent here; the Koran, the doctrine of Mohammedanism; Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia" about the life and teachings of Buddha; the Sanskrit "Rig Veda" and Lafacadio Hearn's "Japanese Lyrics."

Revolution

Probably a three semester course or a core for a B.R.A. degree. A comparative study of revolutions and colonial revolutions in historical texts and other literature. Texts might include works of the guerilla historians—Bernard Fall, Che Guevara, Regis DeBray; literary texts might include the empire novels of Conrad, Dostoevsky, Kipling, Cray, Paton, Gide, Celine; works of Achebe, Abrams, etc., Vietnamese Journal (poems and love letters).

Root Courses

A painless, effective, thoroughgoing way to move into our roots and hook up with Blacks in areas other than North America is through a root course which would be part workshop or studio dance, part lecture, part lecture-demonstration. For example—take one gesture that is often seen in Nigerian Haitian, Brazilian dance—the locked leg and the body pivoting around it; in workshop, the dance instructor would discuss the historical significance of the gestures being learned; the lecture course would provide the background missing in the lecture demonstration course. This course would examine the religious cults and sects of old and new Africa, the Caribbean, the south U.S., South America, etc. Instructors should include: Francee Covington, Sharon Dunn, (students); Sylvia Fort, Geoffrey Holder, Talley Beatty (dancers with anthro training); Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Instructors from the 125th Street Cultural Center, and Gus Dinizulu.