

HISTORY OF AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES DEPARTMENT BASED ON
INTERVIEW WITH DR. HERMAN H. HUDSON 7/88

WHAT LED TO THE CREATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AFRO AMERICAN STUDIES?

In 1968, in fact even one year earlier than that, there developed a student group on campus starting with a group of bachelors students who were meeting and talking about conditions on this campus. Then in '68, some demonstrations occurred. There was a march on the president's lawn, and demands presented the president for a change. As you may know, that was a period when students all over the country issued their non-negotiable demands to administrators about various changes that they wanted to see occur on college campuses. This campus was no different in that there was a black activist group.

By the way, there were two people who deserve particular mention in this early phase. They are Robert Johnson, who some think of as the intellectual of the student movement at that time and certainly he was the one who did the writing and drafting of documents and so on. And the other person who was sort of like the general, the main orchestrator of movements and the one who had the appeal to student masses was a fellow named Clarence R--- Turner. Clarence Turner is now affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh in the Afro American Studies department, teaching. I'm not quite sure what he teaches, he does not, I don't believe,

have a doctorate. Robert Johnson, after many, many jobs, including working with the Black Scholar, is now a resident in Lafayette at Purdue University working out of the city housing office. But anyway, these two students during '67 and '68, were some of the principal leaders of the student movement.

And without getting too bogged down in details, there were a number of things that were happening in the spring semester of '68 and in the fall of '68. One of the things in the fall of '68 was the football boycott or strike on the part of black football players against the then football coach, Don Pont. The result of that strike and the grievances they presented to Pont was that he fired all of them off the team and would not consider taking any of them back. So those 11 guys were out.

Another sort of major and sort of dramatic event that occurred during the Christmas vacation of 68-68 was this: There was a place over on Indiana and Kirkwood, a kind of store run by black students, to sell black books, black artifacts, and cultural memorabilia of the black movement-----Africa and so on. The students had an interesting name for that. It was called Black Market. During the Christmas vacation the Black Market was burned to the ground. Of course nobody knew who did it and to this day it's never been known who did it. Nobody was ever prosecuted, of course. It is believed that it was white reactionaries, perhaps even Klannish persons who did it.

There was another episode, an incident of a black girl who was involved in selling encyclopedias or something from door-to-door in Martinsville. She disappeared and died and that was another factor in this ----background so there was a lot of national visibility to the whole question of the black concerns... and local visibility too, as these episodes occurred. Of course, in the spring of '68, April 4, when MLK was assassinated, so that the whole time, a macrocosm of the country and on the microcosm of the campus, there was much agitation about the black concerns.

The students presented to the faculty council January 17, '68, their proposals. Remember that some demands had been presented to the president the year before but this one was formalized and written up in a 10-15 page document and presented to the faculty council for consideration. That document is known as Faculty Council Circular #55, which I would recommend that you read. There, set forth in a more narrative and reasoned form, are the demands the students were making. The university responded by saying yes to some of the things and no to some of the things...but, coming out of the early spring of '68, there was a commitment on the part of the university to do something by way of a greater emphasis on minority concerns.

One of the things that started down one track was the Groups

4

Program. In the summer of '68 they had the pilot project for that, which was a group of 42 students, largely from the Gary area, who came down on that bridge summer program. In '69 they really got the program started and each year thereafter, the Groups Program has continued and each summer the cohort is identified by that year in which they came...so now we're in Group '88.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE FOR THEM TO CONSIDER THE DOCUMENT AND MAKE IT ACCEPTABLE?

They didn't consider it too long. It was during that same spring. As a matter of fact, immediately, the day that it was presented, there was an endorsement by the AAUP which was helpful and unusual. But the problem that flowed from that period was that even after the university had adopted a plan (and this plan called for the appointment of a major administrator) the students asked for a vice-president of Afro American Affairs, the faculty council countered by saying they'd have a vice-chancellor for Afro-American Affairs. They called for the establishment of an institute for Afro American Studies and various other things which are all there and many of the things that we now have in a slightly different form were spelled out in that document.

BUT THERE WERE NO PROBLEMS PRESENTED BY THE ADMINISTRATION?

They accepted it with modification. The problem was not so much that, but the problem of implementation. So, that this all happened in the spring of '68 and it was hoped that soon after the university had formally accepted the plan, that they would appoint somebody as vice-chancellor for Afro American Affairs, a modified title that we had agreed upon. And they got all these programs started. They did not appoint anybody in the spring of '68 nor in the summer of '68 nor in the fall of '68 and not in the spring of '69 until fairly late in the spring, I can't recall exact dates...somewhere around March.

At last, after having a few people out for interviews, and a few people locally were interviewed and everybody was rejected and this and that. Finally they appointed a man by the name of Orlando Taylor who was a faculty member here at that time. His name had sort of been nominated to the Board of Trustees and the Board of Trustees had not met to confirm his name so that there was kind of a time lag between the time of a person's (being) named to occupy a position and the fact of occupying that position occurring which might have been 2 or 3 weeks.

During that 2 or 3 weeks lapse, another big demonstration occurred where students, some of the same students who had been

active all along, locked up administrators who were having a meeting in the faculty council. (This is) a famous event in the history known as the Ballantine Lock-in. They took over the faculty council room and locked these administrators in there...and they were in there too...and they were pressing their demands again and even the things that had been agreed upon and nothing was really happening and they were feeling that things were being subverted so they were having this confrontation. In that meeting where the students and these administrators were, was also Orlando Taylor who was actually there as a member of the faculty council, on the administrative side. Remember now, that he had not been confirmed in that position by the Board of Trustees so he was not really vice chancellor of Afro American Affairs. He then, during that lock-in, the vice-president told Orlando, almost demanded that Orlando tell those students to go away and release everybody and as if he were the dean of Afro-American Affairs, which he was not the vice-chancellor at that time and he did not do that. He felt that the students had some legitimate things to say that really ought to be listened to and furthermore that he had no authority, he was not the vice-chancellor of Afro American Affairs at that time and so he did not intercede in that dispute in the fashion that the administration thought he should have. In fact, they believed that he was in cahoots with the students...in some sense he may have been (laughter). When that lock-in ended later, they fired him. They did not confirm him as vice-chancellor of the Afro

American Affairs. Not only did they not confirm him in that position but they took him to court and all those students to court. It was a local trial here in Bloomington. As many students as they could identify plus Orlando Taylor. They were all ultimately released. It just caused a lot of trouble. And Orlando left the university at the end of that spring semester.

So there again, nothing was happening and it was not until the following year, this march of 1970, after much frustration on the part of all those who believed in this document and the action of the faculty council a couple years earlier, what's happening here.. anyway, at that time my name was put forward and indeed I was appointed the first vice-chancellor for Afro-American in March, 1970.

The primary mandate was to get all of these projects going as speedily as possible. In the case of the academic unit to have a program in place by September of that same year. If you can imagine, since there was no curriculum, there was no faculty, not that Afro American Studies did not exist except as a concept somewhere, and all of that to get started by September was difficult. Especially given the fact that by March and April, faculty have already made commitments to wherever they are and you can't recruit anybody successfully that late in the spring. But nonetheless, we opened business in the fall with a skeletal

faculty, a skeletal curriculum and since then it has grown to be what it is now.

WHO WERE THE ORIGINAL FACULTY MEMBERS?

Myself, Phyllis Klotman, Joseph Russell, and a number of associate instructors, one of whom might have been Bill Wiggins. The next year Portia Maultsby, still as a graduate student, became a part of the group. And there are charts which chart the development of black faculty from the beginning until now.

DID THESE ORIGINAL FACULTY MEMBERS DESIGN AND DEVELOP COURSES?

Yes, the idea was to have students take four courses, all at the same time. In one year they would have a saturation of Afro-American studies with four basic courses that would run a year long. They were Afro-American history, which came to be taught by William Harris. Bill Harris was not in the Afro American Studies department, he was in the History department. He later became associate dean of the graduate school here, subsequently the president of Payne College and currently is the president of Texas Southern. So he was teaching Black History. Another course taught was African and Afro-American arts. We had a graduate student who was doing that whose name was Walker. She too has gone on to many subsequent successes and is now associate curator of a new museum of African/Afro-American art in

Washington, DC. A third course was Afro-American literature which Phyllis Klotman was teaching. In the beginning, David Baker, we just borrowed courses or cross-listed courses that he taught, and then later on when Portia came on board she began to develop the Afro-American music courses. The beginning was piece-meal, partly with the little faculty that we had, partly by a cross-listing from other departments and partly by utilizing black faculty from other areas or the courses that they taught as part of the curriculum, David Baker being a case in point. The English Department, however, had been teaching Black Literature but when we started we got them to get out of that business and to release that ----- of academic instruction to us. Now, this all was the fall of 1970.

During that same time, fall and early spring, I was moving to shift the administrative focus of what we were doing from sort of a piece meal program to a program that could offer an undergraduate major and to acquire departmental status as any other department, even though it was small. Even though it was fragmented, and we did not know where it was going, the one thing that was very clear to me was that in order for it to survive, it had to be established on the same academic basis as every other department in the COAS. The department being the unit of university administration which gives the greatest stability and indeed power for an instructional program. Not only to have departmental status but to have the right and the responsibility

to hire your own faculty and if that department becomes the academic home of that faculty through which that faculty would receive salary increases, promotion and ultimately tenure on the faculty. So it was important to do that quickly. And as a matter of fact, on April 24, 1971, in the first year of operation, we got the Board of Trustees to authorize the awarding of an undergraduate major in Afro American Studies and hence, a departmental status for the department.

CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THE VARIATIONS OF THE AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES MAJOR?

Well, in the beginning, there was just a major in Afro-American Studies, the content of which changed as we went along and got more faculty and more variety of courses that we could offer. We no longer just talked about just those four courses as constituting the core of being an Afro major. But that just evolved as the faculty grew and as the number of options grew. That's internal to the department, as to how it arranged its nature. There is a major in Afro Studies, a double major between Afro Studies and any other department which requires the student to do everything that he's gonna do in Afro American Studies as a major but he also can fulfill the major requirements in English, or Sociology or whatever. That grew out partly because the university began to eliminate a minor. So when they stopped talking about a minor as a requirement in the COAS it was then

possible for students to arrange schedules such that they could do enough courses in 2 departments to have a double major. And the third kind of major is an interdepartmental major. Now all of these things were happening in the late 70's, early 80's. An interdepartmental major is the one that is probably going to have the greatest growth potential for the department here.

#1. It requires a relatively small number of courses to qualify for it;

#2. It has in the minds of people the same status as a major or a double major;

#3. It is reflected on the transcript of the student; and

#4. It enables the student to more carefully articulate the courses taken to fulfill the interdepartmental major and the primary major.

That is easy enough to see if you had somebody in English and Afro-American Studies, Afro-American Studies was the secondary or interdepartmental phase, take some literature courses and so forth to sort of blend with other literature courses you take in the English Department. But increasingly there are other departments in which it is profitable to have an Afro-American component in your training. Criminal Justice,

Theatre & Drama... Some of these departments by the way, cross-list courses in Afro-American Studies. Courses that students in those departments may take and in some cases it is indicated that those courses can't even count toward the major in that department. In the English department there are courses that we have that are ----- a major in English can count as courses toward their major in English and other fields as well. So that out of all of that interdepartmental activity develops this interdepartmental major which requires only 15 credit hours. All 15 of those hours have to be in courses above 300- so that you might have a student who's got a major in Afro-American Studies but he only took 15 hours, well, usually they will have taken a good many more because most students will take something at the 100- and 200-level anyway and to require that they have 15 credits above 300- is the way in which that interdepartmental major is defined by the curriculum committee of the COAS. You can get an interdepartmental major combining any 2 departments and by that means we get a lot of majors in Afro-American Studies.

DID AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES START AS A DEPARTMENT OR AS A PROGRAM?

It was amorphous in September, 1970, though it was always intended to be a strong academic unit. The formal action that made it so took place during that first year of operation in the spring semester when it became a department officially by action of the Board of Trustees.

DID IT BECOME A DEPARTMENT PRIMARILY SO THAT YOU COULD ATTRACT TENURED FACULTY?

That's not why I was pushing it...by the way I was not only vice-chancellor for Afro-American Affairs but I was also acting chairman of the department of Afro-American Studies from 1970 to 1972. The reason that I was pushing it was that I know that for this university or any university the soundest ground for any academic unit to stand on is that of departmental status. And the reason is that you control your faculty, you control your budget, the budget is derived from the general fund just like the English Department's budget or the History or any of those others.

Most of what was happening, by the way, as universities were doing something to respond to the demands of students around the country, was to establish programs. What a program meant was

that you look around in all the departments and you see some black courses and you list all these on paper and then you appoint an administrator to deal with the paper but you have not created an instructional unit. Those people belong to the English department, the Sociology department, the History department, the whatever department. What those programs then can do is simply advise students to take some combination of courses offered by somebody else over which they have no control and that's what a program is. They do not have a budget

things which make a department powerful and establish the basis for growth are on the one hand to have a curriculum that is expandable and modifiable to offer as a major to be able to recruit and hire your own faculty. These program concepts if the head of the English department says that Joe Blow cannot teach Black literature this year what can the Black Studies program say about that? They're not their faculty member, they're not paying the salary, that faculty member's gotta do what the English department chairman says do. But to hire your own faculty, third, for that faculty to have all of the aspects of university appointment functioning through your unit, that is, his salary, his salary increments, his promotion from one rank to another, and opportunity to move towards tenure...all of those things reside in the departmental structure. Finally that there be a budget for the department which is derived from the general fund budget of the university and not from special funds. Special

funds are created and can be eliminated whereas those things that are part of the fundamental budget of the university, as they call it the base budget of the university, have greater longevity.

HOW HAS THE PROGRAM CHANGED WITH RESPECT TO ITS GOALS AND COURSE OFFERINGS?

Onward and upward! From a point where you had four narrowly defined courses as constituted the major we have a multiplicity of courses.

WHAT ABOUT THE ENROLLMENT?

The enrollment has grown, too. In early years we had a fair number of black students who enrolled in those courses. In fact almost all the students were black. There were, even in the beginning though, some white students. Some problem with some black faculty members who didn't want white students to be enrolled in the Afro-American Studies courses as well as some black students who didn't want white students in there. We had one faculty member who was very abusive to white students if they enrolled in her class and treated them in an openly differential manner than she treated the black students in her class. One other thing that I think has made this department strong is the longevity of the faculty. I was able to recruit people and get

these people committed to this program to the extent that we have never lost a faculty member from 1970 until today. Once hired, we created conditions that made them want to stay except one, that was that one teacher who was that way toward white students. She left but that was because we, as a department voted for that person not to get tenure. That person is gone. But other than that one person, everyone else has stayed. I think they stayed because we were able to develop an ----- core, a commitment to the enterprise of Afro-American studies and to the students that we served such that people felt it was a good place to be. We've tried to have reasonably competitive salaries and the other things that make people stay but I don't think that is it. People have been offered higher salaries than we pay and yet they have remained. Other universities have tried to recruit people from here but I can say that from even people that we hired when they were AI's, graduate students, like Bill Wiggins, are still right here. Like Portia Maultsby who is still right here. Like Mellonee Burnim, who I first recruited as a graduate student and Fred McElroy who was a graduate student and is now an assistant professor and so on down the line. And even others who came in who did not go to school here, like John McCluskey who came out of Ohio. Winona Fletcher who had taught for 25 years, or some long time, at Kentucky State. I first recruited her in 1971 and she taught here from '71 to '73 and then she went back to Kentucky State, because her husband is there and she had some commitments there and taught there for several years and finally

resigned and came back '78 and has been here ever since. Phyllis Klotman who is white and there was a great deal of trouble about that. I hired Phyllis in 1970

Maury Evans wrote a book which was very powerful at the time: I Am A Black Woman. She's a poet, I hired her in 1971, so Phyllis was here first. But nonetheless there were many students, many blacks generally, who said why are you hiring that white lady? It turned out that she was a very well-qualified person in Black literature and accessible...somebody that we could get and over the 18 years that she's been here she's been one of the most productive faculty members that we have.

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE OBJECTIVES OF THE DEPARTMENT, IN TERMS OF SURVIVAL, DEVELOPMENT, ETC?

The department will survive. We were talking about enrollment a moment ago...3 or 4 years ago maximum enrollment in all of our courses in a given semester might have been around 600...in '85 or '86. In '87 it started to move. In '88, this past year, for example, we moved from the 600 enrollment of a few years ago to over a thousand students enrolled in all of our courses in a given semester. Not only that there's been a shift where there was a dependence. Throughout the 70's black students were 90% of the enrollment. In recent years, including last year, approximately 40% of the students in all of our courses were

white and 60% are black. We're expanding course offerings; we offer many more courses than before, we are appealing to a wider constituency. Not only black students but a substantial number of white students enroll in the courses. The faculty has grown from those three people in 1970 to something like 13 or more in 1988.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE FACT THAT ONLY 60% OF THE STUDENTS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THIS PROGRAM ARE BLACK?

The black student enrollment has been declining the last few years, it has gone down from a peak of about 1600 a decade ago to less than 1200 this past year. There are only about a thousand undergraduate students and so if we depended exclusively upon black students, whatever their interests are and their majors are, to populate our courses, we might be in a predicament. Moreover, the kind of information that we have is, particularly in terms of the sociological change of people's minds and attitudes and so forth, is as important for white students as it is for black students. If you only teach black students, you're preaching until they're convinced. They're already committed, they know, they just need some facts to bolster their convictions. But if you want to get at people whose attitudes and ideas need some modification, you gotta cut into the white market. No matter what we say, white people are in the majority and will be in the majority for at least the next 50 years.