

Memo to: Reinhard Mayer
Literature Division

From: Bill Dixon, Secretary
Black Music Division

Date: May 30, 1978

Dear Reinhard:

I want to thank you personally for your appearance at the reading of which your Division was a co-sponsor of Rashidah Ismaili the poet from Dahomey.

I would like, however, to make an obversation that I think has to be made at this particular time. This was an event that had something to do with Literature. True it was Black Literature, but none the less Literature, and I and the rest of my colleagues in the Black Music Division, as well as ~~other~~ interested students, noticed that ~~other~~ members of your Division were quite conspicuous by their absence. There was a time when I would have gone on the band wagon about the lack of seriousness that people in academia ascribe to the work and aspirations of ~~the~~ people of color ⁱⁿ ~~of~~ this country, but after having been at Bennington as long as I have been and having seen the divisions here not even make a peripheral attempt to establish any line with the work of Black people in their disciplines, (and this goes for the Art Division, Social Science Division, Science Division, Music Division, etc.,) I have come to understand that that is indeed the way it is here. I noticed a great many people including members of your Division, at the Hadley Fellow Lecture, but this is something different that I am talking about.

In the past, I have had Ted Joans, from Timbuctoo up here (poet and writer), Larry Neal (poet, writer and critic) who ~~was~~ teaching at Williams College, Clayton Riley, who ~~was~~ teaching at Sarah Lawrence (who is a poet, critic and playwright) to name but a few Black writers and in all of these circumstances, members of your Division have systematically remained aloof. *I remember once, when I first came to Bennington your Division had Ismael Reed, the novelist here but that was a long time ago.*

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We don't have to be reminded here, Affirmative Action Plan or not, that in the long run (when it comes to the hiring of Black Faculty) the Bennington College Faculty and Administration is not interested. I just wanted to bring this to your attention since you made a strong effort (after you were approached about the co-sponsorship) to be involved. And, I don't think that the idea of the writer, Jay Wright, coming to Bennington for the Summer Program, can obscure the fact that the Literature Division (a very large Division) has a rather poor record in terms of anything that is not in the tradition, ~~that~~ ^{that} they obviously think ~~that~~ is either superior or the only one that counts. This is a small community and people around here notice things.

Bill Dixon
Bill Dixon, Secretary
Black Music Division

BD/stj

cc: Alvin Feinman
Donald Brown
Joseph Murphy ✓