

GALLEY

In an effort to make education more relevant to us and to introduce black culture to interested white students, the black students at Bennington have presented two proposals to the administration and the faculty. The first calls for a seminar defining the black ethos in the arts which would invite speakers representing art, dance, music, theatre, and literature. The second stresses the need for a black professor in the social sciences who would teach a course in black history or anthropology.

The proposals should not be viewed solely from a racial viewpoint. Certainly they do reflect the fact that the experience of being black in America can not be formulated and taught by white professors. However, they are part of a larger change Bennington and other colleges are undergoing: a re-examination of the fundamental principles of education in an effort to make it relevant and a growing realization that people are more important than abstract ideas or material wealth. 200 miles from a large population center should not signify 200 miles from reality.

Though discussion began in early April, the administration and faculty have not taken any concrete action to date. To my knowledge, letters have not been sent out inviting any of the suggested people. For example, Herman Ferguson, a highly-respected community organizer and educator in New York, is interested in exploring with the administration the possibility of coming to Bennington as a part-time professor. However, he has not been contacted. The black students have done all they can at this stage. The school must now decide whether it will support and implement the proposals -- not with a verbal "I agree" but with action.

I fear two consequences if this stalling continues. First, over the summer the administration may set up a program as it sees fit without consulting the black students, though we have repeatedly stressed we want to be involved in all stages including the tedious paper work attached to such a program. Or, action on the proposals may be postponed indefinitely.

Lastly, I emphasize that I speak as an individual, not the black student, whatever that may be. I greatly resent, I am sure as do other black students here, the efforts of some administration and faculty members to select a "spokesman". There are only eleven black students at Bennington -- why should a "spokesman" be needed? Though working towards a similar goal, we are distinct individuals and I expect the courtesy to be treated as such.

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