

THE BLACK PERSPECTIVE

= As stated in the catalogue, Bennington College is dedicated "to a tradition of liberal and humane study" while simultaneously its curriculum is both "flexible enough to take account of the important differences between individuals and broad enough to promote the student's understanding of our culture."

The two statements are contradictory. The tradition of liberal and humane study is a traditional study. It is strongly situated in a particular past and is representative of a particular point of view. This is culture and it is significant, but its main defect is one of omission. There are other civilisations, there are other philosophies of civilisation, and other methods of perceiving tradition. Education must relate to the immediate present, it must be seen in a closer perspective. If the curriculum should speak to the average Bennington student in terms of the relevant, the meaningful, the applicable, and the contemporary, then it must essentially be these things to Black students for whom education is an urgency, a tool rather than an idea.

We are calling for an examination of the courses offered at Bennington, both in terms of scope and content. The absence of Black contributions to American and international culture is an omission that infers a judgement of its worth, and questions its very existence. The Black man is inextricably part of "our culture". His influence in historical contexts, and the economic and political situation resulting from the particular circumstance of his being and his subsequent removal from that being, are not accounted for in the available curriculum. The art forms that grew and are still evolving are only minimally suggested or completely ignored in such areas as Art, Music, Drama, and Literature. The contribution is not an afterthought or a phenomena that just grew out of nothing, but a process of complete disciplines that are systematically denied. An inclusion of Black Studies is imperative if courses are in any way to reflect the fullness and validity of their subjects.

We are calling for the incorporation of Black subject matter into already existing courses. Courses should be expanded in terms of content and the perspectives by which the material is studied must be opened.

We are calling for the creation of courses to fit within the structure of present divisions; the development of courses such as Urbanology, Black Protest Thought, Afro-American contributions to Music and Dance, etc.

We are calling for the creation of a Black Studies division, making it possible to major in Afro-American Studies, or some area within.

We are calling for the addition of one, preferably two, full-time Black faculty members who will coordinate the existing course in Black Culture and provide additional study in social and historical areas. They will also provide adequate counseling for Bennington's Black students.

The objectives of the Black students at Bennington do not imply acceptance of these conditions as priority items of a completed culture, but rather as important steps in expanding an awareness of the education here as a reflection of the past and present nonacademic world (and by making it a constructive instrument in the creation of a desirable future.) Unless the college lives up to its own ideals

by presenting a framework of education within the tradition of study, rather than perpetuating limited study in traditional areas, ~~then~~ this school cannot begin to claim a concern for individual growth; it cannot direct an understanding of 'our culture' or attain any degree of educational validity.

* * * * *

Please support implementation of these programs, and consider them as imperative student priorities.

signed,

Katharine Holabird
Rose Basile
Sharon Stockard
Annice Jacoby
Gaye Johnson
Carole Bolsey
Diana Robbins
Laurel Delp