

8 April 1980

TO: Joe Murphy

FROM: Bill Dixon

re: Paul Robeson House
(formerly Carriage Barn)

Joe:

In our talk yesterday you ~~xxxxxx~~ revealed ~~that~~ there is ~~some~~ consternation at upper echelons of the Board of Trustees with specific regards to:

- choice of*
- (a) the idea and implementation of the Black Music major;
 - (b) the re-naming/the initial impetus for our meeting/ of the Carriage Barn to Paul Robeson House;
 - (c) the name change ~~itself~~ (theoretically within the purview of Board responsibility) considered by you to be of a more serious nature because it has been named for Paul Robeson;
 - (d) because of specific talks you have had with the Chairman of the Board it is your feeling that at this ~~point~~ point I should not 'rock the boat' by now making what you you describe as a formal request directly to the Board for 'per-~~mission~~ mission' to name the already named Paul Robeson House because;
 - (i) the enrolment of students in the college taking courses in the Division has shrunk, which you feel would serve as ammunition for the Board members predisposed to think negatively of Black Music to both effect a negative stance (with ~~possible~~ possible sanctioning actions) to the Division's aspirations relating both to Robeson House and other more educationally visable (the Black Music Major) parameters;
 - (ii) it would ~~precipitate~~ *precipitate* a sort of 'enquiry' into the entire ~~matter of the Division itself~~ *matter of the Division itself* commencing with the idea of the aesthetic of Black Music being considered a 'legitimate' course of study eligible to confer a major;

(e) relating to the episode of 'someone' recalling the sign that indicated Robeson House's physical location on campus, it was not you that had maintenance (Bob Ayers) remove the sign one day after it had been made by his department and positioned in place, ~~and as president of the college~~ *and as president of the college*, you have absolutely no knowledge about it or who might have issued that order;

(f) when the division first secured the formerly *NAMED* Carriage Barn it was your feeling that it was to be used *as an* *solely* 'internal setting'; that ~~you~~ *you* felt that we were not at all concerned with sharing the newly acquired space/which *would* thus enhanced the viability and visability of the Division/ *even* with the outside world*;

even
*Are you aware or has anyone brought it to your attention or to the attention of the Trustees that the VAPA is the performing arts complex for all of the college's arts except the Black Music Division?

(g) that when we secured permission from the Dean of Faculty to rename the building/information that was presented to you at ~~that~~ time/ your ~~reason~~ reason for ~~my remaining silent~~ remaining silent and publicly acquiescing was predicated on the idea that ~~you~~ you thought ~~that~~ I was 'shrewed' and ~~that~~ 'grateful' enough to realize that I was 'fortunate' to be at last getting decent space for the teaching and performance requirements of the Division, something that had been systematically denied the Division ~~for years~~ since its inception;

the
decision- (6) relating to the subject of the Division being a division within the college you have never read the minutes of both FEPC and the subsequent faculty vote affirming FEPC's to grant Black Music Divisional status with the 'rights and privileges, etc.... and as a result, to some degree, during last term's 'debate' in FEPC regarding ~~the~~ the Division's offering a major, ~~that~~ you have been swayed by the 'recollections' of a faculty member, ~~who~~ then on FEPC who 'remembers' that I said (obviously in secret to him) that I never intended pursuing the idea of a major;

m/y
and finally (6) it is your feeling that in the fall of 1980, for whatever reason/you haven't totally enumerated/ ~~this~~ ~~your~~ feeling that the Black Music major, etc., is going to be a subject of some 'debate' ~~also~~ initiated by those trustees who are hostile to the ~~division~~ idea of black music being a serious and worthy study (okay, ~~though~~, as fun and games) in the college. And you have, peripherally broached to the SEPC Rep of the Division.

This

In essence this is what we seemed to be discussing yesterday. And although you may have found it difficult I am of the feeling that you made a strong effort to listen to what I have to both say, and feel about the totality of the situation. As talks go, it wasn't ~~a~~ bad ~~one~~ and I don't feel entirely without value. There was a considerable amount of information presented both overtly and subliminally. And at the risk of being redundant or repetitive (if you want since you speed read you can skip over this) I cannot say any more emphatically that, while you solely seem to view the situation from the standpoint of a certain kind of 'practicality' (relating to the primal stance viewed by ~~the~~ ~~survivalists~~ 'survivalists') I attach, equally, the idea of integrity. There is a right and a quite obvious wrong here and how does one go about trying to come to terms with it.

extension

almost noble
It is ~~reasonable~~ for you to/ if I am to believe that your feelings of caring about the division and what it has done for the college in terms of its being here as a viable part of the educational process and the ~~division~~ of the ~~college~~ ~~tenets~~ ~~of the~~ Bennington idea, being in the vanguard of the arts in this country both in terms of teaching, who teaches and the uniqueness of how it is taught/ seek to caution me about the ramifications of what ~~you~~ you label as a possible ~~that~~ 'confrontation' with the trustees should I seek to pursue straight answers from them regarding a situation now on this campus that is being perpetrated ON THE ENTIRE CAMPUS and everyone associated with the college ~~that~~, ~~in the~~ unanswered memo sent to the Dean of Faculty with copies circulated to both you and James Vanderpool (the Vice-President) of 27 February 1980; ~~that~~:

'...someone, somewhere is obviously quite disturbed about a building on Bannington College campus being named for Paul Robeson'.

Distortion!

Murphy/pagefour

1 But, if as you told me yesterday, your view is that you really don't care (and you are not alone in this idea) who comes here as long as they can pay, that, is indeed another conversation, and as a teacher I can't really help ~~with that~~ you with that because as far as I am concerned (and this is not to be lofty) my area of expertise is not money and what goes with that, pretty much as yours (at this time) not art and what goes into the rendering of that as a course of study to interested students. It is not to say that quite naturally and as an obligation I don't have both an interest and a responsibility to know and be aware of your principal area of interest but, if I am to be excluded from participation in certain of the important areas; if the president finds (perhaps for the ~~maintaining~~ maintaining of his own sanity) to manage/ ~~what~~ what you often ascribe of me to others/ an air of aloofness; if you find that it is also quite unnecessary to even read a rather important memo; what do you want from someone else?

"Whatever else happens here students must have confidence that the educational enterprise at Bennington will be preserved, and potential donors must be encouraged to believe that Bennington is a viable investment."

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE TO THE
BENNINGTON COMMUNITY

April 20, 1979 ~

I might also observe that faculty also must have some of that 'confidence'. Incidentally there are an awful lot of alumni out there who think that the Black Music Division, in terms of being a contributing force to Bennington's reputation in the arts (despite its obviously low kept profile), is more than just ~~significant~~ significant. And if it is true that Bennington as a college has '...pioneered in the development and advancement of the arts as an essential part of a truly liberal education.'* And is '...well known as champions of the avant-garde'* in terms of the arts, not only because of what is taught here but how and ~~who~~ who teaches it then perhaps that point has to be ~~brought~~ brought much more than it has been to the attention of those trustees that have obviously cloistered themselves in attics of days of yore.

Now mind you I'm not at all attempting to 'influence' you anymore than I will allow you to 'influence' in areas of how, as you put it 'one survives, because you are well aware that survival isn't everything; a part of survival ~~is~~ and an important part, is how one survives. I should also say that had I known in any detail that the attempt to honor a rather important black man, one that has certainly made strong contributions and, as a result, paid incredible dues would result in the present dialogue that you and I are engaging in, I would have immediately erased it from my mind.

*letter from the college admissions office to prospective performing artists authored by Jean S. Aldrich

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Based on our talk of yesterday the following ~~solutions~~ 'solutions' seemed to present themselves:

- (1) The entire matter can become a public issue;
- (2) The full matter can be presented to the full Board of Trustees;
- (3) The Black Music Division can return the building to the College; reverse the name to Carriage Barn and make no further use of it.

In my opinion (taken for what it is worth) neither you nor I nor anyone else in his right mind endorses the idea of (1).

You have advised me strongly against the idea of (2).

You also seem to feel that the inherent ramifications of (3) are fraught with the identical 'political' tone of (2).

The number ~~four~~ four that you suggested (stay with ~~the~~ building as it is presently ~~in~~ where it can ~~only~~ only be Robeson House on campus while officially (to the 'outside' world - where it is even more important, significant -) it is still the Carriage Barn, in my view, from the standpoint of integrity and decent 'survival', is not stomachable.

Where does that leave us?

AND

Bill
BILL DIXON

9 April 1980