

Introduction

URSULA MAHONEY, '54



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Demonstration at San Francisco State

THE BLACK STUDENT is the focal point of this issue of the *Alumni Quarterly*.

We settled on this theme for several reasons. One was a criticism voiced by some alumni that Hunter's academic standards were being lowered by the rush to recruit ghetto students and admit them even if their marks were not up to par. We felt that some more understanding on this point was needed.

At the opposite end of the scale there were those who felt Hunter wasn't doing enough to recruit black students. During last year's Centennial Fonthon, for example, one graduate refused to contribute to the fund, claiming that the college was failing completely to meet its responsibility in this area. We thought we should explain what the college was doing.

But more important than either of those considerations, we chose this theme because today black students — whether we agree with them or not,

whether we approve their methods or disapprove — are in fact leading a revolution on campuses throughout the country. And we believe that for alumni, for the college, for the students — both black and white, both present and to come — the current black student demands, the stirrings they are causing in our thinking, the changes they are effecting as to relevance in curriculum, as to rethinking standards for hiring faculty, rethinking what constitutes a good teacher, as to making efforts to recruit a broader range of students, mean changes which



could conceivably be the most important things that have ever happened to colleges in this country. The cry for relevance alone challenges the very concept of liberal arts education.

If the colleges can survive the confrontations—and we believe they can—and if they will withstand the upheaval of change—and we believe they will—then ultimately we all stand to gain. Like it or not, we are being shook up, being forced to reexamine our positions, being forced to see shortcomings in a white-oriented society, and, more important, we are being given a chance to change things and, hopefully, to improve the racial climate in the country.

What's more to the point, is that we have to try and understand what the black student revolution is all about. It seems clear that black students have gotten tired of waiting for equality, have gotten tired of having opportunities for equality handed down to them by white people. Blacks want their self-dignity, their own image, they want to make it their own way—and they want their rights now, not some vague time in the future when their children's children can enjoy them.

There can be little doubt that the civil rights struggle has moved from the riot-torn streets of the ghetto, or the blood-stained balcony of a motel in Memphis bearing a slain Martin Luther King, to the arena of education. And it is in the schools and on the campuses that blacks will find their equality. They will make themselves equal.

The struggle is not always easy to watch or to accept. Violence and confrontation, non-negotiable demands, suggestions of separatism—all this can be frightening and abrasive.

There is no doubt that campus riots and deadline demands do little to win friends for the cause among people used to democratic give and take. Many view the situation with mixed emotions, agreeing at heart with the aims of the students, but not with their methods. Some raise the objection (sometimes with disguised prejudice, sometimes in honesty) that the black demands promote one minority at the expense of all students' rights and that they violate traditional democratic process. That is true. In the same vein of thinking, it's true the colleges lower standards to recruit blacks. But the question then is, isn't this what has to be done now? Are protests the only way to force change? Apparently black students feel it is the only way, and the number of years they have waited in vain for change to come naturally seems to be a point in their favor.

We also stand to be misled by the press reports of the riots. Headlines and photos of shouting students show one side, and don't show how many black students are quite serious, purposeful students, intent on getting the best education they can. Too often we see only a one-sided view and perhaps miss the real point of it all. The question to ask is not why black students press non-negotiable demands, or why they demand black-run black studies, but rather why they feel that no one will listen unless they force their demands. Why do they feel there can be no real dialogue as society now exists?

Why do they feel they must wait no longer, but raise themselves to be equals and then come back and have dialogue? Their attitudes are what is really important, certainly more so

than their methods.

Why, for example, should there be such a struggle over a black studies major? Certainly a genuine field of academic inquiry exists there. True, there can be arguments about procedure and legitimate questions. Should it be a department program with full departmental status? Is it legal to staff it on a segregated basis? What benefit will it be for a black student to major in this field? How many students will actually sign up for the courses once the clamor calms down? Finally, is an ethnic-oriented education compatible with the free pursuit of knowledge and a free mind? Will the establishment of black studies move society further in the direction of the two Americas the Kerner report speaks about?

Certainly these are valid points to consider. Yet they should not be used to put down the programs. Unquestionably black studies programs will be experimental in nature for some years to come. Even black students wouldn't say they were the answer to the problem. But they are a beginning, and they are an important step in the direction of black self-discovery.

Hunter's department of Black and Puerto Rican Studies has come into being with less struggle than we have seen elsewhere. But that is not to say that tension does not exist, and that disagreement is not a part of the Hunter scene.

Last semester militant black students, joined by many white students, staged a sit-in at the Faculty Council for the Field Service course. This past February came the demands for a Black Studies department, and the rallies, and campus editorials. On Febru-

ary 21, TV cameras from a local station covered a demonstration of white students sitting-in on the first floor of the college in support of black demands, while black students took over the cafeteria for a teach-in commemorating the death of Malcolm X.

The time of change is with us, and it will remain now to see what happens as the college attempts to meet the demands presented by Toussaint students, and begins its new department.

It is important to remember, however, that though black goals have been characterized by turmoil, they have not been made as vague gestures of protest. Black students are not crying revolution for revolution's sake. They are not threatening to overturn the colleges. Rather they are asking for their self-respect, for educational opportunity, for jobs, and for their rightful place in society. Admittedly, their demands don't take account of the time required to do things committee-style. Nor do they always face the facts of budgetary life. But these students are in college now—not one year or even two years from now—and they want their education to give them the power to be equal, to make their own way instead of having it doled out by whites.

One black student at Hunter put it this way: "Look! I don't want to burn the place down. I don't want confrontation. I'm here to learn. But I want that learning to mean something to me. I want to build my own path. And I want the college to listen to me."

And so, in this issue, we attempted to listen—to him, and to others, on the Black Student on Campus.

—Ursula Mahoney, '54

Letters from Some Alumnae

AS AN ATTEMPT to discover what some of our alumni had felt about their undergraduate days at Hunter, we sent a questionnaire to a number of them asking whether or not they, as Negroes, had experienced any prejudice as students, what had been their problems as Negro students, and also asking their opinion of the demands of today's black students. Here are some of the replies we received:

From Ellen Holly, Class of '52

The following is an excerpt from a letter Hunter Alumna, actress Ellen Holly, Class of '52 wrote to *The New York Times* (Sunday, September 15, 1968), in which she eloquently discussed the position of the "able and gifted" Negro in the outside world.

"Does no one understand what freedom really means?

"In the name of black 'freedom,' a handful of black militants, enthusiastically aided and abetted by white 'liberal' writers, have moved in like the Gestapo and staked out a territory called Where It's At, Man that so narrowly limits blackness that it can fit on the head of a pin. The clever and the watchful, however, will see the same old ugly enslaving forces at work as American racial progress limits itself to the exchange of one stereotype for another. Uncle Tom is being replaced by the angry, young black-skinned male from the ghetto, and if—like me—you happen, instead, to be an angry, thirtyish, beige-skinned female from the suburbs, your life is judged as somehow unauthentic and unreal. The truth of the matter is that there is no one place where it's at.





Ellen Holly

There are 22 million different, highly individual Negroes in this country and, therefore, 22 million different places Where It's At, Man, and it is a cynical comment on the nature and quality of human life to assume that any single one is somehow more valid than the next."

After reading Miss Holly's letter, we asked her to comment on Hunter College.

"In answer to your letter, I would say that my years at Hunter were some of the least abrasive I have spent in the midst of a community in which whites were in the majority. I don't mean to suggest that the Negro students were totally integrated into the student body. A subtle sense of difference existed among blacks and whites alike, and the Negro girls tended to keep pretty much to themselves. This was most obvious during free periods spent in the cafeteria where, as a matter of emotional security, we tended to sit together rather than disperse into the community at large because of the occasional negative vibrations there.

"It was less a matter of avoiding white hostility — I don't think there was very much — as a matter of avoiding white ignorance about so much that is racial that would result in dumb remarks and inane conversation. I must say, however, that at no time did I feel, as I almost always do elsewhere, that my Negroness prevented me from

getting anywhere I wanted to get, or doing anything I wanted to do.

"When my interests narrowed to the theatre, Charles Elson, Charlotte Perry (two quite extraordinary people) and the rest of the speech and drama staff that was there at the time — also, the students — related to me entirely in terms of my own merits as an individual and a 'race' factor was totally non-existent in my relationship there. This was not done in any self-conscious liberal manner that would have been thoroughly obnoxious to me. Rather, I don't think it ever occurred to anyone to behave otherwise. As far as my experiences in that particular department are concerned, they were ideal. The only time in my life when I could say as much.

"You ask me about Negro-oriented courses Hunter is offering this semester. I could scarcely volunteer a judgment about them as I have no idea how well or badly these courses have been assembled, or what are the credentials and quality of the people who teach them — all of which is highly relevant.

"I think we are all agreed that black history has been either omitted or distorted in the American educational system and that some means must be found to remedy this. The question is how?

"It is my own belief that the entire system needs drastic revamping with the ultimate intention of illuminating the truth, rather than its present goal of reinforcing Anglo-Saxon myths. This would result in a totally different treatment of a vast amount of material, not

only pertaining to blacks in America and Africa, but to the Irish and Latin Americans whose oppression under white-oriented systems of oligarchy we surreptitiously condone, to list but a few topics that readily come to mind. It would involve not only history departments, but departments of literature, philosophy (where Oriental approaches to the puzzle of existence take a back seat to the Occidental approaches), indeed, every conceivable subject.

"I also believe that the system should be revamped to assist each individual in self-discovery and the realization of his unique potential rather than its present aim of filing off the rough edges so that the individual can dutifully slip, like a well-oiled component part, into a computerized society. As none of this is likely to happen, band-aid courses like Afro-American history are, I suppose, better than nothing."

From Evelyn Cherry Parker, Class of '56

"As a student at Hunter, the only instance of discrimination I ran into and perceived as such, came during my rushing of sororities. I learned later that while the local chapter of Delta Zeta girls liked me, their national instructed them to observe a 'No Negro' policy.

"I did notice that there were very few Negro students at Hunter and only



Vilma Evans



Evelyn Cherry Parker

one professor — Professor Diggs.

"I know of Hunter black alums who felt professors displayed prejudice towards them. I did not feel this way regarding my profs. I must say, though, that I was not as aware, alert or as politically sophisticated as today's black students, especially the militant ones.

"Being a Negro, I was conscious of my need to prepare for a job in a field where I could expect employment. I could not 'pursue knowledge for its own sake.' Consequently, I was an education minor, which made it impossible to take many other courses which would have interested me more.

"It is asinine to pretend that Negro students are just like the others, and have the same life chances. See any recent study comparing black incomes with white. Also see studies exploring the racist nature of United States society (the Kerner report for a start).

"I'm glad to hear of new Negro-oriented courses. Hope the college moves on to ever more truthful coverage of black (and African) history, for example, the history of what the mass of black people accomplished as opposed to citing outstanding personal achievements. Cease 'the first Negro to do this, and the first Negro to do that', when black history goes back thousands of years before Christ.

"I personally regret that my college education did not tell me MY history. That I am still seeking on my own.

"I could hope Hunter would make a

more than usual effort to salvage the many black and Puerto Rican intelligent youngsters whom the present New York City public education system utterly fails to educate. For decades, education was the one way out of despair for Negroes. Tragically, that last exit of hope now is all but shut for the poor and black."

From Vilma Evans, Class of January '50

"It has been close to 20 years since graduation and because of my unusual background, I do feel that my answers and outlook are somewhat different. I am American-born and my parents are naturalized citizens. We were reared in the West Indies, which has a completely different culture from that of the United States.

"There was definitely racial discrimination when I was at Hunter. It was manifested mainly in such things as houseplans, sororities, and certain clubs. You were never extended an invitation for membership, or overly encouraged to join these groups. Along the academic lines, there was little, if any. However, in preparing for careers, there was a tendency to guide you into only certain ones.

"I do not know if I can point out any particular problems except that because of your color, some teachers tended to expect only certain stereotyped behavior, academic accomplishments of you. It seemed you were not accepted as an individual.

"I do not feel that making much of Negro students as Negro students as it is done today can truly help the situation that exists. The establishment of the Negro-oriented courses is fine, but should have been included over 50 years ago. The lack of understanding of the culture of your fellowman is part of the existing problem. This statement holds true for all the multitudes of people in the world as well as in this country. The individual's image of himself is what is important.

"I strongly feel that many of the existing problems will eventually be solved or eased, but can only be done on a person to person basis. The upheavals, riots, destruction, separatism, legislation, etc. can in themselves be of no value if a person is not willing to accept his neighbor as an individual, and not as a member of a racial group. Americans should be Americans . . . Each person should strive for goals within himself and according to the opportunities available. He should then prepare himself for the future and take his rightful place in society, and blame no man for his own shortcomings. Individual achievement, I believe, is still the factor necessary to ease the current conflicts."

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE COLLEGE

Students Discuss Their Goals

"I fail to relate to the material being taught to me because I lack identity. I have no goal." — Bill Alford



James Ollie

"Our education at Hunter is a survival course on how to survive in a white society." — Ernestine Williams



Toussaint Members

"The only way to get the facts on black history is not to take the American History course where we spend five minutes on it. We need a whole, separate course." — James Ollie



THE SPEAKERS QUOTED, all black students at Hunter, were among a group of representatives from the Toussaint L'Ouverture Society, who met recently with two members of the Alumni Association, Betty Fox and Ursula Mahoney.

In a frank and long discussion the students expressed opinions, raised objections, and offered suggestions about their education at Hunter.

Basically their demands focused on more relevant courses; more black students, faculty and counselors; and more flexible channels for communication with the administration.

The discussion of a black-run black studies program was focused mostly on the idea of a search for self-image and the idea of building their own power base.

"White people want to help," one student pointed out, "but they don't really know the problems."

"Black students should have more awareness of themselves," James Ollie declared. "They have to realize who they are first before any meaningful dialogue takes place. If we find that realization, then we can operate from a position of strength. Then we come back as equals and have true dialogue. That's where a black-run black studies program comes in." Mr. Ollie felt it would teach blacks to learn to operate as equals. Now, he feels, they can't work together "even in this school" because "equality doesn't exist." When asked what courses would be relevant, Mr. Ollie replied, "The history of black thought, of black philosophy, the coming of black people from Africa."

The students felt that at present, in Hunter, blacks have not been presented fairly in course work, that there are

attitudes that come up in course work that should be corrected, or at least commented upon. Ernestine Williams complained that in an American history course, slavery was mentioned once. James Ollie mentioned the Blake poem (included elsewhere on this page). He also complained that in anthropology courses the charts showing the history of man show man starting as an ape in Africa; when he splits off to be represented as a recognizable human being, he has become a white Anglo-Saxon in Europe. Although he did not list this as a major criticism, he cited it simply as an example of why black students feel they're treated as second class citizens.

The students complained about the educational opportunities for blacks. "Functional illiterates are produced yearly out of public institutions," Bill Alford complained. He added that improving education is "one of the first steps in self-determination. The administration must realize this," he added. "The salvation of the black man in America depends largely on the education he receives. This is why Toussaint is pushing so hard to reform it."

The students not only stressed the importance of increased black enrollment, which is a "first step only," but also attempted to explain their desire for more black teachers and counselors. "Black students can relate to those people," Bill Alford declared. Though the point was raised that there is a shortage of qualified black teaching personnel, the students disagreed. They felt recruiting efforts were still lukewarm, and they also felt that perhaps standards of hiring would have to be changed: for example, hiring a gradu-

When we spoke to the Toussaint students, they complained of various things at Hunter that they felt reflected a note of racism. James Ollie, one of the students, mentioned a poem that had been read in his English class, without any comment or attempt to put it in a historical context. His feeling was not that this poem shouldn't have been read, but that some comment would have helped.

THE LITTLE BLACK BOY

by William Blake

My mother bore me in the southern wild,
And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
White as an angel is the English child,
But I am black, as if bereaved of light.

My mother taught me underneath a tree,
And sitting down before the heat of day,
She took me on her lap and kissed me,
And, pointing to the east, began to say:

"Look on the rising sun, — there God does live,
And gives His light, and gives His heat away;
And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive
Comfort in morning, joy in the noonday.

"And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love;
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

"For when our souls have learned the heat to bear,
The cloud will vanish; we shall hear His voice,
Saying: 'Come out from the grove, My love and care,
And round My golden tent like lambs rejoice.'"

Thus did my mother say, and kissed me;
And thus I say to little English boy,
When I from black and he from white cloud free,
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy,

I'll shade him from the heat, till he can bear
To lean in joy upon our Father's knee;
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him, and he will then love me.

ate student to teach black history. "He doesn't need a Ph.D. He needs to relate to his students," one student said. Bill Alford pointed out that one-third of the families in poverty areas are run by women. "The father is not there as a goal-setting image."

The demand for more black teachers and black counselors is part of that image-setting. The students feel such people would be more aware of the special black problems, and would be more sympathetic to their position. "Black counselors would push black students where their aptitudes lie," Mr. Alford claimed. "A black-directed institute would develop an awareness in the black student of his aptitude."

"It is not important if the white counselor is the best in the world," James Ollie added. "If the black student doesn't think the white counselor can help him, he won't go to the counselor."

"A black counselor is better able to relate to the problems of black students," Mr. Alford said. "We're concerned with awareness, attitudes and goals that black counselors could develop in black students."

"In other words," Miss Fox said, "what you're saying is that the black student doesn't have someone he can imitate. I can remember, when I was in school, seeing a teacher and thinking that some day I, too, could aspire to that job. But it's true, it was a white person in that job. And it's a white person who becomes the goal for a black student."

"Right!" exclaimed James Ollie. "All he has is a white image."

On the subject of increased black enrollment, the students felt that the



Toussaint members with James Ollie



number of black students in the City University should reflect the racial makeup of the city's high schools. They suggested that the SEEK program be expanded, and that new programs be adopted to increase the number of black students.

The students also criticized their relationships with white students and with the administration.

James Ollie complained about what he felt was the white students' lack of concern with the problems of black students. "They're not concerned about what happens in this city except to make their fast buck."

The Toussaint students were also

critical of the administration. They felt black students didn't really have a voice, that they got a runaround. "I lose respect for them because I feel they're lying to us," one student claimed. Bill Alford claimed that dialogue between black students and the administration is non-existent. He feels that, whenever he has approached administration and faculty committees, "they defend their institutions and their reasons for not granting what we request," and don't seriously consider what the students are asking for and their reasons for asking.

What does one do to improve communication? What about the lunch-

time meetings President Cross has to talk over problems with students? The students laughed.

"Give us student power," replied James. The only power we students have now is with the masses. If the student body at Hunter did decide to do something, these channels would change."

"Toussaint's whole struggle is one they have to lead," Bill Alford said. "The survival of the upcoming generations depends on it. We can't let the white administration take its time. We have to force confrontation or anything to get these things. The administration should take the lead. It hasn't."



At far left, Members of Toussaint L'Ouverture

Left, Stephen Schulberg of Student Coalition



BETTMANN ARCHIVE

Toussaint L'Ouverture. After contemporary print.

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

The Toussaint L'Ouverture Society on the Hunter campus was originally a historical and literary society. Over the years it became more social and eventually was inactive. Two years ago, the group was reformed, using the same name but reorganizing along different lines. Toussaint now views itself as a militant group, rather than as a social group.

The society was named after a Haitian slave who lived from 1744 to 1803 and is regarded as a symbol of the blacks' fight for liberty. A self-educated man, François Dominique Toussaint was freed shortly before the Haitian uprising of 1791. He joined the Negro Rebellion to liberate slaves and became its organizational genius. In a series of campaigns he became known as L'Ouverture. By 1801, he governed the island, reorganized the government and instituted public improvements. But as a threat to Napoleon he was eventually captured, and died in a French prison.

is acquiring books relevant to Afro-American Studies; and also to develop a special section in the Library where new books in this area can be readily available.

IV

Black Staff Personnel

Early last fall, every department in Hunter College was urged to make vigorous efforts to recruit faculty and staff from minority groups, especially black and Puerto Rican. The criterion for appointment is simple: can the person do the job required? There continues to be a disappointing shortage of persons interested in positions at Hunter. All of us welcome suggestions of potential appointees.

I acknowledge the particular desirability of having black counselors available for black students. The SEEK program at Hunter has already made a number of such appointments. Other programs and divisions have had some success, and all are trying. I think it is important to state explicitly my conviction (which I think is Hunter's conviction) that black counselors should not be limited to counseling black students, and that black students should not be required to see only black counselors; freedom of choice is the goal.

V

Administration

I intend to appoint an Assistant to the President for Special Educational Activities. His first task will be to give administrative initiative to the activities mentioned in this report. He will also be encouraged to propose and, where it is personally feasible for him, to carry out, other activities, like special orientation for black and/or Puerto Rican students. . . .

VI

A Challenge to Students and Faculty

Hunter must see to it that every student, whatever his background of achievement, secures the best education possible at Hunter. . . .

I propose the development of an unprecedented array of **voluntary** educational activities, ranging from say, an hour's tutorial on a specific skill, to a program lasting a semester or a year. I propose that a student, or a group of students, or a student and a faculty member, or a group of faculty members, develop services for those students who need and want more services than are provided for within our regular credit-grade-class system. I am convinced that everyone involved in such an enterprise—student-teachers and student-learners, faculty members as learners or teachers—would benefit from such an exfoliation of educational activity. . . .

Elsewhere in the college, the demand for a separate department met mixed reactions. Kathryn Hopwood, Dean of Students, said it seemed to her the students were asking for "a college within a college." She views a "separate department with its own set of faculty and counselors" as "segregated". "Twenty years from now," she said, "they will have the right to say that we sold them out."

In another statement, issued by Ruth Weintraub, Dean of the Division of Social Sciences, separatism was also decried. "I believe that separation and segregation are inimical to American life and are the roads to disaster for the black community," Dean Weintraub said.

"I recognize that, in the past, colleges have not given the black experience its due place in scholarly studies.

Other minority racial groups have also been overlooked. Happily, in the past few years this is being corrected at Hunter College." The Dean then cited the new black courses, additions to the library in the area of black literature and history, the efforts of departments to find qualified black professors. "It will do no one any good," she declared, "to recruit people who do not have the qualifications. We have made national searches to acquire such personnel. Where resources are scarce, the competition is high and we cannot always win out in the competition."

Citing Hunter's other moves in the direction of meeting minority needs, Dean Weintraub said, "We are in the forefront in the United States by being one of the first places to establish a Department of Urban Affairs, and our graduate students in Urban Planning are working both in the Lower East Side and in Harlem in order to make their education in planning a real one. In addition, we have just finished a conference on advocacy training, a program in which we are training black and Puerto Rican leaders so that they may participate more effectively in the planning process." She concluded by saying, "Hunter in its 99 years has never been racist."

The following week Toussaint students held a rally at 1 p.m. to explain their demands.

On February 21, white and black students staged various sit-ins — whites demonstrating in support of the blacks, blacks staging a sit-in in the cafeteria in honor of Malcolm X.

By the month's end, the faculty established the new department of Black and Puerto Rican Studies.