How Universities Ripp-Off Black Students

by Hallord H. Fairchild, Ph.D.

American universities rip off black students in several ways. Most importantly, they have locked their doors to persons of African descent throughout the entire history of American higher education.

In the 60's and 70's, Black students in American universities issued a number of demands, seeking to redress the historical inequities in American higher education. They demanded that Blacks be admitted into universities at a rate proportional to their population; that financial and academic assistance programs be established to insure their success; and that courses in Black studies be offered. As a result, universities cracked their doors, and our numbers increased—but still remain grossly disproportional to the size of the American Black population. For example, although Blacks make up over 20% of the L.A. population, less than 5% of UCLA undergrads are Black.

Once Black students are on the campuses, they are often "warehoused" through "benign neglect." The absence of a Black faculty, accompanied by the latent and manifest racism of many white faculty, has led to a drop-out rate of Black students that approaches and surpasses 50%.

Universities also rip-off Black students through "menticide": the killing of intellectual curiosity and the search for truth. Even worse, American universities generate and perpetuate lies and distortions concerning the Black experience in the United States through the denial of the contributions of Blacks to American science and technology. Therefore, the academic demands of Black students are legitimate. There is nothing inferior about Black Studies. Indeed, a close look at the American political economy reveals an ideological system that exists to support white supremacy.

The most visible rip-off of Black students, however, is an economic one. Black students figure prominently in American university life, clearly evident on the fields of university sporting events, especially in the big money sports. Consider the University of Michigan. The interesting thing here is that Anthony Carter, the star of the football team, has been instrumental in making Michigan's football team a success for the past several years.

The University of Michigan boasts the largest college stadium in the country, regularly packing in over 100,000 each home game. Now it doesn't take a mathematical genius to figure out that the Michigan football team is making over a million dollars per game (plus television royalties), largely on the abilities of Black stars like Anthony Carter. And what is true for Michigan, of course, is true for the majority of America's major universities.

The point here is that American universities profit tremendously from the talents of Black athletes. And what do they return to Black students? Mis-education and a few dollars in federally subsidized student loans. Black students are made to feel that they are taking the place (and money) of someone more qualified. But what Blacks need to realize is that as a group they contribute far dollars to American higher education than they can ever hope to recieve. The financial demands of Black students, therefore, are legitimate demands.

American universities have been around for a long time. For all that time, Blacks have supported them through the payment of taxes. And for most of that time universities have blatantly denied access to persons of African descent. So that while Blacks as a group have contributed millions of dollars to support universities and colleges, they have gotten virtually nothing positive in return. That's a rip-off.

It is important for Black students to recognize that this rip-off is taking place. Black students must recognize the fairly precarious situation they are in and the forces acting to encourage their flight from the university.

This recognition must be bolstered by realizing the need of a collective effort and responsibility as Black students. This means involvement in the BSA, as well as forming student groups in all academic disciplines.

Perhaps most importantly, Black students need to recognize their social responsibility to past present and future Black people. They must recognize their debt to those courageous brothers and sisters who sacrificed their wellbeing so that future Blacks could be educated at "prestigious" universities like UCLA. The debt is too great for Blacks to fail to work hard to be at the top of the class. Black students must pay their dues— as did the brothers and sisters who opened the doors for them in the first place.

Black students must unite and act now, but realize they won't be able to change this monster overnight. If we are to open the doors of universities to Black students, it must be done for future Black students.

It will be through collective action now, and through future Blacks, that the rip-off by American universities will be laid to rest.