

Western Washington State College  
Black Student Union  
1111 Indian Street  
May 14, 1968

President Charles J. Flora  
Western Washington State College  
Bellingham, Washington

Dear President Flora:

Western Washington State College has been, and is a racist institution. Its function has been and is to preserve and extend a racist status quo.

Through its administration, faculty, curriculum, and administration policies, the college has sent white and black students into society with the racist notion that white, middle-class, Western ideals and practices are superior.

The average white student leaves this college with the absurd notion that he is superior. The average black and non-white student leaves this college with an equally absurd notion that he is inferior.

The phenomenon in the last paragraph can be understood by taking a look at key aspects of Western.

First, the administration. Psychologists talk about the need for youth to have adult models. At this point, a black or non-white student has no model at a high administrative level to imitate and relate to. This is important because black and non-whites need models they can identify with. They need a black and/or non-white administrator who has had similar problems and conflicts.

A second point about the present administration must be made. When black and non-white youth come into contact with the administration officials, he is subtly told that he is inferior. He sees white people giving orders and running the school.

From this realization, come the mistaken idea that there are no black or non-white people who can run institutions, who can successfully carry out large assignments.

The overall effect of this idea is the stifling of initiative, the decrease and bringing to a halt of positive dreams and desires. The same effect comes from the black and non-white's student contact with faculty. A black and non-white student sitting under a 99% white faculty is subtly being that only white people can teach him the things he needs to know.

A third point also must be made. The faculty are products of a racist society. Faculty trained in the twenties and thirties came up through an educational system based on the assumption of black and non-white inferiority. Consciously and/or unconsciously the faculty transmits their racism to black, non-white and white students.

One way in which they transmit racism is their ignorance. A professor in Classics enthused over the wonders of Rome, in many cases is unaware of the great achievements of African Universities such as the University of Timbuktu. This university was a magnet for scholars and philosophers while Europeans were running around in caves.

A professor in Contemporary Literature praising the works of Hemmingway or Faulkner, would do well to consider the beauty and power of Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and brother LeRoi Jones.

Omissions, distortions, and out-right lies produce students that feel that all the great ideas came from whites, and came from the West. As was indicated earlier, the white student believes in the lie of his superiority, and the black in the lie of his inferiority.

A fourth aspect the Black Student Union feels strongly about is the College's admission policies. We've been told that Western does not "discriminate" and that they take all students who are qualified. We realize that standards are necessary if Western is to produce well-trained people, but we also realize that the present elementary and secondary educational system stifles the desire and creativity necessary for achievement.

The majority of black and non-white students who pass through the present educational system do not:

- 1) gain a knowledge of their past
- 2) get encouragement from the faculty and administration.

For example, a black and non-white student is taught only the achievements of white, he learns about Lincoln (a racist), George Washington (a slaveowner), etc.

When we see these things clearly, we realize that the educational system from kindergarten to graduate school must be changed.

The Black Student Union of Western feels that one good starting place for change is at the College level.

Although the administration, faculty, and admission policies have been racist in effect, the Black Student Union feels that Western should be given a chance to change to prove its "good intentions." As long as we feel the College is making an honest effort to change, the Black Student Union will cooperate and work closely with Western.

However, when Western begins to make phony excuses and resist needed changes, we will be forced to look at Western as an enemy to black and non-white people and act accordingly. In short, there will be political consequences for political mistakes.

With this last point in mind, the Black Student Union of Western submits the following demands:

- 1) All decisions, plans and programs affecting the lives of black students and non-white students, must be made in consultation with the Black Student Union. This demand reflects our feeling that whites for too long have controlled the lives of blacks and non-whites.

We reject this control, instead we will define what our best interests are, and act accordingly.

- 2) The Black Student Union should be given aid, financial resources and other necessary aids to recruit and tutor black and non-whites. Specifically, the Black Student Union wants to recruit 10% of the student body of Afro-Americans, American-Indian, and Mexican Americans. This should be done by September.

Quality education is best through an interaction of diverse groups, classes, and races. Out of the student population of Western there is a very minute amount of black and non-white students. This will be changed for the good of all students concerned.

The present admission policies are slanted toward white, middle-class Western ideals, and the Black Student Union feels that Western should take these other ideals into consideration in their admission procedures.

- 3) We demand that a Black Studies Planning Committee be set up under the direction and control of the Black Student Union. The function of this committee would be to develop a Black Studies Curriculum that objectively studies the culture and life-style of black and non-white Americans.

We make this demand because we feel that a white, middle-class education cannot and has not met the needs of black and non-white students.

At this point, an American Indian interested in studying the lives of great Indians like Sitting Bull and Crazy-Horse has to go outside the school structure to get an objective view. Afro-Americans, Members of the Black Student Union have had to go outside the school structure to learn about black heroes like Fredrick Douglas, W.E.B. DuBois, and Malcolm X.

One effect of going outside the normal educational channels at Western has been to place an extra strain on black students interested in learning more about their culture. We feel that it is up to Western to provide and re-examine the courses that meet the needs of black and non-white students.

- 4) We want to work closely with the administration and faculty to recruit black teachers and administrators. One positive effect from recruiting black teachers and administrators is that we will have models to imitate, and learn from.
- 5) We want black representatives on the music faculty. The Black man has made very significant contributions to music (i.e. jazz, and spirituals), yet there are no black teachers on the music faculty.

We want black teachers in the Physical Education Department. Black students play a large role in the athletic curriculum of the college.

- 6) We want a committee to investigate racism in public and private facilities especially in the area of housing, immediately. We want this committee to consist of faculty and students, black and non-black.

The six demands above are legitimate and worthwhile, and we hope you will carefully examine them. In view of the seriousness of those demands, and the need for Western to change, we have set a five day deadline for a reply from you.

We have set this time limit because we see that Western in the past has moved too slowly, has avoided facing key issues squarely.

Very sincerely yours,

Black Student Union