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"THE MYTH OF "DESIGNING DIVERSITY": A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE ATTEMPTS TO 'COLORIZE' COLLEGE CAMPUSES"

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Diversity, to date, has not allowed people of color to "close ranks" and formulate strategies which would, indeed, allow for true diversity. The concept of "designing diversity" was first made public and prominent by Dr. Kenneth Shaw when he was the president of the University of Wisconsin system. With the assistance of then Chancellor Donna Shalala and "Special Assistant" James Sulton," the "Design for Diversity" was given headlines and headway in major publications all over the nation.

But it accomplished very little. Why? Because of the lack of commitment, follow-through and continuity by those in positions to make a difference.

Within one year of instituting the "Design for Diversity" and still falling short of its publicly stated goals (information will be provided on exact numbers), the three key players all left the UW system for other venues; Sulton to another institution with the same position, Shaw to another educational institution with a major position, and Shalala to become Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services under president Bill Clinton.

In this paper and presentation, four approaches to "designs for diversity" will be compared and contrasted. From this information will come analyses pointing to similarities between these programs and highlighting the potential positives that each program might possess. There is no doubt that such programs are aimed at increasing the numbers of minorities on predominantly white campuses; however, this paper seeks to

ask the "right" questions in finding out what the intentions of administrators really are in implementation of such programs.

In this presentation, we name and describe four (4) reasons, all of them less than "moral": The Ideological Response Approach, the Federal Compliance Reaction, The Oasis Syndrome and the Qualified Intentions Approach.

First, the **Ideological Response Approach.** This approach is nothing more than a knee-jerk reaction to what other institutions are doing and to the buzzwords of the time period. There is no real commitment, but the over-use of such terms as "multiculturalism," "diversity programs," "prejudice reduction workshops" and "racial harmony" are used time and time again when the reality reflects that the campus remains lily-white and racist. This approach is one that is aided and abetted by campus and community media, which make pronouncements of what "will be" and what "is on the way" when nothing to bring about true substantive change is even being considered.

An integral aspect of Ideological Response Approach is the promotion of existing blacks to highly visible areas: director of Multicultural Affairs, Dean of Minority Recruitment and the like. The fact is, the people have no experience, there is no job description and there are no objectives or goals. In truth, the individual receives a set of keys that fit nothing. Another equally humiliating characteristic of this approach is the competition between campuses who both practice the Ideological Response approach. It is almost as if they are competing to see "whose Negro" or "whose Latino" can be displayed more prominently in the newspaper, whose has the most degrees or credentials and whose has received the most air time. It is paternalistic racism at its most insidious.

Second, the **Federal Compliance Reaction.** (Secretly) realizing that the numbers are fading, many campuses rush out to find "qualified minorities" who can quickly be used to place on a chart which, in turn, is immediately faxed to the Federal government to protect or retain contracts. This kind of "diversity" is always publicly described as being "an idea whose time has come" without ever really stating what the real reason is. Examples will be provided of several institutions, some of them from the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, which continue to operate in this fashion.

Third, the **Oasis Syndrome.** We call it a "syndrome" because it represents a set of signs and symptoms that occur together. On the one hand is the belief that "integration" can best be captured through imagery: on the covers of course schedules, in yearbooks or in publicity shots. When this is done, it simply points out the disingenuity of the campus and its politics. The approach used to capture such "integration" is evidence of the "oasis syndrome," an attempt to make it appear as if people of all colors sit, talk, study, sleep, eat and interact together on these campuses when, in reality, nothing could be further from the truth.

On the other hand is the hypocrisy of the Oasis Syndrome, since it does not exist in the communities where most of these universities are located. In fact, in the information provided in this paper, we will show that the opposite is the case: in college towns where there are attempts at "designs for diversity," the black community for the most part is

extremely segregated from the rest of the community. It is then, an "oasis" for another reason: the campus promotes an ethic which is not reinforced by the community that the campus serves.

Fourth is the **Qualified Intentions approach.** The paper provides example upon example of where the "design" for diversity is just that - a "formula" that while, on the one hand, allows for increasing numbers of minority students, faculty and staff on predominantly white campuses, nonetheless contains a CEILING as to "how many" will be "allowed" onto the campus. Therefore predominantly white campuses merely "adjust" so that the control of white males at the top is simply increased to include control of a larger minority student population, control over a more diverse staff and control over a more widely represented faculty corps.

With whites in power, the people of color who are "put in charge" are those individuals whom they (whites) feel most comfortable with and, for the most part, these are individuals who do not represent the best interests of African-Americans, Latinos, Asians or Native Americans on campus. In fact, the opposite may be the result: the "special assistant to the Chancellor for Diversity" or the "Dean for Multiculturalism and Diversity" may not have the trust of staff or students, may not understand what is needed in the nearest low-income (minority) community and may, indeed, have a mindset that more approximates that of the whites in charge than of the persons of color whom all purport to want to "include." Karenga (1967) said it best when he wrote, "White doesn't represent a color; it represents a mentality that is anti black."

The crux of this paper is that true diversity cannot be "designed," but most flow. True diversity cannot be implemented by those who do not understand diversity or those who have never seen it in operation. True diversity is not just a matter of numbers, but a matter of quality.

Presenters:

Matthew C. Stelly is a doctoral student in the Department of Urban Education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He holds Bachelor's degrees in Black Studies and Urban Studies, and Master's degrees in Urban Studies and Political Science, all from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Stelly is the former editor of the Milwaukee Courier newspaper, a former talk show host on WNOV-AM radio in Milwaukee and a host of his own television show in Omaha, "North Omaha Focus." Stelly has taught at Milwaukee Area Technical College, both the University of Nebraska and the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and has worked as a minority student advisor at Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, Iowa. Stelly is the winner of two national essay contests, sponsored by the National Urban League (1981) and the National Council on Black Studies (1986), and has more than 500 newspaper articles in print.

Michel Payne is an African-American male, born and raised in Omaha, who attended the Omaha Public Schools and played college football at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. During a four-year stint in Vietnam, he met others who had also played college football. Payne is completing his Bachelor's degree in

General Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and plans to teach elementary education in several years.

Cynthia Jackson is the founder and executive director of Jackson Educational and Technical Services, a consultation firm located in Atlanta, Georgia. Jackson holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology from the University of Wisconsin and a Master's in Adult Education from the University of Minnesota. Jackson has extensive background in supervision in the area of community development and human services, and is now working on a major manuscript analyzing African-Americans in American popular culture.