

1970

IS, OR, WAS THERE A COLLEGE FOR BEDFORD-STUYVESANT?

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Having lived through this entire experience, and after having written several progress reports about this effort for a college in Bedford-Stuyvesant, I find it extremely difficult to put the words together necessary to trying to describe once more what happened and/or what is happening. Just as I believe the people should have been primarily responsible for developing the college, I also believe the people should know what went down, so far, with that college. I must take the liberty of presenting the essence of the matter -- necessarily omitting a lot of details, many of which would be interesting had I the will to go through it again.

To the surprise of most of the Bedford-Stuyvesant community, The City University announced plans to establish a two-year "experimental" college in Bedford-Stuyvesant in early February 1968. Though this was a play on words concerning Central Brooklyn, everyone really knew the college was planned for Bedford-Stuyvesant. Whatever political deals were made or whatever pressures were brought to bear to get the commitment to Bedford-Stuyvesant is beyond me, but perhaps at this time irrelevant. The Bedford-Stuyvesant community began to organize itself around the issue of the college. Over a period of time their organizational efforts evolved into the Bedford-Stuyvesant Coalition on Educational Needs and Services, a group comprised of better than 25 diverse organizations.

There were two major dictates under which this community structure was functioning:

- 1) Any college to be established in our community had to be community controlled; and
- 2) Any college to be established in our community had to be a senior college and not a junior (community) college.

The Coalition elected seven people to represent them in meetings with members of the Board of Higher Education: Bro. Albert Vann, Chairman; Bro. Jack Pannigan, Vice Chairman; Miss Isaura Santiago; Hon. Thomas R. Jones, J.S.C.; Bro. Robert (Sonny) Carson; Mrs. Ella Sease; and Prof. Herman Patterson. A more representative group of Black people would be hard to find anywhere in the world. More pertinent, they were a reflection of the Coalition which was representative of the involved, or, concerned Bedford-Stuyvesant community.

The members of the Coalition and those on the Negotiating Team represented the Bedford-Stuyvesant community exceptionally well. In spite of arguments, profanity, intimidation, and grandstand plays at their own meetings, individual differences for the most part were submerged when confronting the Board of Higher Education. During the productive period of the Coalition's negotiations, City University agreed to finance the establishment of the group's office and staff; they agreed to the concept that a policy-making board for the college come from the community; they agreed to change the proposal for a two-year college to one for a senior college. With the aid of consultants the Coalition developed proposals for a Black Studies Department, a Puerto Rican Studies Department, new

concepts in Teacher Education and admission policies, and suggested courses of study and degree-granting programs. In addition, Federal City College in Washington, D. C. was visited and evaluated, and served to provide invaluable information concerning the pitfalls to be avoided in establishing a new college. The Coalition had also found interim facilities for the college and was moving to explore for a permanent site.

Negotiations with The City University were all that could be expected between the Establishment and a bona fide Black community. The Negotiating Team's strength stemmed from the fact that with the exception of one person no one on the Team was on City University's payroll; thus they exemplified almost total independence.

After more than a year of dealing with The City University, dealing with their community, and progressing with the college, it became apparent that the Bedford-Stuyvesant Coalition was for real, and that perhaps for the first time a united Black community had come together to make decisions on matters (i.e., the college) pertinent to the community. The surface issue that destroyed this community unity dealt with the selection of a President for the college. After having undergone an extensive national search for the appropriate man, only a handful were produced who met the requirements of both the Coalition and The City University. Unavailability among the top prospects narrowed the selection down to one man -- who happened to have been the community's first choice. At this point representatives of the Board of Higher Education found this man, Mr. Rhody McCoy, to be totally unacceptable. More than

that, they completely disregarded and disrespected the entire Bedford-Stuyvesant community by trying to determine for them who could best serve them.

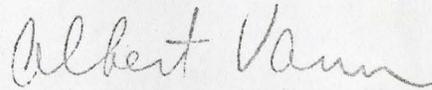
Veiled (and not so veiled) threats which came from City U. regarding the possibility of loss of the college if the choice of a President was not altered provided the necessary wedge, which would begin to divide and conquer. As always, there were niggers waiting in the wings to "do their thing". Politicians who had not been heard from before suddenly became involved, making their entrance with the consent of The City University, but without notice to the established community structure and their constituents. Members of the Coalition who had not been seen since its first days established direct communication with City U. to oppose the position taken by the community structure. Unfortunately for Black people, it was real easy to divide and conquer. Niggers with their warped egos, who think that nothing should move without their worn-out leadership, pulled their nasty strings behind the scenes; and niggers whose personal greed far outweighed any concern for the broader community responded when their strings were pulled.

Nevertheless, the majority opinion within the Coalition withstood. Despite the break-aways, the Bedford-Stuyvesant community maintained its dignity and its right to choose a President for their college; but more pertinently, it maintained its right to determine its own destiny. With the knowledge that a college is not just a building nor a plant which would provide a few choice Blacks with

\$20,000 jobs and menial jobs for a few less fortunate brothers and sisters, this position came easily. The understanding that a college in their community would make a dynamic impact, but, too, that an impact could be positive or detrimental, made it even easier.

In summary, it should be of prime interest to Black communities throughout the nation to know that there exists a Black community which is awakened enough, concerned enough, and involved enough to do what is necessary to protect their young and to begin to build a firm foundation -- necessary for rebirth of the dignity and strength of the Black man.

Peace and Power.



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