

Old Perspectives on Race at WSU

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On October 19 to 21, Wayne State University will sponsor a conference titled "New Perspectives on Race and the City." Featured speakers include G. Mennen Williams, Jerome P. Cavanagh, Hubert Locke, Roger Wilkins of the U.S. Justice Department, Community Relations Service and John Spiegel, head of the Center for the Study of Violence at Brandeis University.

The conference is an insult to the local black community and to anyone else who seeks new insights into the racial conflict which racks the nation.

The symposium which is to be held is not the one which was originally planned. To understand what happened to the original conference, the planning of which I was involved in, is to understand something about liberals, and about white folks and about urban universities. It is also to understand something about fear and neurosis and the ways in which this society continues to extract compliance from its psychologically terrorized citizens.

In early July of this year I was asked, on the recommendation of a third party, to advise the Centennial Symposia director, Dr. Edward Lurie, on the planning of the first symposium to be concerned with racial problems. In advance of my first meeting with Lurie, I was given a proposed conference outline to react to.

That outline included as speakers Daniel P. Moynihan, Oscar Lewis, Robert Weaver, Whitney Young and others. The format was vague and traditional. Very much the conference which will in fact take place the 19-21.

I suggested an alternate format and different personnel. Surprisingly, most of my suggestions were accepted. On July 10, I met with Dr. Lurie to go over a ten page outline which he had prepared based on our conversations. The outline, contrary to later assertions in the South End newspaper by Lurie's assistant, Philip Bordon, created a multi-faceted format for discussing the impact of race both locally and nationally.

The conference was scheduled to open with a keynote address by Stokely Carmichael. Consideration was also being given at that time to a dialogue between Mr. Carmichael and others, including Gunner Myrdal or Daniel P. Moynihan. Using panel discussions, workshops and other techniques the balance of the conference was to concentrate, according to Lurie's outline on The Myths of the Negro in the City, including the myth of black progress, the myth of the success of proximity (integration), and the myth of education. This was to be followed by discussions of: The Psychology of Racism, Education and Race in the City (white and black), the Economics of Race in the City, The Geographic Patterns of Race in the City (concentrating exclusively on Detroit), and the Politics of Race in the City. The final session to be devoted to the role of the University.

Participants sought for these discussions included in addition to Mr. Carmichael, Charles Silberman, Author of "Crisis in Black and White" and Senior Editor of *Fortune*, Alvin Poussaint, Professor of Psychiatry at Tufts; Vincent Harding, Professor of History at Spellman College; W.H. Ferry of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions; Nat Hentoff; Eliot Shapiro, former N.Y. school principal; Conner Cruise O' Brian, Albert Schweitzer, Professor at New York University; Kenneth Clark, author of "Dark Ghetto;" Calvin Hernton, author of "Sex and Racism in America;" Robert Coles, research psychiatrist at Harvard; Jack O'Dell, Associate Editor, "Freedomways;" John O. Killens, author; James and Grace Boggs authors of "The City is the Black Man's Land" and other articles

and Nathan Hare, formerly professor of sociology at Howard University and author of "The Black Anglo-Saxons." Other personnel both local and national were included as well.

In order to implement the conference a decision was made to retain William Strickland, presently Deputy Director of the Black Power Conference as a consultant. Mr. Strickland was to receive a consultant fee of \$100 for his planning advice and also for contacting some of the national personnel who were being sought.

Both Mr. Strickland and myself were authorized by Lurie to make long distance and where necessary transatlantic telephone calls to locate people. We were empowered to negotiate honorariums and to promise travel and other expenses. At that time it seemed as though the conference would be run in much the way we had planned it, contingent only on our ability to implement the plan which had been agreed upon.

On July 12, with travel expenses subsidized in part by Wayne State University, I met with Strickland in New York. In a three way telephone conversation between Strickland, myself and Lurie some substitutions in personnel were made, agreement was reached about the format and both of us were again authorized to contact people for the conference.

During the intervening two weeks, these assignments were being carried out. Then came the rebellion.

On July 30, a meeting took place at Lurie's apartment involving myself, Strickland who had arrived in the city on the 26th and Milton Stern, Director of the University Center for Adult Education who had been involved in some of the earlier meetings. In view of the insurrection it was agreed that the conference had an added urgency and importance. The need was expressed at that time to use the conference as a forum for the black community and the title was to be changed to "A Black Look at the City." Because of his apparent unavailability, even though he was agreed to come if he were in the country, it was decided to substitute Ron Karenga, leader of US in Watts and an important figure at the Black Power conference in Newark for Stokely Carmichael as the keynote speaker. Otherwise, the conference format was left as it had been established.

A few days after the July 30 meeting I telephoned Lurie to ask him for a memorandum on where we stood. He agreed to send the memo within a few days. No memorandum was ever sent. In Mid-August, Strickland sent Lurie a memo indicating that he had completed his part of the arrangements. Karenga, Poussaint, O'Dell and Killens among others had agreed to come. Strickland asked that formal letters of invitation be sent, that he be reimbursed for his telephone expenses and that his consultants fee be paid.

Shortly after receiving my copy of Strickland's memo I called Lurie to see if it was being acted upon. Lurie was "in conference" each time I called. None of my calls were returned. Finally on Aug. 26 I spoke with Lurie for the first time in nearly three weeks. He asked me to come to his apartment for a meeting on Sunday Aug. 27.

The meeting took place early Sunday afternoon. Lurie began by explaining that he was responsible to a "committee" which had found it necessary to make some changes in the format and personnel of the conference. The title was to revert to New Perspectives on Race Economics and the City which I had suggested (the Economics was later dropped when it was pointed out by someone that the conference did not contain any economic analysis). The format was to concentrate on what had happened in Detroit. With the exception of Alvin Poussaint, NONE of the personnel contacted by either Strickland or myself were to be invited to the conference.

At that time Lurie stated that the substitutes included: Louis Lomax, G. Mennen Williams, Daniel P. Moynihan, Cyrus T. Vance, and Roy Wilkins.

Needless to say, I had not been consulted on any of the changes, nor was I being consulted then. Rather, I was informed that this was what had and would take place.

It was agreed that Mr. Strickland's expenses and consultant's fees would be paid and that any additional expenses incurred in explaining to people that their services were not required would also be paid. I suggested that since I had done a great deal of work for nothing that it would be appropriate for the University to pay me \$100 for my time. I had not previously asked for any money beyond expenses although Lurie had indicated it would be available should I request it.

To this date no money had been paid to either myself or Strickland. Lurie has recently written demanding itemized expense accounts which he already has and the matter has been turned over to our attorneys for collection. The money is not, of course, the issue, it is only symbolic.

It should be added that the new conference format places great stress on a preliminary research report to be given by Dr. Eliot Luby. The report is highly questionable.

The original grant of \$150,000 to make the study was made by the National Institute for Mental Health in the midst of the Detroit Rebellion. Of the original grant \$75,000 has already been sub-contracted to the University of Michigan. No hypothesis was contained in the request for funds which was pushed through in part because of political pressure applied by Michigan Republican Senator Robert Griffen. Sources close to the study have criticized its methodology as well as its orientation. In the first stages of the report white interviewers were used.

Speculation is that the report will argue with Negroes in general and that "rioters" in particular are "sick"; that they have been unable to adjust properly to urban society.

That of course is just the point. Understanding what happened with this conference is less important than understanding why. It is the University and white society which is sick; sick with racism, fear and liberalism. To cure that sickness is the task of us all, including universities. It is to the credit of black people that they are increasingly refusing to "adjust" to the oppression, exploitation and degradation which they find built into this society.

That then is the conference that will be. Wayne State will continue, apparently, to pursue grants, prestige and acceptance instead of the truth.

The conference that might have been is being planned as a counter-conference with representatives from the black community, a committee sponsored by the Student-Faculty Council and others and will be presented in the near future. Details will be available in the next issue of the Fifth Estate.

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