

FOREWORD

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Fifty-five years ago *Black Studies in the University* was a beacon of light for a new and necessary area of study in the academy. It illuminated a path for uniting the various streams of academic ferment in this area of study. The editors led a successful effort to persuade Yale to bring together a critical mass of scholars throughout the country who had devoted portions of their academic careers to analyzing the history of Blacks in America, and how that history could be woven into a course of study worthy of inclusion in the academic offerings of first-rate universities.

Aided in substantial part by this book, African American Studies has become an integral offering in today's universities, and has provided opportunities for many scholars to explore and explain the history and impact of a people who comprise more than 14 percent of the U.S. population. Racial progress, however, often moves two steps forward and one step sideways or backward, and Black Studies and its role in the academy have not escaped this phenomenon.

In today's world, those who favor the continued exploration of the Black experience in America and see it as an integral part of the American experience must struggle against an aggressive attempt to take the country backward. Well-financed and determined forces are systematically seeking to roll back all forms of affirmative action, and to halt the inclusion of Black history as a part of American history in education and in American society in general at every level. This can be seen in efforts to kill initiatives for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and in any other policy that seeks to address the wrongs done to Blacks as a people in the history of the United States.

In the preface to the first edition of this book, one of the editors noted that one of the questions they faced was whether the study of the Black experience was of sufficient amplitude and depth to justify

general study. While the opponents of Black Studies still make the discredited argument that it is not, their actions boldly go even farther, rejecting the notion that knowledge of the Black experience is needed to prepare students for functioning effectively in the multiracial society in which they must live.

This book, and the scholarship to which it has led, acknowledges the importance of engaging in the battle to replace historical fiction with historical fact. Black Studies continues to play a vital role in the pursuit of historical fact over manufactured fiction, of the type most recently seen in schoolbooks in Florida, which essentially teach children that enslaved people were the beneficiaries of slavery because slavery gave them skills which were useful when they emerged from 250 years of forced bondage.

So this book should be reread by some and read for the first time by others with vigor to understand the historical terrain through which Black Studies has traveled. But we must note that the struggle continues, and the need to strengthen and sustain Black Studies will continue. Freedom is never completely won.

The author of this Foreword learned at the feet of the original editors and the other persons who led the effort to put together the symposium and to pursue African American Studies in the elevated context that it has facilitated over the past fifty-five years. For that we honor Armstead Robinson, Donald Ogilvie, and Craig Foster, to whom we owe a great debt of gratitude. Much of this Foreword is inspired by my recent discussions with Craig Foster.