

# Popular Black Studies Course Dropped Because of a 'Lack of Coordination'

By Bob Waddell  
NU Journalism Student

The first course at the University of Nebraska designed specifically toward black studies has been dropped.

Popular by enrollment standards, the course, "Black Experience in America," was considered valuable by the five faculty members and three students interviewed.

Why is the course being dropped? What effect will it have on the black studies program? How do students react?

Asked why the course is being dropped, Lodis Rhodes, coordinator of African-American Studies, said it was primarily a problem of the lack of cooperation among the departments involved, English, sociology and history.

Dr. Leslie C. Duly, associate professor of history, said, "Cooperation was a problem if we are talking about intensive coordination. It was a problem not only in selecting the textbooks but in faculty listening to each other."

The chairman of the History Department, Dr. Philip A. Crowl, who taught most of the history classes, said, "The English department wants a full course and sociology the same."

"The biggest problem was grading," he said. "The English department let the students grade themselves. Also there was the administrative problem of grade averaging."

Crowl added, "Until this year, I was happy with the course, but student interest was not the same as previous years."

Charles Peek, who taught the English section the last two years, said "Lodis (Rhodes) and I agree on the general principle that you can't teach 200 people at a time. The teacher needs to respond to the students."

He said the course was "meant to be interdisciplinary. Subjects should be related. This was not done."

Asked about the value of the course, Dr. John Robinson, associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences expressed what everyone interviewed said, that "black studies is a stop-gap measure." He added that "ultimately black history is part of American history. However, this is long range. At present the history taught is white history," he said, "and there are a whole host of ethnic groups it is proper to learn about, hence, black studies."

Crowl said the course, best known as 198, was begun in 1968 in direct response to black students asking for a course in black history.

But, Crowl said, "at the time I didn't have a staff member with sufficient background in Negro history to teach a class in it, nor were there funds to get a specialist. So I called on other departments to share the load."

The class, then titled "The

Negro in American Society," was divided among English, history and sociology, each being responsible for one-third of the semester.

Crowl said each department tested and graded the students on the material it covered.

Crowl was named coordinator of the three departments' efforts. He taught many of the history classes for the course as well.

The following summary of the two credit-hour course appeared in 1969 in the bulletin of the College of Arts and Sciences:

"A survey of the history and contemporary status of the Negro in American Society and of literature by and about American Negroes."

This was followed by a listing of the subjects covered: "... slavery and its impact on American history, emancipation and its consequences, the history of segregation, the civil rights movement, the Negro in contemporary society, the Negro in American literature."

Then in June 1970, Lodis Rhodes, instructor in sociology, was made coordinator of African-American Studies. Part of his responsibility was to assume coordination of 198. Rhodes said he assumed teaching duties for the sociology section as well.

The following semester the course name was changed to "Black Experience in America."

Another change occurred in

reading assignments. Dr. Leslie C. Duly, associate professor of history, who taught part of the five-week history section, said the reading requirement was reduced from four books to three.

Rhodes said that for the same period, the sociology requirement was cut from three books to one and that the English requirement also was reduced.

A student who took the course in 1970 before the changes occurred, John Votipka, said they tried to cover too much material. He said the reading load was too heavy, adding that the course "should have been expanded into three courses."

Votipka also said, "There was poor coordination between lecturers in the history section." He said it resulted from the number of different instructors who shared teaching duties for this one section.

According to the syllabus issued that semester, there were five lecturers for the history section.

Ron Malsby and Jim Pratt were enrolled in the course last semester. Asked about the reading load, both answered that it was not too heavy. However, both agreed the course should be expanded.

Malsby, a history major, said, "It should be one course in history for a full semester and the same for the other two. It goes by too fast."

"But even with little time," he said, "it's beneficial to

students who hold myths toward black America."

He added, however, that the interdisciplinary nature of the course detracted from it.

Jim Pratt said, "The overview of black experience presented by three departments was beneficial because you get more ways of looking at it."

Pratt's biggest complaint was size. "The size prohibited discussion," he said. "If discussion groups were held once a week it would be good."

He said he enjoyed the sociology section which was loosely structured. The history section was good also, he said but that "there was no opportunity for discussion." The English section, he said, was too abstract and not easily understood.

"But over-all, I liked the course," he said.

Student enrollment acclaimed 198's popularity. Last semester more than 250 were enrolled in the class.

Next semester there won't be a class.

Course 198 was the beginning of black studies at NU. It was joined in the fall of 1969 by four other courses.

A story in the Lincoln Star May 2, 1969, reported that Dean of Faculties Dr. C. Peter Magrath announced the new courses and the possibilities of others to members of the Afro-American Collegiate Society (AACS). The story said that this was one of numerous

meetings between NU administrators and AACS members regarding the black studies program at NU. The meetings had begun after a series of campus demonstrations during April of 1969, it said.

In the spring of 1970, the university published a survey by Magrath, the purpose of which was "to provide students with a picture of the University's overall academic offerings in the broad area of ethnic and minority group intercultural studies."

On August 6, 1970, NU president Joseph Soshnik released a six-page "Response to Concerns of the Afro-American & Collegiate Society." In it he said that "while definite progress has been made, much more needs to be accomplished."

Asked about the present status of black studies at NU, Lodis Rhodes said there are "six or seven classes which were specifically designed with this in mind. There is a minor offered in black studies."

Course 198 was a part of that minor. So, the immediate effect of dropping 198 is that "the minor program will be revamped," Rhodes said.

Duly said that a new course, Slavery in the 19th Century, will replace 198 in that department. But he cited more that needs to be done.

"Despite the developments of black studies programs at institutions," he said, "there has not been money put into these programs. The emphasis

has been on raising the standards. I hope we'll do more than what we've done in the past."

One of the responses of President Soshnik to the AACS was the goal of black faculty recruitment in several departments. One of these departments was history.

According to the History Department there are no black faculty or black graduate level personnel in the department.

Crowl, when asked about efforts to recruit blacks as faculty, said that it was not "till recent years that there were many qualified blacks."

He said that with the recent budget cut hiring was not now feasible.

"And if a black historian were available, we might not be able to interest him in coming to NU," he said. "He wouldn't have many fellow blacks, since Lincoln has little black population," he said.

Rhodes also commented that until recent years qualified blacks were hard to find. But recruitment of black faculty, he said, was only one area of concern.

"But the real issue," he said, "is to provide a real education for the student. I see black studies as a vehicle to get to true education, the recognition

of differences as relative to making good decisions. And frankly, the program isn't doing the job."

Votipka, a journalism major, pointed out that there is a major offered at NU in modern dance. He said, "When they ascribe enough importance to modern dance to have a major in it, then they should consider the area of racial and ethnic studies as important."

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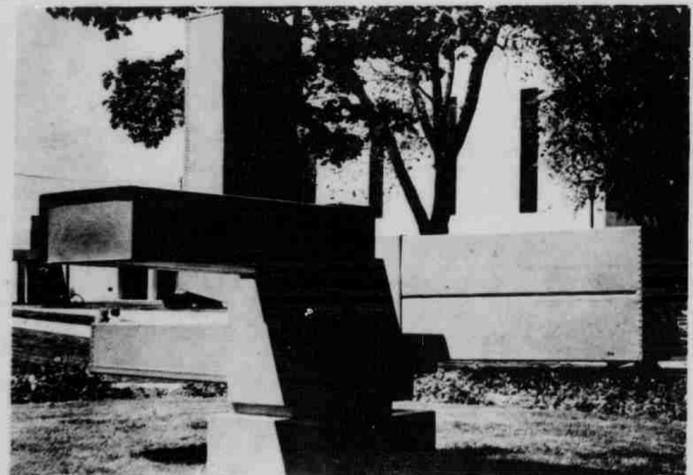
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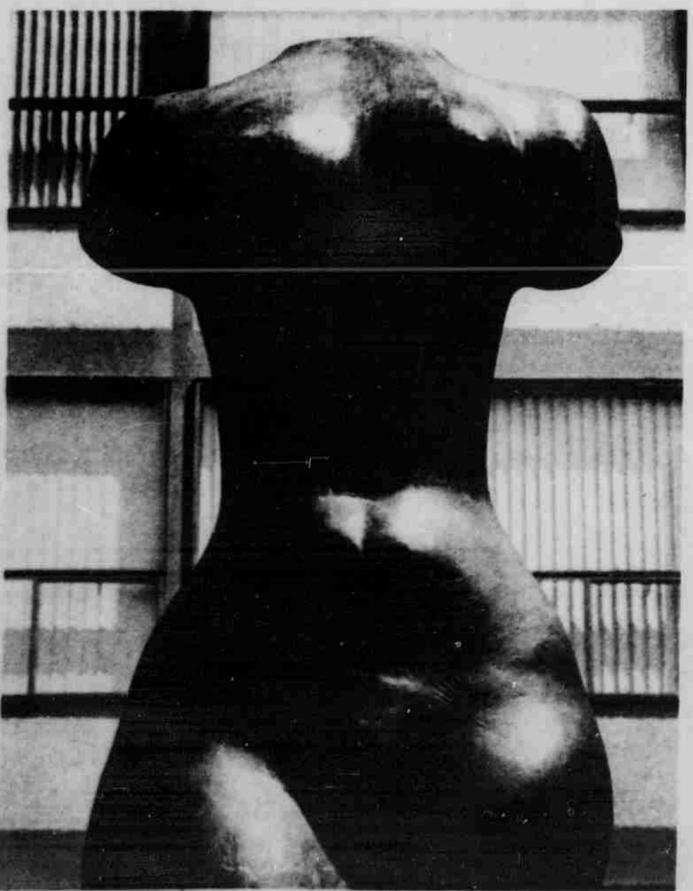
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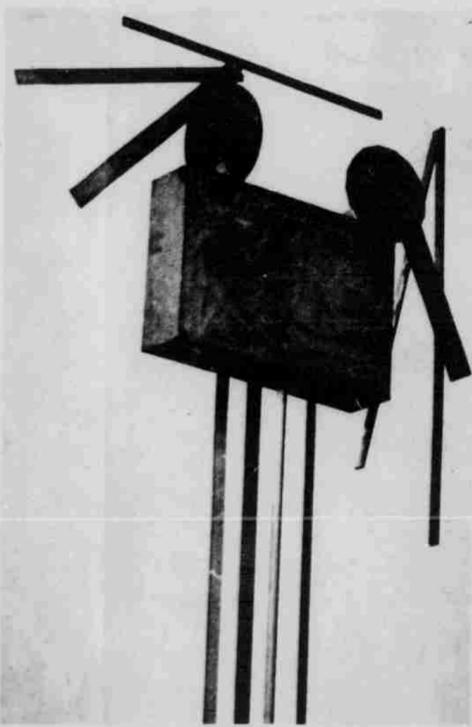
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