

BLACK HOUSE

ABSTRACT

Black House opened in Fall 1970 with the help of a Ford Foundation grant and was taken into the BESP fold in 1971. It was liquidated in June 1973 because the Office for Civil Rights ruled that it violated Title VI (school desegregation) of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In its two years as part of BESP, Black House was under constant OCR surveillance. The cloud of suspicion, the ever present danger to its existence, were the paramount conditions of its brief life span.

The idea for the school originated in discussions between a young Black Studies consultant-instructor at Community High School (later Genesis) and some Black students who felt that CHS was so white-oriented that it did not respond to needs of Black students. The rationale for the school was as follows: Many Black students did poorly in the high schools that were, despite desegregation, permeated with the predominant assumptions, values and aspirations of white society. These students lagged because of a vast gulf between their ethnic frame of reference, both experiential and cultural, and the educational program and ambience that emerged from a different (i.e., white) experience and culture. It was hypothesized, therefore, that a school that was steeped in Black historical tradition and contemporary reality, that nurtured Black consciousness and self-esteem, that viewed subject matter from a Black perspective and in relation to the Black condition, would eliminate the gap between the community and school environments and would motivate Black students to realize their potential.

Curriculum had two emphases: basic skills (according to a BESP estimate between 80 and 90 percent of Black House students were deficient in basic skills) and Black consciousness (typical of the latter emphasis were a political economy course in Black Nation Building and a civics course called The Black Man and the Law). The student population, estimated at between 40 and 80 9-12 grade students in the two BESP years, was all Black (except for one Chicano in 1971/72), as was the staff (without exception). BESP and the Black House staff emphasized that student composition was determined by free student choice, not system coercion, and the choice was determined by the school's educational mission, not by a racial exclusion policy. These arguments were rejected by OCR. So was a plan for an Alliance of Black House; Casa de la Raza, an ethnically oriented Chicano School; and Odyssey, a multi-ethnic BESP site. Under the Alliance proposal the three schools would have retained their autonomy and the integrity of their original conception; they would have taught core courses to their respective student populations in the morning, but in the afternoon the students would have attended multi-ethnic courses that drew not only on the Alliance schools, but

also on other BESP or common schools in the district.

Forced into a defensive position, preoccupied with the struggle for survival, Black House had little inclination, time and energy for internal evaluation, and was not disposed to be hospitable to outside evaluators. Moreover, truncation of the school's troubled existence after only two years as a BESP site also impaired adequate evaluation. As a consequence there are no evaluation data on cognitive or affective growth.

However, even if such data were available and indicated a high rate of achievement, they would not have been relevant to the decisive "evaluation" that was made by OCR. The critical issue became the right of a school district to sponsor such an experiment, rather than what the experiment did or could produce. Given the fact that desegregation, as thus far implemented in the United States, has not produced conclusive evidence of overcoming ethnic inequality in educational achievement (with all the consequent implications for ethnic inequality in the society at large), it would seem that experimentation with alternatives to the prevailing patterns is valid and vital. Black House represented such experimentation, the most innovative experimentation attempted under the BESP flag. By compelling the liquidation of Black House, OCR has cast a blighting pall on a crucial area of educational experimentation in the United States.

EMERGENCE IN LOCAL PLAN

The origins of Black House can be traced to two sources: the "free school" movement and the powerful surge to Black identity and Black pride, which began to be generated by conspicuous currents in the Black freedom movement in the late 1960's.

The "free school" movement, in the form of Community High School I (later Genesis), served as the launching pad, but the propellant was the assertion of Blackness as a distinct and admirable value. More specifically, a young Black teacher, who was brought into CHS as a Black Studies consultant, found deep discontent among Black students at that site. They complained that CHS was oriented toward the white majority in its student body and staff, that it was not responsive, either in program or atmosphere, to needs of Black students. In discussions between the young Black teacher and the discontented Black students the idea for Black House was born. In the process of shaping the idea into a proposal for submission to the Berkeley School Board, the young teacher consulted with the originator of CHS and Herbert Kohl, the most influential "free school" proponent in Berkeley at that time.

The proposal was submitted to, and approved by, the School Board in July 1970. Black House opened in the Fall semester of that year, housed in makeshift quarters at the West Berkeley YMCA, which is in a Black community. In the plan produced by BESP in Spring 1973 for the second 30 months of the program, it was said retrospectively that "the (initial) aim of Black House was to structure an educational program which accurately reflected Black achievement and would renew the will of Black youth to learn and become prepared to survive in the hostile, racist American environment."

The young Black teacher, who was the founder of Black House and became its first director (a service that was terminated by a fatal auto accident in Summer 1971), offered a more elaborate rationale for the school. "The blatantly obvious fact," he wrote, "(is) that Black students are simply not performing according to their best abilities in Berkeley High School...The real problem at hand (is) how to motivate and teach Black students."

Berkeley High, he argued, could not solve this problem for large numbers of Black students because of a yawning gulf between the school and the home (home being used not only to designate domicile and family, but to embrace the Black community with its unique status, experience and culture). The large, "integrated" but white-dominated high school offered Black students an "ivory tower" education, unrelated to their experience and culture, and to the real problems they would have to confront in their real world. A viable alternative, he concluded, was a school that was not cloistered in a white "ivory tower" but rooted in the reality of the Black ambience, a school where shared

experience, shared culture and a broad community of aspirations created empathy and the possibilities for true communication between staff and students. Students could be motivated to learn because then education would be seen as "more than something 'the man' says one has to go through." Instead, education would be perceived as vitally relevant to the needs of the students as individuals and as members of an ethnic community. "Many students," he asserted, "cannot even begin to understand the importance of going to school unless they know that it will help their survival as Black people." Black House, as an all-Black alternative, would impart that knowledge and would, indeed, provide education designed to help the students' survival as Black people.

The essence of this argument had been articulated previously by proponents of various forms of Black autonomy at various levels of the educational system. However, here it was advanced in specific circumstances, and the form in which the argument was couched reflected these circumstances. The form was an open letter, addressed to "Whom It May Concern," dated March 29, 1971, a scant seven months after Black House opened its doors. That the founder-director felt impelled to so address a militant apologia for Black House already indicated the hostile pressures to which it was subjected from the very outset. The document was explicit on this score: the school "finds itself surrounded by heated controversy"; it is a target for "many angry epithets"; some critics have gone "so far as to include attempts to defame the characters and qualifications of some of our staff members."

To understand the intensity of feeling about Black House, it is well to remember that the school was launched in 1970. This was only two years after Berkeley had completed the bused "integration" of its entire public school system, a feat that was widely celebrated for its comprehensiveness and relative orderliness. Within Berkeley, this achievement was a source of great pride in many quarters, and nationally it enhanced the reputation of the Berkeley school system as a model to emulate.

Black House was a discordant note amid the still-resounding echoes of self-congratulation. It was a challenge to the integrationist credo. Inevitably, it offended much of the Berkeley education establishment, much of Berkeley's politically potent white liberal community, and an unmeasurable segment of the Black community that included a number of articulate Black educators and Black community figures who had been in the van of the integrationist movement.

A coincidence only exacerbated the situation. In the same year that Berkeley public schools were integrated the cry of "Black Power!" reverberated through the land. Within Berkeley, the many innuendos

of this suggestive slogan were embodied in the tangible form of the Black Panther Party. Another coincidence: 1968, the year of Berkeley school integration, was also the year when Berkeley was the scene of a sensationalized "shootout" between Black Panthers and police. In the public mind (or some part of it), it was not difficult to form a vague association: Black House-Black Power-Black Panther.

Even so brief a sketch of certain factors in the Berkeley environment circa 1970 helps to explain why the March 29, 1971 open letter from the Black House director and staff had the tone of a defiant communique from a beleaguered fortress. From its inception Black House was forced into a defensive position. A concentrated and overt manifestation of the hostility that attended the birth of Black House was an extraordinary action by the counseling staff of Berkeley High School. Even before Black House opened, the counselors announced that if and when it did open, they would not service it. They formally retreated from this position only after a dramatic confrontation with the superintendent and school board members, in which they were advised that failure to carry out their duties in relation to the new school would constitute grounds for dismissal. Abandonment of a formal position under threat of dismissal is not the same as a change of heart. Indeed, the Black House staff was never persuaded that the BHS counseling staff (with one exception) faithfully fulfilled its responsibilities to the school.

Given all the above, the question arises: why did the school board approve the Black House proposal in July 1970, which also meant district assumption of responsibility for funding the school, as this was a year before ESP came upon the scene. One tangible explanation is vigorous support of the proposal by Hazaiah Williams, a Black school board member, and Superintendent Foster. Other explanations are more speculative. Even if it is assumed that the initiative for Black House reflected only a minority sentiment in the Black community, this was a highly vocal and assertive minority at the time, and those attributes endowed it with some political clout. Moreover, with the elements of pluralism that were operative in the Berkeley school system and community, any given alternative did not have to represent a majority consensus; all it needed was a credible constituency. Black House was conceived as an experiment that would involve some 100 students at a time (out of a student population of some 15,000 in the school district). As such it was deemed worthy of active support by Foster and Williams, and if some board members had misgivings about the general conception of the school, its very modest size could have been a factor in dissuading them from entering into battle over it with such potent opponents as Foster and Williams.

Once the school had been approved and funded as a district alternative, it was hardly politic to exclude it from the BESP package that was submitted to OE/ESP in June 1971. And once Black House became the recipient of federal funds, it was also subject to special federal scrutiny. Federal pressures, it soon became apparent, could be far more formidable than hostility or criticism within Berkeley.

In Spring 1971 (just about the time when BUSD was drafting its experimental schools plan for submission to OE/ESP), the U. S. Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity conducted hearings in Berkeley (and elsewhere) on the progress of desegregation and its effects upon educational opportunity. The committee exhibited particular interest in Berkeley's system of educational options and seemed to regard such schools as Black House and Casa de la Raza (a Chicano school that was being proposed as part of BESP) as acceptable experiments in coping with problems of certain minority students.

Among those not present at the hearing was Senator John L. McClellan of Arkansas, a committee member. Later that year, after Black House and Casa had been approved for federal ESP funding, McClellan dispatched a letter to the Office for Civil Rights, the HEW agency charged with primary responsibility for enforcing Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. McClellan posed a question: how could OCR legally countenance such "segregated" schools as Black House and Casa even as it was insisting on desegregation of the Arkansas school system? The question seemed simple, but an answer would have been complicated--if it had been given. OCR chose not to answer this question; instead it decided to investigate the two schools and subsequently adopted the position that they could not, in fact, be legally countenanced.

McClellan's thrust and the OCR response created an embarrassing situation for HEW. In approving the BESP package, including Black House and Casa, OE ruled, in effect, that the two ethnic schools were acceptable educational experiments. Thus, it appeared that two agencies of HEW were at loggerheads. However, there was no public clash. A defense of the two controversial schools would have faced formidable political odds. Some of these were:

1. Paradoxically, in Berkeley the greatest misgivings about the two schools were voiced by committed integrationists, but in Washington the pressure against them was being applied by a traditional leader of segregationist forces. To be sure, the motivations were opposite, but just the same the practical effect was to lodge the two schools between two very heavy millstones in the educational mill.

2. A conspicuous peculiarity of American politics is a re-current bloc between Republicans and Conservative Southern Democrats in the Congress. For a Republican Administration faced with a Democratic majority in Congress that bloc is the best hope for getting much of its program through the legislative process. This was the situation in 1970-73. McClellan was an influential spokesman of the conservative Southern Democrats in Congress, and it may be assumed that the Nixon Administration would not lightly risk his displeasure.

3. Within Berkeley, as already indicated, there was a serious cleavage about Black House. The school district was not in a position to play the political trump of a united citizenry behind it on this issue. Moreover, defiance of the OCR finding that Black House and Casa, as constituted, did violate Title VI would have jeopardized not only federal funding for the two controversial schools, but all federal funds coming into the district. The district could reasonably assume that this was an intolerable price to pay.

4. Finally, the issues posed by the two schools were complex. Powerful arguments could be advanced for their validity as educational experiments, but at the same time, as McClellan clearly demonstrated, they could also be used by segregationists to embarrass the implementation of the officially adopted public policy of school desegregation. Aside from their susceptibility to use as political foils, there was also the honest conviction in integrationist circles that separatist schools at this juncture represented a retrograde step educationally and sociologically.

Considering the above factors, it would seem in retrospect that once McClellan prodded OCR the fate of Black House was sealed. But the denouement was delayed. McClellan made his move just as Black House became a BESP site and two full school years passed before it was terminated in June 1973. If local hostilities and pressures pushed Black House into a defensive position in the pre-BESP period, the subsequent federal pressures, with the power of legal sanctions behind them, magnified and solidified the beleaguered fortress mentality. Sporadic ISA observations at the site confirm that the director and staff were so preoccupied with the struggle for survival that other problems received inadequate attention. The circumstances were not designed to encourage a welcome to outside evaluators.

The most ambitious strategy devised to deflect the OCR axe was the Alliance plan. The plan, shaped over an extended time in the 1972/73 school year and intended for implementation in the Fall 1973 semester, proposed an alliance of Black House, Casa and Odyssey, a

multi-ethnic BESP site. These three off-site schools were to retain core courses for their respective student populations, and the integrity of their original conceptions. However, they were also to offer supplementary programs in which they not only shared their resources, but also utilized the facilities of BUSD common schools. "The purpose of the Alliance," the plan explained, "is to link the ethnically oriented education that Black House and Casa have developed to the multi-cultural emphasis that is offered by Odyssey and other alternatives in the Berkeley district." The core courses were to be scheduled for the morning, and the other courses, exposing Alliance students to multi-ethnic settings and multi-cultural programs, were set for the afternoon. Examples of proposed daily schedules were as follows:

A 10th-grade student at Black House would attend classes, one hour each, in U. S. History, Black Studies, and Intermediate Reading and Writing at Black House. After the lunch break he would, along with students from other Alliance sites, take Physical Education at Casa and Multi-Art at Odyssey. His final period would be devoted to a Physics class at Berkeley High, attended by other Alliance students as well as Berkeley High students, enrolled in either alternative programs or the common school program.

A sixth-grade student at Casa would take World History, Math, and Language Arts at Casa in the morning. In the afternoon he would attend a Science and a Music class at Longfellow Elementary (4-6) School.

On June 13, 1973, OCR formally rejected the Alliance proposal. OCR insisted that "no student be permitted to attend a one-race or racially isolated class for greater than 25 percent of any school day." Compliance with this condition (along with some others) would have effectively nullified the rationale for Black House and Casa, as originally conceived. At this point BUSD was threatened with non-approval of its \$2,867,735 ESP contract (for the December 1973-June 1976 period) unless the two schools were closed pending adoption of a compliance plan satisfactory to OCR. The BUSD superintendent thereupon notified OCR: "We will discontinue the operation of Black House and Casa de la Raza schools."

Having sketched the history that involved the legal right of Black House to live, we turn now to what it did (aside from struggling for survival) while it was alive.

Precise data are hard to come by. When the school closed the incumbent director retained all its records. District record-keeping was spotty. Access for evaluators was uneven and uncertain. As a consequence one must rely on the best approximations.

Black House opened in the Fall 1970 semester with approximately 40 10-12 grade students, six staff members (including the founder-director), a \$28,000 Ford Foundation grant, and cramped quarters in the West Berkeley YMCA.

With BESP funding, it moved in 1971 to more ample quarters in a remodeled warehouse-office building in West Berkeley's industrial district, bordering on Black and Chicano residential communities. The student population in 1971/72 was between 40 and 70, depending upon which estimate and which method for computation are accepted. The district attendance roster carried 40 students at Black House. But this excluded students who attended Black House classes, although they were enrolled at Berkeley High School. A BESP brochure estimated "about 60" students in this school year. ISA's Report No. 1: A Retrospective Description of BUSD/BESP from Its Inception Through June 1973 (dated September 1, 1973) put the student number at "approximately 70."

A similar uncertainty attends staff size. The central BESP office estimated that certificated staff ranged between 1.8 and 3.5 full-time equivalents in 1971/72; the district attendance office put that figure at 1.4. ISA observers reported that the classified staff roster ranged between 5 and 7 in that year, and that 6 consultants and 4 work-study students rounded out the staff. The grade spread became 9-12. The administration consisted of a full-time director and a secretary.

Stated objectives were:

1. To develop ethnic pride
2. To develop a knowledge of Black history, art, literature and culture, and a consciousness of the Black experience.
3. To create a functional relationship between the school and the Black community.
4. To help students develop self-discipline, self-awareness, self-direction and motivation.
5. To develop communication and thinking skills.

To help realize these objectives, the curriculum for Fall 1971 included such class subjects as:

African Literature	Black Philosophy	Black Music
Science	Black Art	Math
Creative Writing	Black Man	Photography
Reading and Writing	Slavery, Civil War, and Reconstruction	Rewriting Black History and Literature

Class scheduling resembled college patterns more closely than conventional high school patterns. If three hours per week were earmarked for a particular course, for example, it could be offered in three one-hour sessions, or in two 90-minute sessions, or in a block of three hours. Such flexibility was facilitated by the smallness of the overall student population and the smallness of individual classes.

Black House also experimented with what was called a "sexsemester" (six six-week sessions within the school year, three sessions in each semester). It was felt that these short but concentrated courses would be particularly useful in teaching basic skills, helping to develop a positive attitude among students by imparting to them a sense of productivity and accomplishment upon completion of each six-week session. This system was employed in the Fall 1972 semester. For the Spring 1973 semester a modification was introduced: the semester was divided into two nine-week sessions.

According to the BESP plan for the second 30 months of the program, between 80 and 90 percent of Black House students were deficient in basic skills, and consequently a primary focus of the school was on basic skills. Team teaching, small class sizes (one teacher for 15 students), and special tutors from U. C. complemented the experimentation with class scheduling and sub-division of the semester into smaller time periods in the effort to further the acquisition of basic skills.

In interviews with ISA, administrative personnel stressed an insistence on student discipline and a serious commitment to learning. It was stated repeatedly that Black House was not the place for "jiving around." To corroborate this point, there was a decision in the Spring 1973 semester to drop 16 students because they were not responsive to the program. There were also instances when students were refused enrollment because of an apparent inclination to view the school as a congenial and convenient locale for dubious activities.

In the 1972/73 school year student population was estimated (by central BESP) at about 80 and a goal of 100 students was set. (An ISA observer counted 69 students at the school in the Spring 1973 semester, 38 males and 31 females.) The curriculum retained its dual emphasis on Black consciousness and basic skills. Typical of the Black consciousness emphasis were a political economy course in Black Nation Building and a civics course called The Black Man and the Law.

Only students who volunteered (and this included those referred by counselors) were admitted to the school. The enrollment was all

Black, except for one non-Black student (a Chicano) in the 1971/72 school year. The staff was all Black throughout the school's existence. ISA observation discerned a change in student composition between the school's first year, pre-BESP, and subsequent years when it was in the BESP fold. In the first year more than half of the students came from middle-class families. This was probably due to the principal source of the initial enrollment--Community High School. In the subsequent years the students were predominantly of working-class origin, and an ISA observer estimated that about 50 percent came from single-parent families. In part, according to Black House staff, the change in composition was due to the inclination of the Berkeley High School counseling staff to view Black House as a remedial program. About 30 percent of the Black House students in 1972/73 were steered to the school by BHS counselors. The staff would have preferred a more representative cross-section of Black students, both with respect to academic achievement and socioeconomic status.

Governance of the school was lodged essentially in the director and staff who made the major decisions through consensus. Parent understanding of, and support for, the school were sought, but parents were not involved in the governing process. Nor were the students.

One must remember that Black House existed as a BESP site for only two years, and in all that time it was under constant pressure. It is tempting--but idle--to speculate about what might have been, had it lived longer, and without the OCR axe over its head.

ARTICULATION

Because of its unique and concentrated Black consciousness orientation, Black House did not readily fit into a system-wide articulation scheme. Any student in grades 9-12 could choose Black House and secure admission on a showing of serious attitude toward the school's program. Consequently all Berkeley public schools that served these grades, as well as the grades 7-8 junior high schools, were potential recruiting grounds for Black House. To be sure, students in Black Studies courses at other sites could transfer to Black House for what was presumably a more comprehensive and more intensive Black Studies curriculum, but this hardly made for a systematic articulation design.

An undetermined number of Black House students also took courses at Berkeley High School, which possessed facilities (e.g., science laboratories) that Black House did not. Here again, the evidence is that this was a matter of individual choice, and not part of an articulation pattern.

From the available data it is not possible to spell out the articulation within the school. However, students did graduate from Black House, indicating that a process of articulation was at work.

FUNDING

Because of the uncertainty that shadowed the existence of Black House from the outset it is unlikely that five-year forward funding could have been reassuring on the issue of continuity over the allotted time span.

Like administrators of other alternative schools, especially those that were off-site, Black House administrators complained about a tight budget. However, no claim was made that Black House was discriminated against in the allocation of BESP funds.

In the pre-BESP year, 1970/71, Black House was funded by a \$28,000 Ford Foundation grant that supplemented BUSD allocations. During the BESP years, BESP allocations to Black House were:

1971/72 - \$35,242

1972/73 - \$55,266

Salaries were the major item in both years. Building costs were the biggest non-salary items: \$10,000 in 1971/72 and \$18,450 in 1972/73.

EVALUATION

As noted previously the embattled status of Black House created a virtually insurmountable obstacle to objective evaluation. With the administration and staff feeling that the school was a target of hostility and distrust, and that it was threatened with extinction, a disinclination to objective in-house evaluation is understandable. Moreover, the insistent demands of the struggle for survival left little if any time or energy to design an on-site evaluation system. The circumstances were also not conducive to an open-door policy for outside evaluators, or for acceptance of institutionalized district-wide evaluation measures. On the latter score, the argument could be made that since Black House was attempting to do something that no other Berkeley school was doing, its performance could not be measured by the same yardsticks as were used for other schools. This argument was, in fact, made in rejecting the standard CTBS. The issue of CTBS, or some alternative, was being negotiated by Black House and central BESP, but the school was closed before the negotiations were concluded.

Level I did attempt to test student attitudes toward Black House, but only 18 students responded, which invalidated the test as an evaluation measure. All 18, however, expressed a very positive attitude toward Black House.

All that remains of an evaluative nature are field notes of ISA observers and several estimates by Black House personnel and central BESP. The latter estimates were offered from a defensive

position and are, therefore, vulnerable to the charge that they are self-serving.

ISA field notes describe, by and large, good morale and self-discipline among Black House students, a dedicated staff, an atmosphere of "restrained relaxation," a sense of community, and a satisfactory rapport between staff and students.

The school's founder-director made these assertions after it was in existence for seven months:

We feel that in the past months we have very definitely seen positive improvements in our students. For example, there have been measurable changes in our students' communication skills (i.e., reading, writing, speaking and thinking). Initially we had to encourage students to get over the negative feelings they had of themselves so they could admit to their deficiencies and positively work on improving them.

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Many of the changes we have implemented, we feel, are valuable to educational theory on any level. Small classrooms, a relaxing environment, informal teacher-student relations, college oriented class scheduling and, most importantly, building an educational system flexible enough so that it revolves around the student and his needs instead of the teacher and his lesson plans, are innovations essential to improving the educational system.

In a presentation of the Alliance Proposal (as an appendix to the second 30-month Plan for BESP), central BESP bracketed Black House and Casa in these observations.

The success of both schools, whether measured in terms of student enthusiasm or student willingness to pursue further education, has been remarkable. Over half of Black House and Casa graduates have gone on to post-secondary schooling; that feat is all the more remarkable when one realizes that these students were drop-outs from the regular system, literally plucked off the streets. Students at both schools report stronger feelings of self-worth, greater appreciation for their cultural



heritage, increased understanding of other groups and--perhaps most significant for this proposal--greater enthusiasm for additional ethnically and culturally diverse experiences.

As suggested previously, there might well be a self-serving edge in the above statements. They were ventured in a context of defense and advocacy. They are not buttressed with hard data. Nonetheless, they emanated from sources that had familiarity with, and responsibility for, Black House.

Perhaps the most important datum of all is that the decisive "evaluation" of Black House was rendered by the Office for Civil Rights, and customary measurements of educational performance and achievement did not enter into it (except by strained allusion to the premises of the Supreme Court's school desegregation decision of 1954). Suppose, for instance, that Black House had done fantastically well in improving the basic skills of its students, as measured by the most honored of standard tests, would this have dissuaded OCR from rendering its summary judgment? Actually, Black House was given neither the opportunity (by dint of the relentless pressure to which it was subjected) nor the time to show what it could do. Hence, pro forma evaluation is of dubious relevance.

What was, in fact, evaluated was its raison d'être, and its right to exist. We therefore deem it appropriate to summarize the arguments for the school's right to exist as expressed by the advocates of Black House in the Berkeley school system, and to append a brief observation of our own.

The principal arguments, which were contained in documents by the Black House founder, by BESP, its legal counsel, and the BUSD superintendent, may be fairly summarized as follows:

1. The Black composition of the student population at Black House was the result of choice, not system coercion. This was true for those who chose to enroll in the school, and those who chose not to enroll. Since the development of Black consciousness and Black pride were central to the school's educational mission, it is understandable why white students chose not to enroll in it. But the choice was theirs, and it was based on a perception of educational needs, not skin color, and there was no policy of exclusion on the latter criterion.

2. Related to the above, the school was constituted as it was to achieve an educational purpose. This affirmative purpose was altogether different from a negative intent of achieving racial exclusion, especially when such exclusion is coupled with a sense of racial supremacy and superiority. Both the founder-director of Black House and the BUSD Office of Project Planning

and Development (in a draft paper, dated February 1, 1971) cited evidence to support the school's educational purpose: Black students were performing poorly in the large, desegregated high school. It was, therefore, proper to experiment with alternative settings to overcome the achievement lag.

3. BUSD had implemented district-wide desegregation. This district whole was not altered essentially by the existence of parts (small parts at that) which, in the pursuit of educational diversity and experimentation to find better ways of meeting demonstrable educational needs, departed from the district norm. Moreover, these ventures were experimental, and their duration was therefore limited to a time necessary to demonstrate success or failure.

4. On a more abstract philosophical plane there is the complex issue of what integration means in practice, and what is its relationship to assimilation. When Black students are thrust into an educational environment dominated by prevailing mores, needs and aspirations of the white society, and permeated with institutional racism, some may be assimilated (e.g., those who, for some reason or other, feel competent to compete on the terrain delineated by white society), while many will be maimed or destroyed. The latter outcome is likely because of the gap between the educational setting and the communal experience and cultural frames of reference of the Black students. Furthermore, white domination, within an integrated framework, reinforces the historical patterns of white supremacy, and is therefore destructive of pride and a sense of self-worth among too many Black students. Integration without equality may be a chimera, a replication of the racist caste system in a new guise, irrespective of the sincere desire among integrationists to achieve something different and better. If, in fact, the large, impersonal, white-dominated and white-oriented setting of Berkeley High lacerates the self-esteem of some Black students and diminishes their learning achievement, then it is not only permissible, but obligatory, to seek alternative settings that are likely to produce positive outcomes. And if, in fact, it turns out that Black autonomy, which creates an atmosphere and program that are rooted in Black experience and are responsive to distinct Black needs, provides a positive alternative setting, then it will enhance the possibilities for authentic integration. That is, by instilling in Black students a proud awareness of their own culture and an appreciation of the value of their Blackness, and by consequently motivating them to realize their potential for learning, it will equip them to enter into multi-ethnic and multi-cultural situations without being submerged, overwhelmed and alienated. They will have a sufficient sense of self-confidence and self-worth, both as individuals and members of an ethnic community, to enter into functional relationships with their contemporaries on a psychological plane of equality. In this conception, the unity of integration is best achieved through ethnic and cultural diversity, including the opportunity for autonomous manifestations of this diversity.

It seems to us that the above arguments have sufficient substance to justify at least the sort of educational experiment that Black House (and Casa) represent. Of all the alternatives in the BESE fold, Black House (and Casa) were the most innovative experiments by far. We are too cognizant of the complexity of racism and racial division in the United States, of the deep historical roots of these phenomena, to offer any simple solutions for these organic problems of our society. By the same token, the illegalization of the Black House experiment strikes us as simplistic. In education, as in other spheres of American society, racism, racial division and their consequences are still so much with us that one may prudently predict that much travail, conflict, pain--and innovative experimentation--will have to be traversed before these societal deformities are overcome. In such an expansive historical and societal context, Black House is a small thing. Still, it might have perhaps offered some clues as to what could usefully be done at this historical moment to cope with problems in education that are universally recognized as staggering. Perhaps, it could have provided empirical data to shed some small light on what should not be done. We will never know.