

# Education and mobilization: The Black Student Movement faces the 21st century

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When the BSM was founded thirty years ago, the state and nation were in the midst of a transforming turmoil. It is useful to examine that era carefully for some of the same trends that were prevalent then remain with us today.

In April 1967, for example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had moved decisively to the left when he came out forcefully against the war in Vietnam. Many charged that the domestic scene had nothing to do with global affairs and, in any case, Dr. King ran the risk of alienating potential allies at home by taking a position on this controversial war. Besides, argued the critics, what did Dr. King know about international affairs anyway?

Dr. King begged to differ. He recognized that there was an intimate connection between the domestic and the global; he knew that the U.S. could not solve pressing problems of hunger, homelessness and joblessness at home as long as millions of tax dollars—and countless lives—were being wasted in a hopeless, even genocidal anticommunist war in Southeast Asia. Dr. King knew further that one of the main reasons why Jim Crow in this nation began to crumble when it did was precisely because of global pressure: how could the U.S. purport to be the paragon of human rights virtue in the Cold War competition with the Soviet Union when people of color in this nation were treated so atrociously?

Thus, Dr. King dared to sail into a stiff and bracing wind by taking a stance that was not very popular with all too many. He knew that he should not limit his demands to the four corners of this nation.

African-American students of that era also refused to limit themselves to purely domestic concerns. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was comprised of students from all over the nation. They not only crusaded against racism at home, they too campaigned vigorously against injustice abroad. A major concern of theirs was not only the war in Vietnam but the evil system of apartheid in South Africa and the wars that Portugal was waging in its "colonies" in Africa.

One of the major differences between what was happening thirty years ago and what is happening today is

that all too many have lost touch with the international scene. This is even more strange in an era when the Internet makes virtually instantaneous communication with any point on the globe possible and when supersonic transport can take us from the U.S. to virtually anywhere on the planet in 14 hours or less. Further, the newspapers are filled everyday with stories about the impact of globalization—the stock market dropped sharply recently and this nation's economy was bruised and this was attributable in part to events that have taken place thousands of miles away.

As the BSM looks forward to the next

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century, one point that should be high on its agenda is a closer focus on what's happening abroad and the connection between those events and what's happen-

ing at home.

How should this concern be translated into individual and collective action?

In the first place, students come to this campus to receive an education and this should remain a top priority. There are many things one can study at UNC but one area that all students should study is foreign languages. I would recommend Spanish, since the Latino population is growing by leaps and bounds and at some point in the next century will probably outnumber the African American population. I would also recommend French and Portuguese, since speaking those languages will facilitate living in or communicating with Africa and Brazil—the nation with the largest Black population in this hemisphere. Arabic would be useful given the importance of the nations in the so-called "Middle East." China and Japan may both have economies larger than that of the U.S. relatively soon; thus, the languages spoken in these nations are well worth studying.

Foreign languages should be studied by all students: pre-med and pre-law, history and journalism students; students of sociology and mathematics alike. In the marketplace of ideas and of business, those who speak more than one language will have a decided advantage over those who do not.

*See Education on pg. 27*