

African-American studies: teach our history?

job." Ethelbert Miller, director of the Afro-American Resource Center at Howard University, said that it is a different experience for African-American students at predominantly white universities.

African-American students, Miller said, are looking for role models. Predominantly white colleges have so few instructors, and African-American students look to take the "black class" and they get a white instructor, he added.

"The key thing is looking for a person who is a good teacher, able to be sensitive to needs and adapt to students' needs.

"Many white professors who do not take the time to study Afro-American history are sensitive to Afro-American students," Miller said.

Roberta Dunbar, a white Afri professor, said she can understand

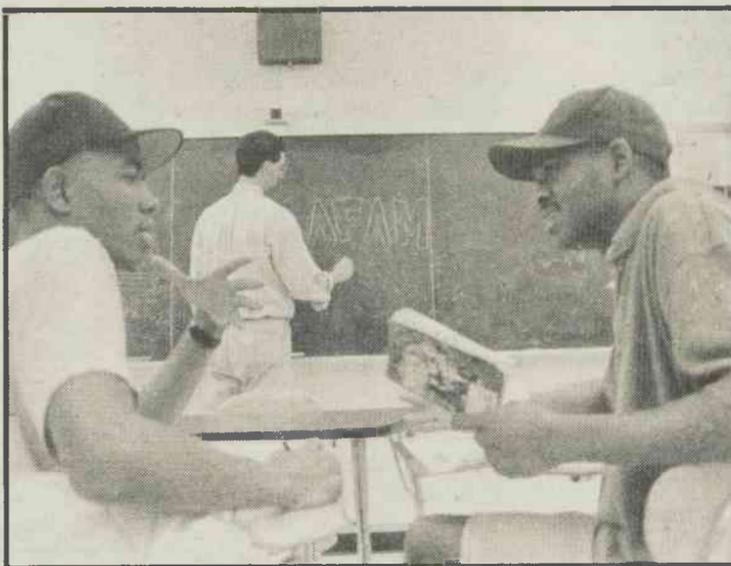
African-American students' positions on opposing white instructors of AFAM and Afri given the closeness they associate with their African heritage.

She said, "There is a role for anyone who has basically put in the work and who has attempted to press the culture on its own terms."

She added, "The study of Africa is both to appreciate one's cultural roots

and also to develop the kind of skills of observation that you would find in any social science."

This may be true for non-black



BLACK INK/COREY BROWN
Blacks say that whites cannot teach AFAM properly

students, but for many African Americans the study of their history is not just any social science. It's a showcase of where their culture has

been and how far it has yet to come.

Thomas Scott, a sophomore French and RTVMP major, said, "I believe that there are some good white AFAM teachers, but I still feel that there is always the possibility of certain biases permeating into the teaching lesson of these teachers, whether they are conscious of it or not."

"I also feel that under a black AFAM teacher I can receive a better perspective from someone who shares similar experiences in this country as myself."

Janken, however, doesn't believe that skin color should be a prerequisite. "If only Afro-Americans can teach Afro-American history, does that mean that is the only place that Afro-Americans can teach?" he asked.

"Well, what does that say about Afro-Americans teaching English or teaching sciences or teaching French? Are those white subjects that Afro-Americans have no business teaching?"

"To me, there is a lot of things that instructors, not just Afro-Americans but others, can bring to the study of Afro-American history."

In the African-American Studies Department, seven of 14 instructors are non-black. These numbers have some students infuriated with a lack of blacks within the African-American Department.

"I feel that there is a lack of Afro-American teachers at this institution, and because of that it is highly inappropriate to have a non-Afro-American teach a course associated with the black experience," said Devaughn Durham, a junior International Studies major.

Arturo Velasquez, a Latin

American Afri 40 instructor, believes, however, that Americans place too much emphasis on race. "I was born in El Salvador, and as such when I came to this country I realized that there is a different way of categorizing in this country than Latin America.

"In El Salvador we were just all El Salvadorians. It was only until I got to the U.S. that I had to pick a category of white, black, hispanic. I think that, in itself, says a lot about this country and its obsession with race. Not only is it obsessed with race, but it really doesn't address it."

He added, "The U.S., being such an insular society, it doesn't really know anything about the rest of the world. So in that sense I'm not real sure that U.S. blacks would be more qualified to teach the black experience as such.

"I've meet several blacks in this country that don't even know that most of the Africans who came to the New World were brought to Brazil and Cuba. I think that entails something about what is known in this country and what is meant by black and white."

For African-Americans, black and white in this country literally means a division of two cultures. It's a division that seems make African-Americans the lone quotient. This makes it hard to let other cultures inside, especially the white culture.

For this reason, white AFAM and Afri instructors will remain controversial on campus.

Whether or not they can teach AFAM or Afri is an issue that is purely left up to the individual. The only thing that both white instructors and African-American students can agree upon is the richness of the African-American history in American history.

As Janken said, "You can't make sense of this country unless you come to terms with the issue of race and the issue of the Afro-American experience."

VOICES

Can we teach African-American courses?

stand what it is to be black." - Kamilah Cornelius

"If the teacher is interested and has researched the subject then I believe he can get his point across." - Monique Hunt

"If the professor is truly interested in his subject then he can effectively teach the course. If it is a superficial interest then the student will not be able to get anything out of the class." - Anika Goodman

"If one talks about teaching something from an objective standpoint then anyone can study Afam courses enough so that they know an immense amount of knowledge; however, effectively teaching is not just relaying information, but also showing how the information is related

to each individual's life. If that teacher cannot relate it, then the professor has not done his job. However, this does not necessarily mean that a white professor cannot relate to his students." - Jasmé Kelly

"A white professor could teach an Afam course well although the feeling would not be present; therefore, he could not relate to the Black experience and the continuing oppression of our African-American society." - Corey Scott

"I think it is possible, but there would be something left out, something that they could not give to the course. They could not relate their own experiences with oppression which could affect the course drastically." - Anthony Peay

"I think that white professors can relay the knowledge of the African-American struggle; I don't think they can identify with the struggle the way that a black professor can. Although some may say that I was not there to participate in the struggle out of slavery, my ancestors did; therefore, it relates to me directly." - LaTonya Mitchell

"No. Why? Because they could not give you the insight a black professor could give, for they are not black. Only a black professor could relay the knowledge of the black struggle. You would go to a man to learn about a man. You would go to a woman to learn about a woman." - Tim Smith