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The Black Studies Project: Uncovering the History of the Black Studies Center at the Claremont Colleges

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2018
The Claremont Colleges Library
Undergraduate Research Award

Data Visualization Award Winner
Dray Denson
Pomona College

Reflective Essay

For my summer 2017 undergraduate research, *The Black Studies Project*, Professor Maryan Soliman of Scripps College, and I uncovered much of the history of my current major department, the Intercollegiate Department of Africana Studies. Through the resources at the Honnold Special Collections library, I collaboratively assembled a history and timeline of the Black Studies Center in the Claremont Colleges, and traced its lineage to the Office of Black Student Affairs, and the Intercollegiate Department of Africana Studies.

To be an Africana Studies major is to be imbued within multiple legacies of survival and resistance, and to commit to uncovering the historical precedents set by Afro-ascended forbearers that cause our pasts to remain visceral and present. Invaluable to my summer research was the thesis “Origin and Development of the Black Student Movement at the Claremont Colleges: 1966-1969”, by Isela D. Gutierrez, Scripps '00, who compiled an extensive history of the Claremont Colleges and the Intercollegiate Department of Africana Studies. To date, Gutierrez’s work is the only written material on the history of the Intercollegiate Department of Africana Studies, and her work mainly assesses the path taken to the establishment of the Black Students Center in 1968. Nearly 17 years later, my project took to task the aftermath of the Center’s establishment, the struggles that occurred in relation to its maintenance and funding, and the decisions that led to the establishment of IDAS and OBSA as separate institutions.

Using archival materials from the Honnold-Mudd Special Collections library, I learned how to conduct oral histories, a chronology, literature reviews, and how to analyze and digitally archive a Black student movement for an autonomous Black Studies center. Within this larger movement, and thinking in the context of movement workers like Angela Davis, Elaine Browne, and Assata Shakur, one of my research focuses was on black women in the Claremont Colleges during the mid-60s to 1968, and their impact and experiences within the movement for an

autonomous Black Studies center. Through Gutierrez's thesis, printed records of student demands, and *The Student Life* archives, I identified key black woman members of the movement for and struggles for continuance of the Black Studies Center (BSC)—Eileen Wilson PO'65, Jeanne Buckley PO'65, and Sue Houchins, emeritus Professor of the Black Studies Center from 1972 to 1994. My findings within the Honnold Special Collections library led to an eventual interview with Eileen Wilson-Oyelaran PO '65, a current trustee of Pomona College and emeritus president of Kalamazoo College. Wilson provided a wealth of knowledge about the founding of the Black Studies Center, and the imaginations of Black students, who saw potential in land near Pitzer College for a possible autonomous college for Black students. Through materials at the Honnold Special Collections library, I was able to locate the voices of Black women who organized for an institutional site that centered literature and philosophy by, and history for Afro-ascended people. Through the archival materials made available to my project, I was able to locate the imaginations of black students struggling for a center, and hopeful for a college that centered their lineages, upheld their legacies, and aligned with their visions of futurity.

To fully articulate a history of the Black Studies Center, is also to mine for the acts of resistance staged by Black students in the Claremont Colleges. In collegiate and local newspapers, papers from investigation proceedings, and demands by Black student organizers, I located evidence of sit-ins, meeting walk-outs, and planned building shut-downs as organizing tactics in favor of an autonomous Black Studies Center. In retaliation to Black student organizing, I also explored an instance of a bombing at Pomona College and at Scripps that injured the face, eyes, and right hand of a 19-year-old secretary, Mary Ann Keatley, at Carnegie. Another bomb detonated at a bathroom at Balch Hall on Scripps campus without

injuries. Approximately 80 black students evacuated on-campus and off-campus housing in light of wrongful speculation of Black students as the conspirators, and rumors of a white vigilante group, possibly headed by Mary Ann Keatley's husband, who was allegedly opposed to Black Studies and the Black Studies movement. The archival materials of the event, and Gutierrez's thesis, allowed me to identify the climate of violence in which black students lived following the establishment of the BSC, conditions that persist and continue to create an exigency for black student organizing.

In library archives, I uncovered poetry, and advertisements of film-screenings and workshops organized by Black student organizers. The media in Special Collections allowed for me to assemble a visual account of the struggle for the Black Studies Center, and its eventual evolution into the IDAS and the OBSA. Artifacts included pamphlets from one of the first full academic years of the IDAS, including pictures of Black students on the five campuses, course offerings, and professors attached to the Black Studies Center. Special Collections materials also included local newspaper advertisements and write-ups on community engagement work done by Black students and faculty in the Claremont Colleges, and within the Black Studies Center. Such community outreach included free childcare programs for local families (similar to Black Panther Party initiatives in the 1960s and 70s), screenings of films (some by Black students in the Claremont Colleges) open to the surrounding community, and Black arts festivals. Engagement with the surrounding community, and a commitment to making work, knowledge, and resources accessible outside of the academy is an intrinsic value to Africana Studies, one that was reified and constantly practiced by Black students within the 5Cs and in the BSC.

To be an Africana Studies major, is to also understand that one's department was not assembled quietly, nor without struggle, and never without galvanization by Black students and

faculty within and outside the institution. My research experience allowed me to understand the challenges of academic historicizing, as well as the necessity of surfacing and remembering resistance that shape today. Using the materials in the Special Collections library at Honnold-Mudd, I was able to gain historical accuracy and specificity with regards to the events leading up to the creation of the Black Studies Center, and the eventual progression into OBSA, and into IDAS. My research can inform the future of both institutions, by uncovering what once was, and using past initiatives to shape trajectories forward.

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Research Project
“The Black Studies Project: Uncovering the History of the
Black Studies Center at the Claremont Colleges”

Black Studies Project

Uncovering the History of the Black Studies Center at the Claremont Colleges

Researcher supervisor: Professor Maryan Soliman, Assistant Professor in the Intercollegiate Department of Africana Studies and an affiliate of the Department of History at Scripps College
Researchers: Zara Singh (SC '20), Elijah Jabber-Bey (PO '19), Dray Denson (PO '20), and Hana Oshita (PZ '18).

This project focused on the origins of the Black Studies Center at the Claremont Colleges, which, in 1979, evolved into the Intercollegiate Department of Africana Studies and the Office of Black Student Affairs. Under the supervision of Professor Maryan Soliman, researchers traced the department's founding from the formation of the Black Students Union in the early 1960s to the foundation of the Black Studies Center in 1969.

Researchers discovered a history punctuated by struggle for tangible, financial provisions and institutional recognition of black identity beyond admission. Black students organized amidst threats and bombings. Black students and faculty pushed for an autonomous center, where they could have courses that were relevant to their needs and experiences. The Black Studies Center was the hard-fought culmination of years of organizing, inclusive of the writing of demands, center proposals, demonstrations, and community-building. Black students in the 5Cs recognized the exigency in a movement for black spaces on the campuses, and for a center where they could learn about themselves away from the impositions of Eurocentric, colonial and modernity-centered curricula.

The purposes of the Black Studies project were to understand the beginnings of the BSC and the departments that descended from it, and to stitch together the histories of black student and faculty organizing, and black self-determination within institutions. Researchers recorded oral histories from professors emeriti, such as **Dr. Agnes Moreland Jackson**, Emeritus Professor at Pomona College. Researchers also used archival materials from Emeritus **Professor Sidney Lemelle**, the Special Collections library in Honnold-Mudd, Denison Library, and OBSA, and literary publications in the Claremont area. The research team extends many thanks to **Isela D. Gutierrez, Scripps '00**, for her excellent research in charting the foundations of the Black Studies Center up to 1969 in her senior thesis, "Origin and Development of the Black Student Movement at the Claremont Colleges: 1966-1969".

A Notable Event

In February 1969, two bombs detonated on Claremont campuses. One was addressed to a government professor in Carnegie Hall at Pomona, and exploded in the hands of a secretary, Mary Ann Keatley. The bomb caused damage to her right hand, her face, and her eyes. The other bomb was detonated in a bathroom at Balch Auditorium on Scripps campus and, fortunately, no one was injured.

The bombings shocked the campuses and their communities, especially black students, who were in the midst of their struggle for resources and recognition of black identity. They hurried to denounce the act, and forewent their immediate grief and shock by, as Isela Gutierrez (SC '00) reports, "[moving] quickly to reassure the Claremont Colleges that they were as shocked and disturbed by the bombing as the administration" (Gutierrez 103). Approximately 80 black students evacuated on-campus and off-campus housing in fear of retaliation by a rumored white vigilante group, possibly headed by Mary Ann Keatley's husband, who was strongly opposed to Black Studies and the Black Studies movement. Students stayed at the home of Bert Hammond, a black faculty member in the 5Cs and an advocate for black students and their movement on campus.

Following the bombing, there was a newfound swiftness on the part of the administration in pushing along the negotiations for the Black Studies Center. In a midnight meeting on March 8th, 1969, deans, faculty, and members of the BSU finalized negotiations for the Center. Headed by Donald K. Cheek as director in a surprising appointment, the Black Studies Center opened in September 1969.

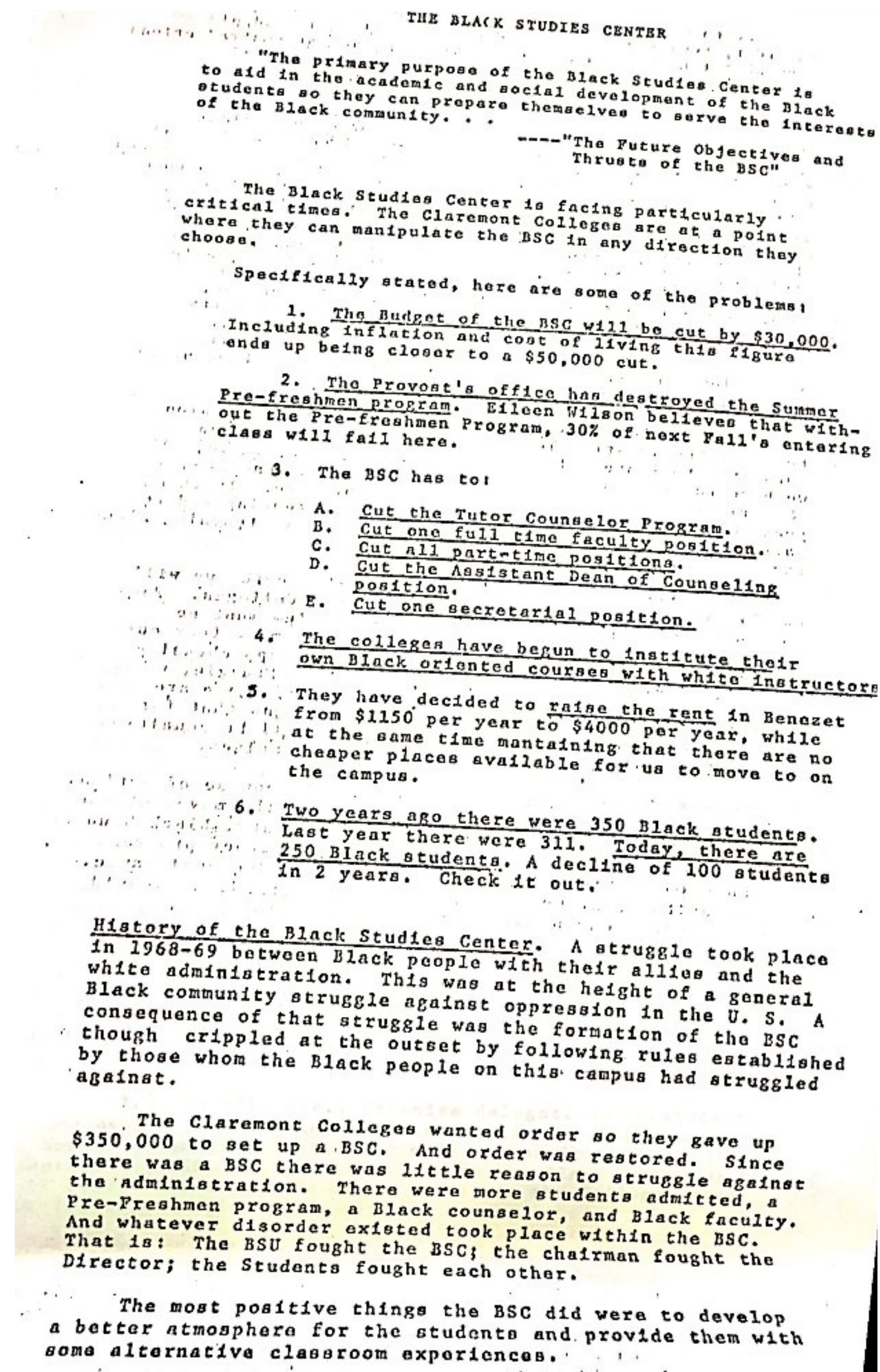
It is important to note that there exists a legacy of violence targeted towards black students, and students of color in general, on college campuses and in public and private spaces. Black students organized amidst a climate of violence that included assault, abuse by white students and the institutions alike, and regular threats of harm (inclusive of bomb threats). This legacy continues to the present, and the conditions that create an exigency for black student organizing persist.

The white power structure is one that has constantly denied the Black man a place in its economic and social structure. Society's ills have disabled, harassed and humiliated black people. The American educational system has perpetually de-educated the black child. Blacks realize that an adequate education will provide them with the basic tools to combat racism, discrimination, and unequal opportunity. The black man's lack of education has led to poor housing, job shortages, and destitution; thus giving the white man an excuse to structurally exclude the black man. The black man must redefine his position and focus on education.

The Claremont Colleges as educational institutions can and must play an important role in the re-structuring of our society. The social, cultural, and intellectual atmosphere of the colleges caters to the needs and desires of the white student, while black person is left lurking in a cultural and social void. If a black person is unable to relate to his educational surroundings, he must be in at the college level. A black student at the Claremont Colleges quickly realizes that Claremont is all white, and there is nothing to keep him here. We had a black administrator-a person to whom we could relate and a person who was honored for doing a wonderful job by all the college presidents. He was forced to leave for financial reasons. The administrator claims it wants more black administrators, yet it made no move to keep him here. Programs to recruit minority group students have been undertaken because the Administrations say that they want more minority students, but recruitment was half-time in nature and limited to the Los Angeles area. Because of these and other contradictions in the philosophy and the recruitment practices of the Claremont Colleges, the Black Students' Union demands the following:

1. We demand that an active recruitment of minority group members be initiated immediately on all the campuses of the Claremont Colleges. The aim of this recruitment effort should be the achievement of a proportional representation of minority group members for the 1969-70 academic year and every year thereafter. Each of these classes should include a proportional number of black students, Mexican-Americans, American Indians, and other minority group members. Recruitment should be implemented on the junior college level also; and that a committee be organized comprised of a representative group from each campus and the Black Students' Union to deal with this problem.

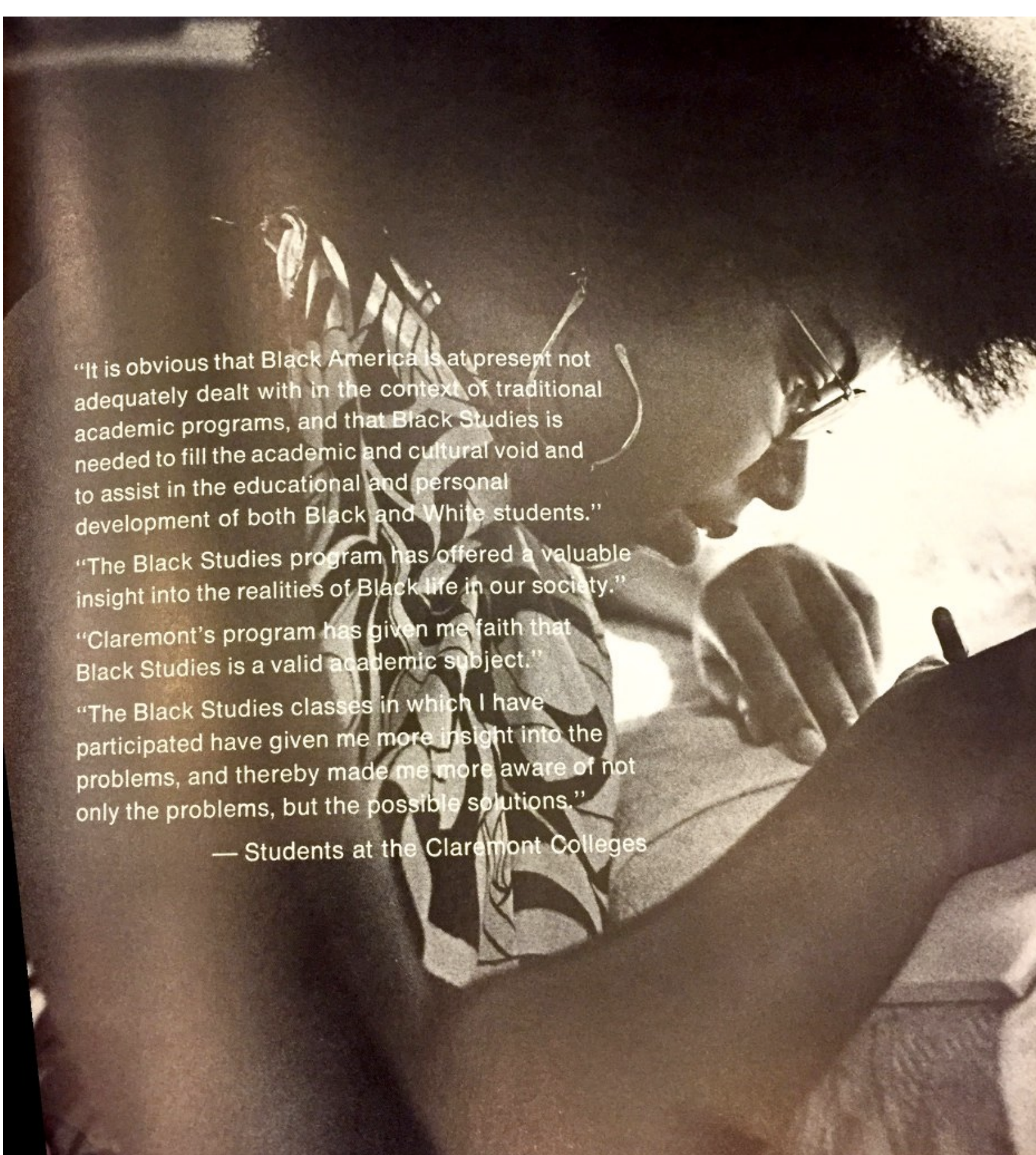
The above image is an excerpt from a set of BSU demands, published on May 1st, 1969.



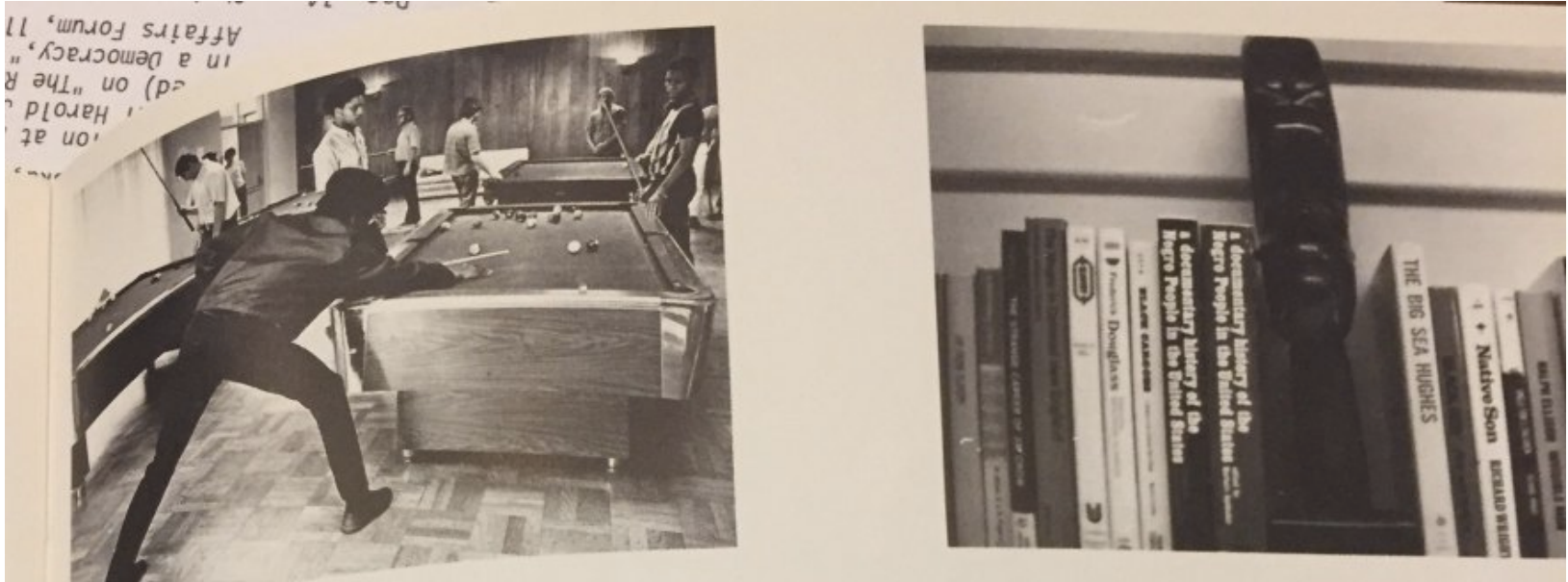
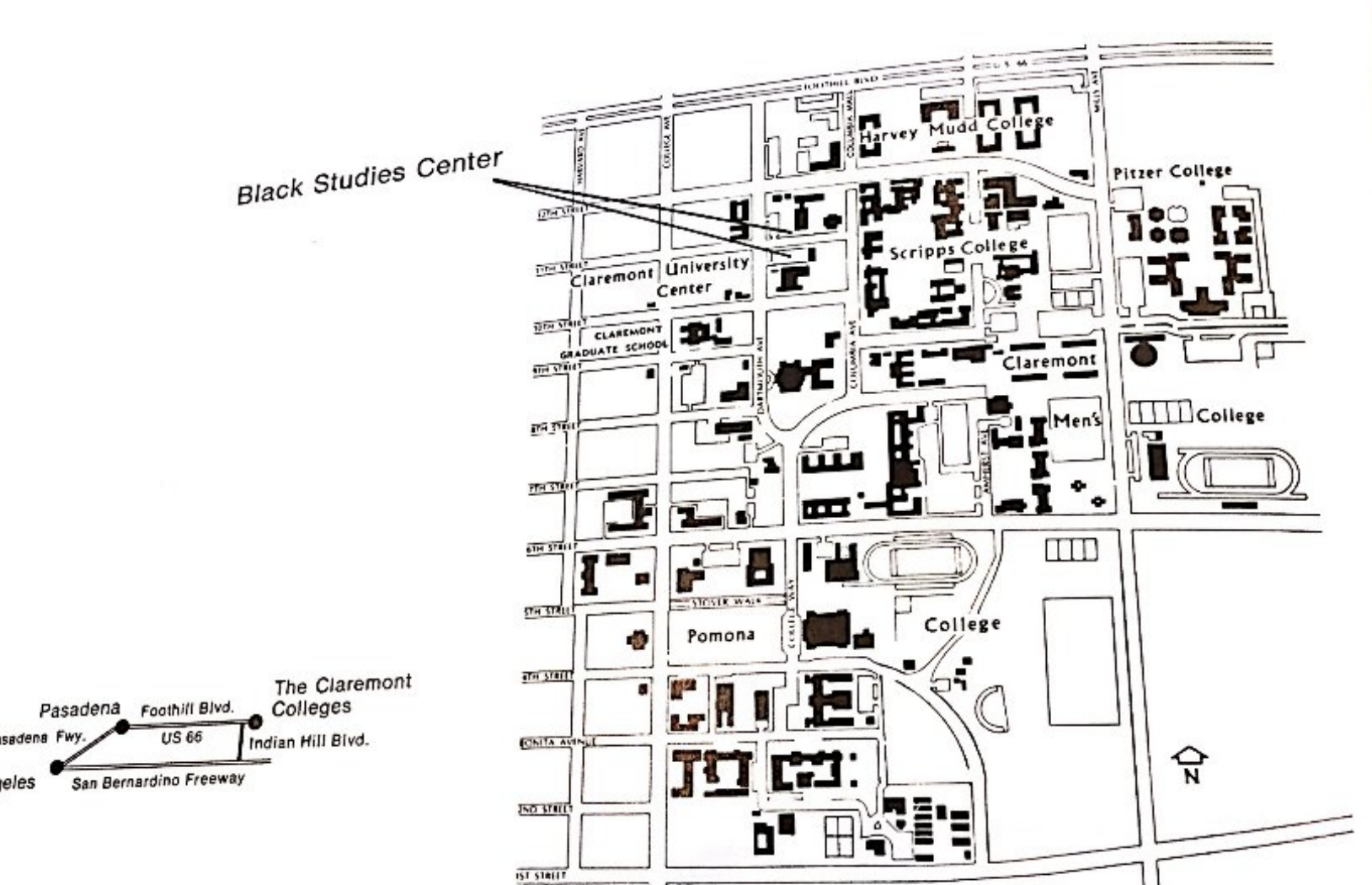
The above image is an excerpt from a statement by the BSC addressing severe budget cuts and the elimination of critical programming for black students and students of color. The Summer Pre-Freshmen Program, constructed by the Black Studies Center for pre-college, first-year students of color, specifically low-income black students. The Program was eliminated on 5/1/75 despite strong resistance from black students, faculty, BSC director Dr. James Garrett, and BSC black admissions director Camilla Browne. Garrett and Browne were terminated for participating in demonstrations, alongside students, against the budget cuts to the Center and the Pre-Freshmen programs.

The Black Studies Center did not exist without tribulations, setbacks, and threats to its very existence. BSC faculty and black students were constantly pressing for their rights to exist at the institution, and for the tangible and financial provisions to be able to do so. Funding was regularly under threat, which created difficulty in the fostering of an autonomous and unaffiliated center because the Center was reliant on the Claremont institutions for funds to continue programming, and to recruit and maintain faculty and staff.

The Center appointed 4 directors in its 9-year history: Donald K. Cheek, Dr. James Garrett, Sue Houchins (interim director) and Kuregiy Hekymara, respectively. Cheek and Hekymara resigned under black student and BSC faculty pressures in response to severe changes that were made to the structure of the BSC. Houchins served as an interim director, and returned to her position of Associate Professor at CMC when Garrett was appointed. As described above, Garrett was terminated for what the administrations termed as "gross misconduct" after her participation in a sit-in against the budget cuts in the Pendleton Business building with BSC faculty and students.

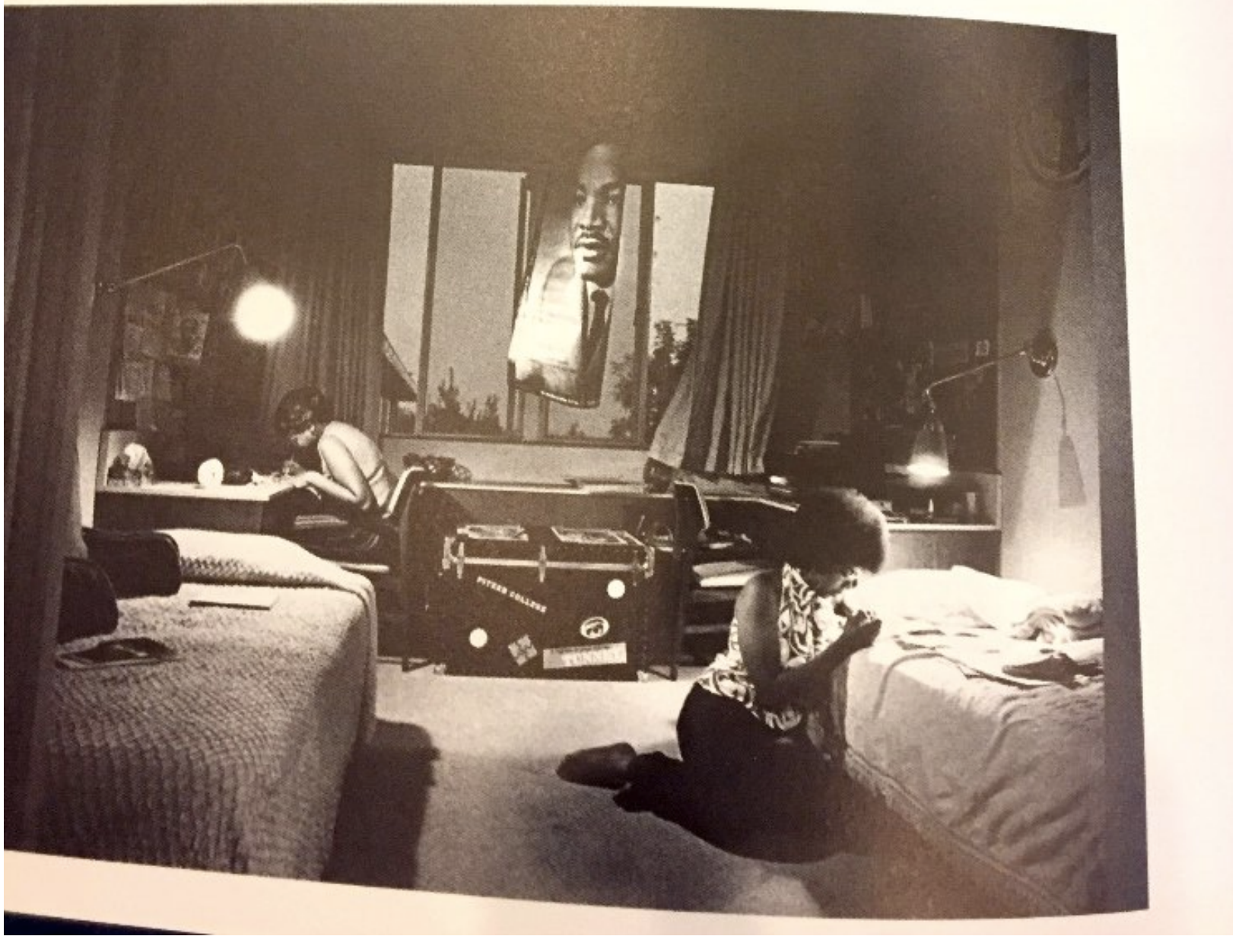
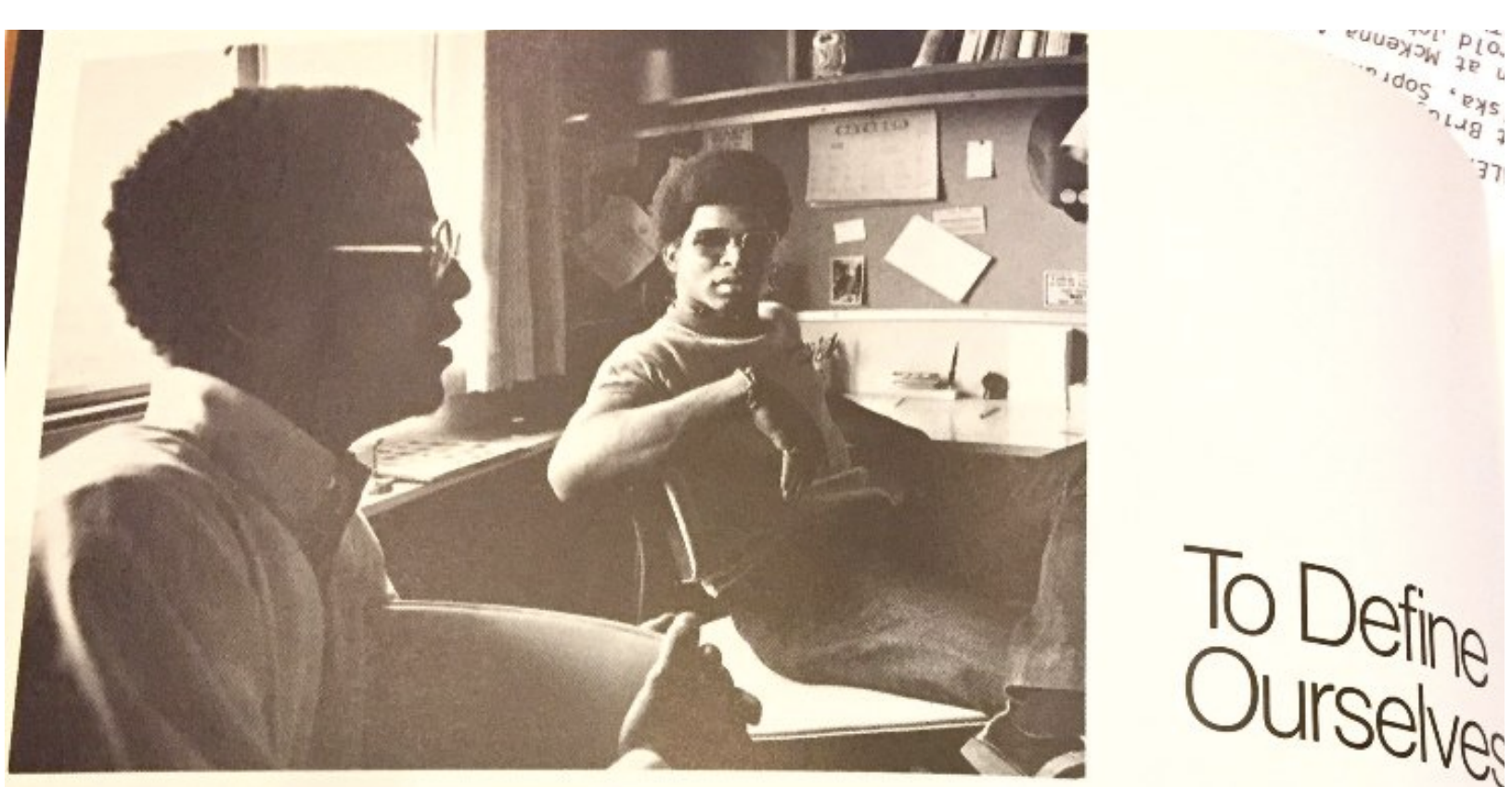


"It is obvious that Black Americans at present not adequately dealt with in the context of traditional academic programs, and that Black Studies is needed to fill the academic and cultural void and to assist in the educational and personal development of both Black and White students."
"The Black Studies program has offered a valuable insight into the realities of Black life in our society."
"Claremont's program has given me faith that Black Studies is a valid academic subject."
"The Black Studies classes in which I have participated have given me more insight into the problems, and thereby made me more aware of not only the problems, but the possible solutions."
— Students at the Claremont Colleges

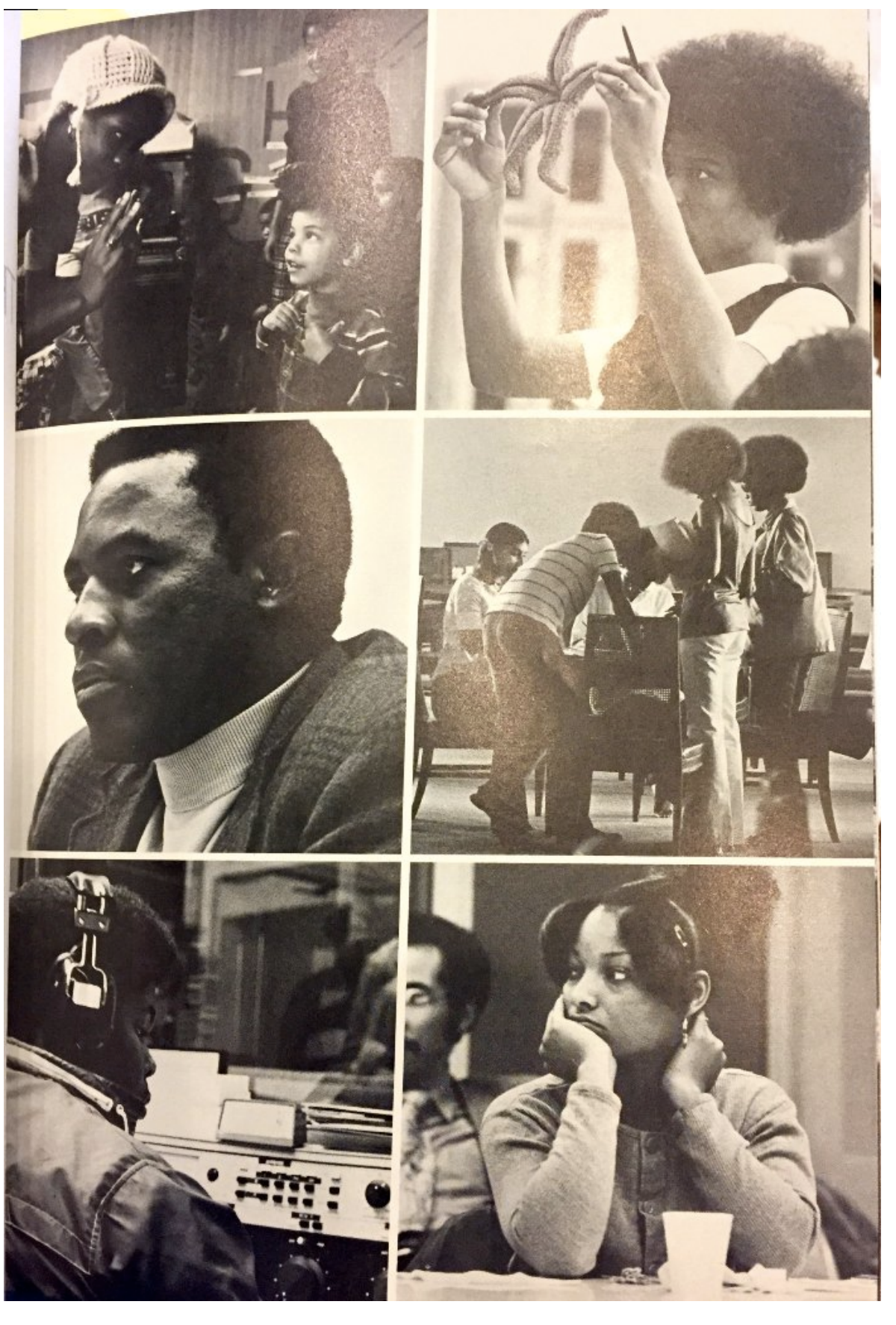


are studies in the language courses. Slavery in America, Tropical Africa, Black folklore and American history from the past to the present, as well as Black social and political thought in the United States, encompasses the history offerings. The Humanities offer a Black Theater Workshop, and wide-ranging study of the art of Black and Oriental cultures. All aspects of Black political thought are examined through eight

course offerings in political science, with the social psychological aspects of Black identity and the Black experience and the effects on race consciousness on mental health and personality being explored in psychology courses. Throughout its academic program, the Black Studies Center emphasizes high academic standards, and puts stress on research of oral history, which in many cases provides the only record of the achievements of Black people.



Above and to the right are images from a brochure by the Black Studies Center in the Claremont Colleges, established in September 1969. The BSC was autonomous and unaffiliated with the 7Cs, meaning that faculty hired through the Center were sole appointees to the BSC alone. However, the administrations of the Colleges played a significant role in the funding and decisions regarding the tenure process for BSC faculty.



Above is an image of Dr. James Garrett, director of the BSC from September 1973 to May 1975, in an edition of the Claremont College's Human Resources Institute newspaper, the Bulletin (fall 1973 edition).



Above is an image of Camilla "Mimi" Browne, former director of black admissions at the BSC.

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Concept Map

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