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Dave Barnett

Charles Jackson

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Dave Barnett and Charles Jackson
"Repression in Education: the Need for Black Studies"
December 12, 1969
Portland State University

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MODERATOR: Our speakers this afternoon are Dave Hilyard—Dave Barnett, I beg your pardon—and Charles Jackson. Dave Barnett is a Ph.D. candidate at UC Berkeley, and Charles Barnett is an undergraduate at UC Berkeley. Both of these gentlemen were original members of the organization that started the Afro-American studies program at UC Berkeley. They wrote up the original 40-course program, and they have come here this afternoon to rap about repression in education: the need for Black Studies. So, I'll turn it over to them now.

CHARLES JACKSON: Okay, first of all, I have to apologize. I hate people that do this, but I have to anyway. We really didn't know what we were going to talk about until we got here, so this is going to be kind of makeshift, because we had prepared another speech to give to another group. Okay, I'm an undergraduate at Berkeley. I've been there since 1964; I have majored in engineering, political science, economics, history, and rhetoric. OK, and so far I haven't found anything there to... that I can use to help me or do the things I want to do. So far, and I'm there... I was there first to stay out of the army, and now I'm there to pay me x number of dollars a month to go to school. There is some use for the university, and in our talk we'd like to possibly bring some of that out.

OK, we have a group down there that used to be called the "Afro-American Student Union"; it's since had two name changes. First, it was changed to the "Committee on Liberation of Death," then it was changed to "the BSU," "the Black Student Union." Back in, I guess it was the spring

of 1968, a group of us students got together, all of us, there were about 5 or 6 grad students and about 15 juniors and seniors. We got together at my house to discuss the relevance of the education we had been receiving. And at this time, at San Francisco State, they had had a Black Studies program going for 6 months. And the other colleges around were beginning to develop Black Studies programs, and we felt that since we were not getting an education from the traditional white educators, we would try to set up a mechanism to educate ourselves. So we took about two months and wrote a proposal that was about 20 to 30 pages long. And it included about 40 classes.

We included that many because we figured we would have to negotiate down to about 15 that we could handle, because we realized we would not be able to get the qualified people to teach 40 classes. After about two months we took our proposal to the chancellor. And myself and the chairman of the group at the time, who was Charles Brown, who was supposed to have been here today, but couldn't make it, and one of the vice presidents went to talk to the chancellor, and he took the proposal from us and he said he would read it, and we could come back in about a week and he would talk to us about it. So, we came back and he could find nothing wrong with it, because we had some pretty heavy cats in that group and it was a well-knit, very tight proposal. So, the chancellor said he agreed with it in principle, and he agreed that we should have it and that it would take some time, so we should not be too impatient. So we said, "OK, it's cool, we'll give y'all the time that we think you need."

So we proceeded to negotiate with about 10 different academic committees, and we found that after a while... we negotiated actually for 9 months and got nothing at all. We'd go to one committee and we'd talk to them and they'd say, "This is a beautiful program, but we can't help you. You gotta go to this other committee." And we go to them and they tell us the same thing. And what we found out after about 9 months was that we were just providing free... what we were were free consultants to the university. And we were educating *them* on the needs of Black students and on how to set up a Black Studies department. And lo and behold, 9 months later, we heard it through the grapevine that the dean of the Letters and Science Department had written his own Black Studies program.

And that was going to be what he was going to pass through the university. And not only that, but they wouldn't even allow us to sit in on the last session where they were going to vote on what they were going to keep in the program. And we happened to get a copy of the dean's thing, which had been super-secret, but we figured out a way of getting a copy. And we found that the only difference between his program and ours was that he had cut out *community participation*. Which is taboo on the university campus, and said we could not... we had written our proposal so that the junior year would be spent in the community as a participant-observer,

where the student would go in to a community program that had already been established and give whatever help he could and learn as much as he could, and then come back in his senior year, and through a senior seminar and a senior paper relate this to the other students. So, they thought that was bad, so they took that out.

And the other thing that they took out was that students could have a say-so in how the department would be run. Which goes against the University of California tradition, which says that a department runs itself, and no outside agency can tell the department how to run itself. So if the department says students can have a say-so in how it's going to be run then that's what happens. But they took that part out. And the other part they took out was, they would make our professors... they would have to have a double appointment. Which meant that not only would we have to hire them, but we would have to get another department to hire them. Which meant that they would have control over who would be in the faculty. OK, so we just rejected that as completely ridiculous. So, then we went back to our executive committee and talked it over for a while, and decided that the only thing that we could do was take it to the Black students and decide what we were gonna do. So, we held a meeting of about 500 Black students, which was the most Black students we had ever gotten together on the campus. There was about 800 to 1,000 there at the time. And it was a unanimous vote that we go on strike, and what happened later, Mr. Barnett will talk to you about that.

DAVE BARNETT: I think it's very important that we first of all point out that it was a cat-and-mouse game with the university all along. They were definitely on top of the case, some of the things... I have just written one of the things down, but I wish I could recall just the thousands from memory. One thing was that after absolutely no progress, we decided... we held sort of like a press conference and said OK, "We will go on strike." And we were trying to organize the remainder of the student body to do this. Well, the day we were supposed to go on strike, the university comes out with headlines: "Chancellor's Subcommittee on Committees and the Academic Center Committee OKs Black Studies," and right there was a well-calculated attempt to take the thrust out of the strike. The students said, "Well, they got a Black Studies proposal, and what are they striking for?" and, as he pointed out, there were several key points that the university would not make; one of those being, for instance, the joint hiring practice. We have to get a department to house our people; if we want to hire someone to teach something we have to go to maybe the English department or maybe the Economics department and get them to hire there. So, the university has a veto on who we can hire, and they had several other points where in essence the university runs the program.

Now the deal with the strike: the strike started out as a small group of people and it was like... a lot of people took the attitude that we can't do too much, we out here and just strictly going on

morale, nothing but morale. And with that small group of people we set up informational picket lines and we tried to educate the general student body. We set up... tried to set them up at key places and hand out leaflets and so on. Well, not long afterwards, maybe about 10 days, there were maybe, what, 500 cops? 500, 200, 300, there were a whole lot of cops; there were more cops on campus than us. At this time several things happened. First, when the policemen came on campus, the picket lines began to swell. The students on campus in general, as we found out later on, did not at any time deal with Black Studies, which was the dominant issue then. Never dealt with that; students dealt with the fact that the police were on campus.

And some days, I guess, we got up to... the maximum crowd we drew one day was 6,000 people on the picket line. Maybe 3,000 would have books, they're on their lunchtime break and they're marching, but after the university... with the more people that entered the picket lines, the more cops came on campus. After awhile there were a thousand, 15 hundred cops that were 2,000 National Guardsmen and reserve in Richmond, and all of the... well, one day they had the San Francisco tac squad, Oakland police force, Alameda County sheriffs, the Berkeley police force, the UC police force; the National Guard rolled in.

[inaudible comment off-microphone]

Yeah, yeah... Orinda, sometimes probably a few off-duty cops, and several other things. And this kind of thing went on for about 7 or 8 weeks. People come out and they set up a picket line, the policemen come out and chase the people away, and as you know Berkeley is huge campus, and so it was this cat-and-mouse game around for about 7 or 8 weeks. And it got to be like a game, I mean really, a game. People, as I say, the students in general, if we would hold a meeting and try to discuss these issues and explain them to the general student body, if we would hold a meeting at 10 o'clock we might get 100 people. But when 12 o'clock comes, that's time to play throw the rock at the policemen, and we'd get 3 or 4 thousand. And when 2 o'clock comes, then it's time to go home, so... the policemen would leave first. They'd leave first and then the crowd would go home. After the police is gone. The people that are supposed to be supporting.

The point that I'm trying to make is that in this track, the issues were lost. The people dealt with... they dealt with the police, they did not deal with the issues. There was no hope of any kind of success in terms of winning a victory against the policemen, and subsequently, as C will talk about later in the People's Park, that was probably completely drawn out in Berkeley as any kind of a strategy at all. Trying to deal with the policemen out in the streets. And what eventually happened was that after about 7 weeks of running around, I guess somebody at the university, the chancellor's office, got smart and said, "Well, look, when the policemen leave

the people leave, if we want to take everything out of this issue, just withdraw the police.” So, that’s what they did. They phased out the policemen and subsequently they phased out the strike. Another thing that had happened as this was going along was that everybody in our organization had felony charges against them. Up to 4 counts; and everybody in our organization was either in jail or they had a warrant out for their arrest.

And I was working with the bail fund, and I think we used maybe 100 and some thousand dollars just in bail. Just that it was, it was just... this is just another thing about the people losing sight of the issues. I worked with the bail fund in about the middle of the strike, and by playing this game you get concerned with everyday it’s a full time job just to get enough money to try to go out and get people out of jail. And you can no longer deal with the issues. So, what eventually happened was that the support fell down as the policemen phased out, and at the end of that, our ranks were decimated and we didn’t have any support. Students, no support; and the only way that the people would deal with the issue again would be to go out and try to enter the game. Go out, throw some rocks at the police, and then you could get a crowd. But that’s, again... and so far as meeting the demands, that strategy is worthless. It never received any endorsement from the group but sometimes things just drift that way.

So, I guess, about a week... after about 9 weeks, there was a moratorium called on the strike. The strike was temporarily suspended, and the university, at this time, they took this as surrendering. Okay, we see you give... you surrender, and at this time they became very aggressive, more people were jailed, more people were suspended, more people were put on probation, more people were threatened, and more people were threatened with money. There would be no talks of any amnesty and there was just a general attitude prevailing: “You’ll be lucky if you get the original proposal we wrote up.” And I will let Mr. Jackson attempt to carry on from here.

JACKSON: What we are trying to do is, we’re trying to give some examples of the types of repression the university comes up with, and then we’ll try to tie this together at the end. So, shortly after we called the moratorium on our strike, there was another thing that happened. Most of you probably read about the People’s Park thing, which the University of California was prominent in. And what happened was that there was this old vacant lot that was essentially a mud hole; when it rained it just was miles and miles of mud. So what happened, there used to be a lot of what we call hippies hanging around on Telegraph Avenue, and every other day the town newspaper, “The Gazette,” would write some article about how “the hippies are bringing down the image of Telegraph Avenue,” and hippies doing this and hippies doing that. “Hippies should be taken off the streets.” So what they did, the hippies themselves said, “Okay, that’s cool,” so they went right around the corner and took this vacant lot and brought in some dirt

and filled it in, and brought in some swings and things and turned it into a park and a meeting place.

Okay, it just so happens that this land happened to have been the university's land. But the university had no plans to use this land for two years. And in two years they were going to build a dormitory on it. Okay, so actually what the hippies did was bring the property value up, because it was just a desolate area until they took it over. So, some old lady called into the university and said that the hippies shouldn't be there. So then another crisis developed; the university had to do something. So, they called the people in and they asked them to leave. And the people said, "Why? We're not doing any harm. As a matter of fact we are doing a lot of good." The university said, "OK, we will negotiate about it." So they undertook negotiations and the vice chancellor, who is no longer there anymore but he was—let me explain, the chancellor and vice chancellor had a very slick game going with the University of California. The chancellor would be sort of aloof from everything, and the vice chancellor would be the one to go out and tell the students lies. And they had a thing where they would never be at a meeting together. So, if you said, "The vice chancellor said this," the chancellor would say, "Well, I wasn't at that meeting, so I don't know what he said." And if you say, "The chancellor said this," the vice chancellor would say, "Well, I wasn't at that meeting, so I don't know what he said." They keep their lies apart, and in that way they could keep you at the table for 3 or 4 months.

So, after a while the people just said, "Well, look, we are tired of negotiating." They offered to rent it from the university and they offered to try and get the city to buy it from the university. They offered all kinds of solutions to the problem. The university said, "We can't do that." So then the vice chancellor came out one day and said—a rumor had been spread that that the university was planning to move on the park and fence it off—so the vice chancellor came out and said, well, we will give you ample notice before we do anything about the park. OK, 24 hours later at 4:00 in the morning, about 800 cops arrived at the People's Park. When everybody arrived on campus that morning there was this big fence around it. People were outraged, and shortly after that, that afternoon there was a rally, and the students said, we are going to march down to the park and have a rally there and a show of strength that the students really want that park.

So they started marching down Telegraph Avenue, and the next thing you know, a group of cats—we call them the "blue meanies" because they wear these blue jumpsuits and all weigh about 200 pounds and they get their kicks out of hitting people upside the head—so they opened fire on everybody. They said the students were throwing rocks and things. I was there and people were just milling around, and nobody was throwing any rocks. And the next thing you know, all this gunfire, and [James] Rector got killed and 3 or 4 other people. One guy got

blinded in one eye and 3 or 4 other people got shot with buckshot. The university came back the next day and said, "Well, we didn't do that. We didn't tell them to shoot you. We didn't have anything to do with that." They refused to even deal with the fact that they called the police originally. They went through a big long strike-like thing there and nothing came out of it.

So the university decided they were going to put a soccer field out there, and they built a soccer field and the students refused to use the soccer field. And then they built a parking lot and the students refused to use the parking lot. So they got this big vacant lot that they spent 35,000 dollars on, it's just sitting there with about 6 Burns guards standing guard on it night and day, and nobody ever uses it. The university said, "Well, that's the way things go."

It's those kinds... I could go on. I have been in Berkeley since '64, and I have seen FSM and VDC and all those things, and the pattern is the same with the university. They won't make a move at all until the students try to initiate something. The university is just a passive institution. But as soon as the students come up with an innovation—well, not as soon, because the university is slow—a couple days after the students come up with an innovation, then the university starts its repressive mechanisms and then it starts into double dealing, double talk. It's like a big blob, it's really hard to even deal with it because it has so many various parts.

And if you go and address one part, they'll say, "Well, I can't help you. You'll have to go over here." And if you go over there then they'll say, "You have to go over here." And they will keep you running around all the time. If you try to attack one part, then they will sort of surround you and bring in the police and give the police permission to do just about anything they want. And then they will cop a plea and say, "Well, we didn't have anything to do with it. That was the police."

[inaudible comment off-microphone]

Yeah, the university was very slick. They brought the National Guard on campus one day. The National Guard has these gas machines that they carry on their backs, and they also had their bayonets, which freaked everybody out. Even the professors got freaked out that they came on with fixed bayonets and loaded guns. And they started marching around the campus; like in the university we have what we call Sproul Hall Plaza which is sort of an enclosed area, it has about 4 ways in and 4 ways out. And it's easily blocked off. So one day about noon the National Guard started... there were a bunch of people just milling around. There had just been a rally; I guess it was about 1 o'clock and the rally was over at 1:00. And the National Guard came in from the west side and the university police came in from the east side. They had the Alameda police coming in from the north side and the Berkeley police coming in from the south side. And then

they just stood there. They had riot guns and fixed bayonets and everything, and they wouldn't let anybody leave. People say, "Look, I want to go home." "I'm ready to go." And then they just stood there, and the people and started asking, "Why are we are standing here?" And the next thing you know you hear this helicopter coming. And all of the police and the National Guard had gas masks on. And there you had a couple of thousand people just in the middle of this square, and the helicopter came in and started going back and forth gassing everybody. And after they thoroughly gassed people they let them go home. [laughs]

And then you try to fix responsibility, and the Alameda County police, the sheriff who was supposedly in charge of the military operation said that he didn't order it. What's his name... I think his name is General Armstrong, who is the head of the California National Guard, said he didn't order it. The chancellor said he didn't order it. The Berkeley police officer said he didn't order it. They don't know what happened. But all they know is it was a very well-coordinated operation. And they gassed about 2,000 people.

The students learned a lot, but I don't think they really took it to heart. Because students at Berkeley are just apathetic as they've always been. They tend to be very issue-oriented and they never do anything at all unless there is some kind of crisis. And usually what happens is one group, a very small group of students will come up with an issue and say, "We gotta do something." And they'll start doing something and the university starts its repressive mechanism, which means bringing on the cops. Then that alarms the rest of the students, they get in, then the more students, the more cops. The more cops the more students. And eventually you have the university community just polarized. Between... usually administration on one side, half the faculty with the administration, the other half with the students. And the cops come in and say they are in the middle, but actually they are the arm of the administration.

So, Dave's going to talk to you a little bit about some of the conclusions that can be drawn from what we've seen in Berkeley.

BARNETT: Well, one thing I guess that's hard to communicate, looking at the nice calm campus, is just how Berkeley has been for the past two years. In the spring, each day I went on campus, for two days maybe, I would get up in the morning about 6 o'clock and look at myself and then maybe choose another hat, and always some type of pull-over hat. Something that is very obvious, because I wanted to try to look very different from the way I did the day before. The university's strategy—you couldn't imagine—the only way it was different from actual warfare was that they didn't come out shooting, they ended up shooting. But they didn't come out shooting. And the actual strategy was to come out every day and surround the people and try

to effect some type of charge against them. And of course they had roving vans of plain clothes and so on, to rip off individual people.

And that's the category I fell under. And like, many days I had to outrun and so on to deal with the cops. But rather than get off on that, I want to try to make some points here. The first point that we would like to try to make is first, how the issues—just in general when students try to effect change—how the issues become lost. If you look at... if you examine any situation, any issue that has come up on the college campus, you'll see the issue, the small number of people, the repression with the police, then the masses of people, then large numbers of students; and the large numbers of students are with the issue until they get... let's say a large enough dosage to sort of ease their conscience. It's like they never have any sight of the issues; they go and then they say, "Well, look man, I got a blocking the sidewalk charge against me, I better be cool." Or "I've been suspended, I better be cool." Or "Finals are coming up, I better be cool." Or so on and so forth.

And what you end up with—in trying to wrap this little movement up—what you end up with is trying to bail people out. Right now we're still dealing with people going to court on felony charges. Sid Marcias, a member of the Mexican-American Student Confederation, he was just sentenced to 9 months in jail for hitting a cop on the club with his head. [laughter in background] Any number of witnesses, if you go back and find the *Daily Cal* issue for that day, Sid stayed in a coma for what, about 36 hours? He was in a coma for about 36 hours; they did not know whether or not he was going to live. About a 250-pound "blue meanie" just came up behind him, hit him, and of course he went unconscious, so they also charged him with resisting arrest. [laughter]

He was the leader of the Mexican-Americans, so... they can send out the individual squads to rip the leaders off, and they can in general use mainly mild measures; generally, people that participated got arrested with something like blocking the sidewalk. And just give them a little sting, not counting the getting hit upside the head. You have to deal with how are students going to effect change. Why is it that every time we have an issue or movement, it happens like that? Is that something... is that just a coincidence? Or is it some kind of well-planned thing? Why would the university want to repress the students with police in the first place, and who is the university?

If you deal with who the university is, if you deal with in any case... when they have an issue and you deal with who the university is, it's always "such and such says this, and of course the board of regents say this." The board of regents, the chancellor, maybe the president. The university has a very... Issues that seem like they wouldn't involve the university, the university

is very much involved with. Like if, after a while, we really started to deal with what we were working on, just Black Studies, we'd sort of like become a little lost in that. And you wonder, after so many things happened, you wonder why would the university try so hard to repress Black Studies? It's not like it's a whole lot of money involved, they might even give up more money on something... on another kind of issue.

But the whole thing would revolve around simply what kind of education the university wants you to have. And who is the education to be relevant to? Like I realized myself after a couple of years on the Ph.D. program in mathematics that after I finished, outside of making money by—not that I don't want money—but outside of making money there was nothing I could do with it. I could be absolutely... the education in itself would be absolutely worthless. I could go to IBM or I could go somewhere and teach. Those are the two things you could do with a degree in mathematics. You could be a computer programmer or you could be a teacher.

And it's like you have a well-placed little slot cut out for you, and the university is going to make sure... the people who run the university are going to make sure that the university continues its function of putting you in that slot. The university does not want anyone questioning the relevance of their education; they don't want you going around thinking, *how is my education is relevant to me?* They want you to think how it's relevant to them. Because your education is *not* relevant to you. If you think about what's going on inside your classes, like to teach... when people say they are teaching or they have good teaching methods, and what they mean is that they have developed little games that people actually enjoy when dealing with irrelevant material. And the material that you deal with is largely irrelevant; that is, when you get over into the humanities and the social sciences. And the material that you deal with in the sciences, you got one thing that you can do with it.

You can go out and build some ICBMs and some ABMs and so on and so forth. And they actually aren't relevant to anything either, except putting some money in a major corporation's pocket. If you deal with the fact that with all this multimillion-dollar radar system and so on, the cat over in Cuba decided he wanted to split and he flew right over and nobody knew it until he landed. He flew right over; they say, "Well, he flew under it or something..." [faint laughter in background] I mean, it's largely irrelevant, but that's a game.

If they can't make those things, then, after a few years GE might find itself irrelevant, and a few other major corporations. The university is going to make sure that this thing runs smooth. They don't want people questioning the relevance of their education. If I as a Black person look at a social science class or a psychology class and say, "Yeah, this is interesting. But when I leave here, how can I attack the problems that affect me?" If I'm going to deal with an economics

course, I don't want to know about Adam Smith. Damn Adam. I want to know about the cat who's coming down to my community and leaving home every evening with his money bag, taking it somewhere else. Explain that to me. Well, the university clearly doesn't want me to question... to try to deal with those types of questions, to try to make my education relevant. They don't want anyone doing that.

This, as we found out in Black Studies—not so much Black Studies—the university would gladly write you up a multi-million dollar course with Swahili 1-16 and Afro-American Art 1-10. But if you... if some of the things that we had in there, written to the proposal, “Student goes to the community his junior year and does research, and deals with the problems where he finds them.” Deals with the relevant... what is affecting this community? Why is this community like it is? Where is its economic potential? Just what's happening here? Then the university definitely... it's not in its interests. And I think it's time for students to start realizing, to use a phrase that has been used a little before, “you're taking your case to the criminal” if you think that you're gonna get the university to realize that something that's in its interests is clearly not. I mean that's like a man coming along and robbing you, and if you look at, for instance, the university board of regents, which is basically made up of big politicians and big industrialists, if you look at their board of regents you clearly see that they are the people.

They are the problem. You cannot expect the criminal to say that it's in his interest to be punished. He's not gonna do that. I think students are largely, with the present issues, I think the students are largely very, very naïve about the things that they deal with. I think the students should realize... Students in general, they want to take on this oppressed complex, well, you know, “I am one of the oppressed.” And I know that's bull; how can I as a student, as a student, be one of the oppressed when I can go to school, which is largely a game, and do better materially than people that are out working 10 hours a day? I know that's bull, that as a student I'm one of the oppressed. And I also know that I can't even say that I am one of the *least* oppressed, because I am getting primed to be one of the oppressors. I am getting primed to go into the oppressor class.

The students now, the people in this room right now, they are gonna be the people 10 years from now who are the administrators of this society. They are going to be the people 10, 15, 20 years from now. I mean, as we saw—you can even see that happening on a small scale in a certain movement where we might start out and we expect—you want things to be a certain way, like we had certain goals and ideas about the movement, and you find people entering into it. And a person might, for instance, in Black Studies a person might easily become hung up with his job as director and immediately his interests begin to lie with the university. His interests might begin to lie, “How can I keep a 10, 15 thousand-dollar job every year?” and so

on. And until people realize that, until people begin to look at the issues as they really are and deal with the issues as they really are and just say, "Well, I see how the sides are cut out, and I want to be on this side because I think this is a winner." Or, "I want to be on this side because my conscience dictates such."

Until people deal with things like that, and stop dealing with the issues as lunchtime issues but as issues that will affect them for the remainder of their lives, there may be very little change that students are going to be able to effect. I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Jackson and then wrap it up.

JACKSON: Are there any questions? We have to split sometime in the next 5 minutes.

[inaudible question in background, off-microphone]

Okay, the issue for students is that the university is the vanguard of the oppressor. It is the one... essentially, that's what I think what you're talking about. The university is the one who trains the people, the political scientists, the economic... economists, the military scientists, the criminologists. The people out there really doing the oppressing. The university is training oppressors; that's the issue students have to deal with. Are there any more questions? Okay, if not, thanks for listening.

[program ends]