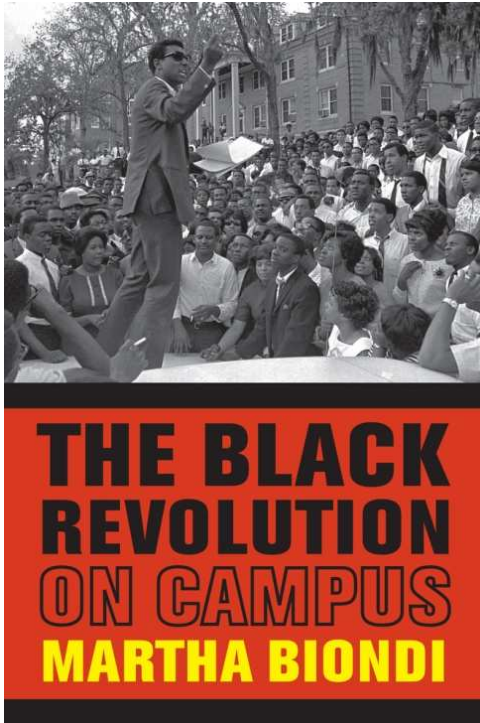


# The Black Revolution on Campus

A review of *The Black Revolution on Campus* (University of California Press, 2012) by Martha Biondi by Maurice Adkins (adkinsmu@mail.uc.edu), a PhD student in the Department of History at the University of Cincinnati.



As an Associate Professor of African American Studies and History at Northwestern University, and the recipient of numerous awards for her publications on Black student organizing and education reform, Dr. Martha Biondi combines her work in these two fields in this extraordinary, exciting, and informative book titled *The Black Revolution on Campus*. In general, Biondi's book provides an incredible new look at the Civil Rights movement that gives homage to the thousands of student activists who fought for the transformation of our nation's higher educational system and helped to bring to the forefront numerous Black Studies departments, programs, and divisions. Specifically, in this powerful volume the author discusses the growth of the Black Power movement after the assassination Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the various responses of hundreds of minority students on numerous college campuses in the United States which ultimately led to the realignment of various arguments and students revolts against international wars, the movement for equal educational opportunities, and a more responsive and inclusive higher educational system.

Using a cadre of oral interviews and archival research, Biondi gives a thorough account of hundreds of student protests events that took place across the nation that rested on the similar mission of economic and educational equality. Many of these student protest activities also had the same outcome that included several episodes of police brutality that took place at a variety of campuses such as San Francisco State College, Northwestern University, South Carolina State University, Southern University, and North Carolina A&T State University. Nevertheless, the overall goal of the student protest movement on these campuses were to change prevailing educational system that they felt was inherently against them. Thus, according to Biondi, "At stake was the very mission of Higher education. Who should be permitted entry into the universities and colleges? What constituted merit? Who should be the future leaders of the nation in this post segregation era, and how should this group be determined? What should be taught and who should teach it? Perhaps most controversially, should students have a hand in faculty selection or governance?" (p. 1).

As noted in “Introduction” of the book, this volume contains eight chapters and a conclusion section that chronicles the events from the rise of the Black Power movement on various college campuses after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., to the overall effectiveness in transformative aspect of numerous major universities through governmental policies during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Following the conclusion section of the book, the author provides the reader with an annotated “Notes” section and a “Selected Bibliography” which lists and describes the various historical sources used in each chapter. This volume also contains an “Acknowledgement” section in which Biondi describes the incredible experience she had working with and meeting some the student-activists who were involved in this powerful movement.

In regards to the construction of the book itself from a content standpoint, in general each chapter of the volume provides detailed information into the internal and external struggles for the creation Black Studies programs, departments, and divisions which was linked to the increasing African American student participation, ownership, transformation of the United States’ higher educational system. Furthermore, the title of each chapter was carefully selected so it would be aligned with the overall theme of the book. For example, the first chapter, titled “Moving toward Blackness: The rise of Black Power on Campus,” explains the origins of the revolutionary movements starting in the mid-1960s. Within these pages, Biondi examines the plight of “Negroes” from different socioeconomic backgrounds and how they dealt with the struggles of going to Traditional White Institutions (TWI’s). Furthermore Biondi examines the increase in black militancy after the deaths of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X as well as the origin of various student led African American Civil Rights groups, such as the “Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the “Black Student Union” (BSU). According to the author, these groups fought intensely for the creation of Black Studies programs, departments, and divisions at numerous predominantly white colleges and universities institutions as well as pushed to change black higher educational institutions to focus on African American issues instead of what they deemed as the institution working to train Black students to conform to the standards and culture of white America.

In second chapter, titled “A Revolution is Beginning: The Strike at San Francisco State,” the author takes the reader into one of the first student-led movements for the creation of a comprehensive Black studies program, which took place at San Francisco State College, where the students received a strong push back from the administration as well as from the state government of California, under the Governorship Ronald Reagan. More specifically, the Black Student Union (BSU) organization at San Francisco State demanded that immediate action be taken to create a Black Studies department with full-time faculty who would have complete control of the department in which Black Americans students would help to select each faculty member and the curriculum of the program itself. However, the university’s administration pushed back fearing that the department would be isolated from other departments on campus and the curriculum would be too radical.

The theme of Black Student activism and the somewhat extreme push-back of university administrators in the creation of Black Studies departments, programs, and divisions continued to be examined in the third chapter titled “A Turbulent Era of Transition: Black student and a New Chicago.” In this chapter, Biondi examines the struggles of black students to create such departments and programs at several local colleges and universities in the Chicago area, such as Northwestern University and Crane Junior College, whose name eventually was changed to “Malcolm X College” primarily as a result of the larger Civil Rights Movement.

While in chapter four, titled “Brooklyn College Belongs to Us: The Transformation of Higher Education in New York City,” Biondi examines the black student struggle for open admissions, as well as the abolishment of the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) and Grade Point Average (GPA) requirement that had been in place for decades at the publicly funded “City College of New York,” in chapter five, titled “Toward a Black University: Radicalism, Repression, and Reform at Historically Black Colleges,” the author takes the reader into the struggles for changing numerous historically black universities and colleges (HUBC’s) from white administratively dominated higher educational institutions into facilities owned and operated by black academics who held and shared the responsibilities of the operating the college or university itself with its African American student population.

In Chapter six, titled “The Counterrevolution on Campus: Why was Black Studies So Controversial?,” the author describes the external and internal fights within the Black Studies movement which rested on whether students should have a say in the hiring process, and should they be required to pursue a second major while majoring in Black Studies. In the next chapter, titled “The Black Revolution off Campus,” the reader is taken into the commercialization of several Black Studies programs and departments. More specifically, Biondi discusses how Black American scholars worked together to produce and honor numerous African American scholars who had played a significant role in organizing and educating the black community on a variety of important and crucial topics. In the final chapter, titled “What happen to Black Studies,” and the “Conclusion: Reflections on the Movement and Its Legacy,” Biondi describes how the current numbers of Black Studies programs and department can continue to function and thrive for decades in the today’s higher education climate. Of particular importance in this section is the author’s pointed discussion on the possible, eventual link between Black Studies and African Studies programs and department as well as the history and experiences of Black women within these academic ventures, which most times was not pleasant.

In general, Martha Biondi’s *The Black Revolution on Campus* takes the reader through a plethora of closed door discussions as well as intellectual fights amongst numerous Black student leaders during the Black Studies movement. Indeed, the author presents a timely text that not only provides homage to those who fought in the struggle, but also explores the arguments and justifications of individuals who were unable to vocalize their thoughts to those who were against the movement.

Moreover, the title *The Black Revolution on Campus* not only exemplifies the true meaning behind this revolutionary movement, but simultaneously shows us the various struggles for the construction of Black Studies programs and departments that took place among thousands of minority students who attended predominately white institutions as well as at HBCUs.

This volume also held the reader's interest with its discussion of both well-known and obscure student protest events that had a violent outcome, such as the massacres in Greensboro, North Carolina, and Orangeburg, South Carolina, where several African American student protesters were killed. Biondi also illustrates how the Black Studies movement, characterized by massive protests, went beyond the classroom and into the local Black American community to create some its most powerful partnerships and outcomes. For these points alone, the book *The Black Revolution on Campus* should be on the reading list at every college campus in the United States.