"Black Experience" may be first step

By Walter Middlebrook

As indicated by its name, a "Black Experience in Science and Technology" is exactly what took place on MIT's campus last weekend. More than 200 Black faculty, administrators, community and Sloan Fellows, and students participated in the event held February 3 and 4.

This conference may have been a first for MIT but what we're hoping is that this won't be the last, is the message one gets from talking with Naomi L. Smith, Assistant to the Dean for Student Affairs. The "Experience" proved to satisfy the major objectives set forth by its coordinating committee. These objectives were: 1) to provoke the awareness of the issues related to some aspects of communication, economic development, health care, and transportation; 2) to afford the opportunity for Black students to meet other Blacks, particularly in the Boston area, who are engaged in a variety of challenging professional pursuits; 3) to provide the opportunity for Black students to receive information about the technical and non-technical needs and considerations of our urban communities; and 4) to investigate the potential for the Black community's involvement in educational, job-related, and volunteer activities.

The committee, which consisted of about 25 students, faculty, and staff, set about obtaining these goals by arranging a two-day program allowing participants to attend general sessions of the body, buffet lunches, and smaller workshop sessions. These sessions were all coordinated by noted speakers who spoke on topics related to the goals of the conference.

The opening session of the "Experience" was addressed by Mr. Samuel F. Middlebrook, a Professor at the Howard University School of Journalism, has been in a focused and rather controversial dialogue with Newsweek Magazine. At one time he was the only Black assigned to the Washington bureau of the magazine, but according to Newsweek became "unacceptable as a reporter on the scene" evaluating the question book, The Choice, The Issue of Black Survival in America. For this reason he was dismissed December 24, 1971. After covering four years of work. Contrary to the usual charges, however, Vette feels he is being discriminated against, citing freedom of the press as a major reason there has been no review of his book.

Vette spoke dealt mostly with the misuse of technological advancements in the past and present. To illustrate his points, he used examples where man had utilized his technological skills for other than constructive purposes. For example, he cited the Vietnam War and the Chernobyl disaster.

Vette was mainly concerned with technology as having social consequences and therefore having political power. He focused on how Black people are being used by the society and the economic structure in this process. The work of the session, A.D., were invited to a buffet luncheon serving soul food. At this luncheon, "Africa and America: A Technology Partnership" was discussed by a panel consisting of Mr. Robert E. Etienne, an MIT graduate student; Mr. Henry Terry, an MIT and Harvard lecturer; and Mrs. Neta Nketia, from the University of Massachusetts and Brandeis and verson on the Black cultural revolution.

All of the speakers were interesting and stimulating, but the session was progressively heading towards boredom. Then, Mr. Nketia, a vibrant, big Black man, made a very effective presentation with his deliberate delivery which avoided the very receptive audience. Nketia's speech was short and crisp. "American Blacks should return and help their own people in America. At the conclusion of the luncheon, the workshop sessions began. There were to be three sessions focusing on each of the "American Blacks should return and help their own people in America."

The workshop sessions were held in the area of economic, health care, transportation, and communication. These men were able to outline ideas and strategies." Transportation ("the community and transportation: issues and non-issues, planning and development, and solution strategies") Transportation featured Mr. Joe Bredwell, presently the city's transportation director. Mr. Bredwell was an interesting point of reference in land use, urban traffic networks and travel forecasting, and plan evaluation for non-industrialized regions. Also in the session was Mr. Edward Goff, executive director of the Joint Center-Community University for Inner City Change in Roxbury. His interests is in survival mechanisms, architecture, and planning, Mr. Charles Grady, President-Founder of Transcnn Lines, Inc. and a graduate of Harvard, specializes in transportation planning and design, business development, and communications property acquisition and development. Another resource for the transportation group was Mr. Jim McQueen, a graduate student in civil engineering at MIT. McQueen, along with Mr. Chuck Turner, a Community Fellow at MIT, rounded out the field. Turner's areas of interest include politics, housing, and transportation.

Communications ("broadcast journalism and programming; access to the media: media responsibilities for control and informational transferal systems; construction of media hardware")

Communications was probably the most interesting of all the workshops. Participants took a look at all the different aspects of communications, from announcing to producing the equipment necessary for communicating, to how to get support for your projects, and if you are already communicating, what is the success it was planned to be useful to bring in resource people who want to question its value to themselves, to their families back home, to the Black community, and to life in general. For this reason Dean Smith thought it would be for MIT undergraduates, members of various professional organizations for its students.

The "Black Experience in Science and Technology" began in early April, 1971, as Dean Smith began discussing the idea of sponsoring some series of seminars geared toward the use of Black science and technological skills. With the assistance of students, faculty, and staff, her original outline was expanded to cover practically all the definite ideas and suggestions she received from the community early in the year.

As noted in Dean's first proposal for the idea, "one important notion which Black MIT undergraduates have impressed upon me is the yearning for greater professional discipline. Our problem is this relatively difficult four year educational process. MIT has few Black faculty members, thus few professional models for its students."

After those many months of planning and those long hours of work, a planning for the "Black Experience in Science and Technology" was the success it was planned to be. Now all that is needed is the commitment of those who volunteered, in the wrap-up session of the conference, to the "Black Experience in Science and Technology," which did not volunteer to serve on any of the committees, began work on other projects. Those who committed themselves to the success it was planned to be useful to bring in resource people who want to question its value to themselves, to their families back home, to the Black community, and to life in general. For this reason Dean Smith thought it would be for MIT undergraduates, members of various professional organizations for its students.

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February 15, 1972
5:15 pm, Lecture Hall 9-150

Technology and Culture Seminar

The Impact of the Computer on Society

Professor Joseph Weizenbaum

Computer Science, MIT

Respondents: Terry A. Winograd, Artificial Intelligence Lab, MIT
Christopher Schaefer, Political Science, MIT

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