

Emphasis on vocations

by Nathaniel Scott

DETROIT -- Detroit, Michigan is the county seat for Wayne County; which covers an area of 605 square miles and has a current population of 2,337,240.

The county is multifaceted; automobile manufacturers; steel foundaries; salt mines; various support and service corporations and businesses; and, education as a business and service to the community.

Presently, there are 29 community colleges in the state of Michigan, and Wayne County Community Junior College ranks as the largest in student enrollment.

Wayne County Community College's enrollment is sixty per cent Black, under the directorship of President Richard Simmons, Jr. -- a Black man.

Simmons, the former Deputy Mayor of Detroit who had served on many prestigious boards and had held educator positions with different institutions of higher learning, "inherited a \$2 million budget deficit, graduating students who weren't able to read" and budget problems that made him "bite the bullet" in order to develop the kind of program that will best serve the community.

He said, "I am now turning my attention to academics. When I first came here (January, 1981), it was in financial shambles."

In Simmons's viewpoint, the community college as a liberal arts college is a thing of the past and in order to compete in today's world, it must embrace the technological aspects of society.

"We are heading in the direction of career education, with emphases on vocational training," he said. "The vocational part has to become self-sufficient. What we have to do is make some real decisions about how we are going to get in support systems." He went on to say that he will be looking at Miami/Dade and other community schools throughout the nation that have made a lot of "noise" in the area of education. And at the same time

Simmons is critical of teaching techniques. "In class rap sessions, one expresses one's own personal philosophy" and any and everything that does not afford the student an education.

He said, "Do we today have as much will and desire to get our children an education as our elders did? If we (Blacks) are just the strong backs and are not getting into using our minds, then we are useless to society." And, "what is troubling me now is, have we developed a welfare mentality?"

Simmons does not rest the burden of education on the shoulders of the higher echelon of education alone. He includes the public school system as well. "We (Wayne County Community College) have gone into a lot of articulate programs with the public schools and will have a lot more. We want to be able to work with the Detroit public schools -- from whence most of our students come."

Simmons wonders about a lot of things that are transpiring within our lack of Black solidarity. "Has that drive and that will to do slipped away from us?" And also, he wonders about the lack of a Black charismatic leader to infuse "Pride" and whatever else it takes to make the words of a Stevie Wonder song ring from the lips of every Black: "You ain't done nothing yet."

Wayne County Community College offers a broad spectrum of courses including: Aviation, commercial vehicle maintenance and diesel engine repair, heating, air conditioning and ventilation, building operations management, numerous computer sciences and much, much more that are designed to meet the challenge of tomorrow's world.

"It is the instructor's responsibility to see that our children get an education," Simmons said. "Too many people write books and never test the theory. One needs to test the theory; we haven't made it yet."



Richard J. Simmons is president of Wayne County Community Junior College in Detroit.

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