

preface

“Perceptions of Black America” was chosen as title for this special issue in order to provide what might be called scholarly “truth-in-packaging.” A number of other titles had been suggested during the early editorial consideration of the project. Was this to be an issue devoted to Black Studies? Was it an issue on Black culture in America? Or Afro-American? Each of those options, of course, carries ideological implications. We worried about whether it was proper for the *Journal*, even unintentionally, to endorse them through the selection of a title intended merely to describe what we were doing.

And, what, precisely, were we doing? Should we, for example, insist on representing a Black point of view? Should we rather make sure that a Black point of view be represented on the editorial board?

Our decision was that if we were to make a meaningful contribution, we should make it by doing what we do best and are most confident of. So we resolved to follow, without exception, our usual editorial policies. In producing this issue, we made no effort to determine the race of our contributors or of extra editorial consultants called in to help evaluate articles in their areas of special competence. The contributors were simply those who responded to the prospectus prepared by Professor Hemenway and our regular board of editors; the consultants were the members of our editorial board and those outsiders recommended to us by the quality of their work in the appropriate topics. It happens that some of us know that some of our contributors and editorial consultants are Black. For others we have no information beyond that provided by the articles which they contributed or their scholarly reputations.

Our title means precisely what it says, then. This is a collection of articles which shows, rather well we think, how American Studies scholars currently perceive aspects of Black America past and present. To say that our consultants were entirely unbiased in dealing with papers which did, in fact, argue for one or another ideological position would probably be untrue. We instructed them to judge the articles on their quality as contributions to scholarship, but undoubtedly their own feelings did play a part in the decision-making process. In some cases, no doubt, they were sympathetic to one or another point of view, and that sympathy

may have influenced their judgment; there was one case in which they were almost unanimously unsympathetic but felt that in fairness the point of view should be represented.

Your editors are aware of the often-voiced resentment against White scholars making scholarly capital out of Black issues; they also were aware of the touchiness of issues as seemingly minor as whether or not to capitalize the words "White" and "Black." In Volume VI, Number 2, our special issue "The Indian Today," the same issue had arisen, and we decided that despite the inconsistency implied in capitalizing Indian and not capitalizing white, to proceed that way simply because, like most publications, we have a style sheet, and that's what it said to do. My own impulse was to capitalize neither Black nor White, for the same reason—it hasn't been our custom in the past, and there are far more significant indicators of Black and White self-consciousness. Another possibility was to capitalize the two words only in instances in which the author's use of them was ideological, and not merely descriptive. That would have made sense too. Our final decision was to capitalize both words wherever they appeared. Even those who argued for this position, and who ultimately carried the day, feel that, while consistent, this is not an ideal solution either, and they have asked me to say that, while we may not have arrived at a solution which will make everyone happy, we are, at the very least, sensitive to the problems involved.

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